

# Customer Touch Points - Your Brand in Action

By Tom Bradbury and Doug Coons

## Executive Summary

Your company's brand is your image—and it creates expectations. It defines who you are, how you operate, and how you are different from your competitors. In essence, your brand is a promise to your customers—and thus a promise that must be kept—to be successful, this promise must be fulfilled day in and day out. Your customers' experience in dealing with your company validates whether or not you are delivering on your promise to them.

### **About the Authors:**

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Your brand can be fulfilled with the following actions:

- Developing a brand promise and proof or reasons to believe—the proof that you are delivering on that promise
- Mapping out the customer touchpoints to determine where in the customer experience you deliver on your promise
- Determining what a successful touchpoint experience looks and feels like so you know what that delivery looks like

By designing and thus controlling the customer experience you can ensure the promise you make to your market will be carried out on a consistent basis.

As a homebuilder, your effectiveness in delivering your brand should also be measured. This is typically accomplished with a suite of customer surveys, strategically placed throughout the customer experience. This accomplishes several things:

- Provides baseline information about your company's performance—a starting point
  - Helps you rapidly identify trends before they destroy your brand
  - Allows your company to determine “targets of opportunity” that help it continuously improve
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## Customer Touchpoints: The What, Why and How

**What is a touchpoint?** A touchpoint is defined as all of the communication, human and physical interactions your customers experience during their relationship lifecycle with your organization. It is only loosely constrained: a touchpoint can occur in different locations and can involve different people. It could include sales agents, customer service representatives, superintendents, project managers, etc. The actual touchpoint could occur in any number of places: web site, informal location/meeting or sales office. Touchpoints are important because customers form perceptions of your organization and brand based on their cumulative experiences. Fortunately, you have the opportunity to shape this experience.

**Why is this important?** Before you invest time in understanding touchpoints, you must first understand your company's brand promise. For example, if a homebuilder, Acme Homes, is targeting starter homes/first time homebuyers, it may decide to tailor the brand promise around four tenets:

- Excellent value for the money
- Ease of home ownership
- Low life cycle cost
- Family-friendly communities

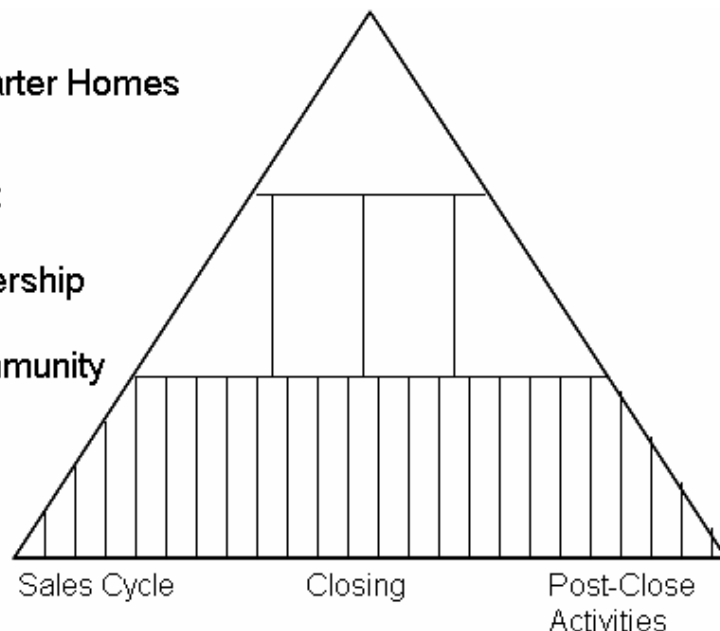
How would Acme do this? By using the tenets as proof of the promise made by Acme Homes to their target customer, a first time homebuyer. Simply stated, each one of these tenets must be fulfilled during the customer experience. In effect, you are designing the customer experience to support these tenets—which in turn supports your brand promise:

### **Brand: The Best Starter Homes**

#### **Reasons to Believe:**

- Excellent value
- Ease of home ownership
- Low life cycle cost
- Family-friendly community

#### **Touchpoints:**



To design this experience, you would:

**Step 1: Identify all customer touchpoints** – map the entire customer experience life cycle from the point of first contact until the last controlled point; when doing this, there are three guidelines:

Only identify touchpoints where you proactively reach out to your customer. Do not try to anticipate reactive touchpoints, as these cannot be predicted accurately.

Touchpoints should be discrete events. In other words, you could think of them as specific activities that take place during the customer experience. For example, “Schedule Design Center Appointment”

If a specific task has multiple events, capture each one; for example, the design center appointment might consist of a scheduling step, conducting the actual appointment, and then following-up, if required

This activity is cross-functional in nature and its development, so you should plan on having representatives from the appropriate functional areas in the room when you identify all the touchpoints. Some of the questions to ask the team:

- How are our homes sold?
- How are our homes delivered?
- How are our homes lived in?
- How is after-sales support provided?

In short, perform a comprehensive trace of your selling and servicing processes to create a simple map of the touchpoints that define your customer’s experience with your brand. For homebuilders, these are usually clustered around pre-closing and post-closing activities.

**Step 2: Determine the most influential touchpoints and how they affect your brand promise/tenets** – not all touchpoints are created equal. If you think about it, each touchpoint offers some type of opportunity to excel and reinforce your brand. At each touchpoint, you should be asking yourself the following questions:

- Which tenet can I best reinforce at this touchpoint?
- Do I want to reinforce more than one tenet of the brand promise?

While you may not be penalized for supporting your brand promise at a given touchpoint, you will have lost a valuable opportunity to reinforce it. In many cases, it is an opportunity that comes only once during the customer experience lifecycle.

**Step 3: Define the optimal experience at each of these touchpoints** – once you have determined which tenet of the brand promise to support at a given touchpoint, you must determine what “success” looks like. It is not simply enough to say that you will reinforce a tenet at a specific touchpoint. You must develop an understanding of a successful experience from the customer’s viewpoint.

**Step 4: Ensure your organization is set up to fulfill this optimal experience, today and everyday** – after developing an understanding of what a successful touchpoint experience looks like, you must implement it. This requires that you have clear ownership at every step in the process. The people, processes and tools must ultimately drive the touchpoint.

In our example, Acme Homes might choose to emphasize their homes’ excellent value for the money and the ease of becoming a new homeowner during the sales process. Similarly, they could emphasize the low life cycle cost of their homes during their Post-close Proactive Warranty Program visits. Lastly, Acme would stress their family-friendly communities by having homeowner representatives meet with new buyers during the selections/design center process. Overall, Acme Homes would be finding ways to emphasize their brand promise throughout the customer experience.

### **Conclusion**

In today’s market, we believe it is imperative that homebuilders invest in their brand since it shapes their customer experience. The far reaching impact of doing this affects the viability of your business and doing it right helps you sustain your business:

- ✓ Customer loyalty—repeat and move-up purchases
- ✓ Referrals—prequalified leads from satisfied customers
- ✓ Brand recognition—ease of selling
- ✓ Favorable publicity

Internally, you will benefit from a framework that allows you to manage the customer experience regardless of personnel transitions. Additionally, by having a documented approach, you have a starting point for continuously improving how your organization.