

Sprint PCS, End-to-End Clarity and the Customer Frontline

V3.0

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Background

The Sprint PCS *clarity* brand enjoyed tremendous visibility and popularity in the U.S. wireless market, with research consistently demonstrating exceptionally high levels of consumer awareness and desire to investigate. The public seemed to have a strong understanding of the voice clarity message, and the brand was providing a strong differentiation from Sprint's competitors.

Sprint also attributed a broader, metaphorical salience to the clarity brand – *end-to-end clarity* – emphasizing crucial customer-facing qualities like *ease of doing business with Sprint*, *ease of understanding the bill*, *simplicity of plans*, and so on. Sprint wanted all phases of the customer experience to be as clear as the quality of its digital voice signal.

The Challenge

In early 2002, the Sprint PCS Brand group was focusing on how the company was delivering on the clarity promise across all customer touchpoints. In an effort to assess the internal and frontline commitment to clarity, the Brand organization retained the Gronstedt Group to perform a comprehensive brand audit.

The Solution

From March 6 - April 4, 2002, the Gronstedt Group (Anders Gronstedt, President and Sam Smith, Communications Director) conducted a series of interviews with over 50 Sprint PCS senior executives and employees to explore how the brand message could be better internalized by the entire organization and delivered at every point of customer contact. Of this number, 38 were individual interviews with vice presidents, directors and senior managers; the remainder were customer care advocates, business and retail sales representatives who participated in three separate focus groups.

The purpose of the study was to assess which customer-engagement functions were "living and breathing the brand" and, correspondingly, to identify touchpoints where Sprint could improve its delivery of end-to-end clarity. It gauged:

- + awareness of the Sprint PCS brand message;
- + the effectiveness with which employees felt they were delivering on the brand message at their various customer and support touchpoints;

- + employee perceptions of barriers or disconnects that compromised delivery on the promises Sprint PCS made in its external messaging;
- + how the (then forthcoming) 3G launch was affecting their ability to deliver clarity across their various customer and support touchpoints; and,
- + their perceptions of how other Sprint PCS business units and departments were performing against the end-to-end clarity brand message.

Discussion

The Gronstedt Group found that executives, managers and line employees of the PCS division had a generally strong understanding of and commitment to the clarity brand message. The study also identified a series of internal and external-facing policies, practices and infrastructural dynamics that the Gronstedt Group felt could be revised and streamlined in order to strengthen Sprint's delivery of end-to-end clarity. Unintegrated business systems, for instance, made it very difficult for frontline employees to quickly access the information they needed to provide a clear interaction with the customer.

It was concluded that a series of fairly uncomplicated tactical correctives could be applied to these operational issues in the short term, and in the long term Sprint was advised to consider comprehensive strategic programs to address the deeper corporate and structural issues from which most of the operational problems derived.

- Corporate Ideology of Entrepreneurialism

Specifically, the research phase identified an ideological tendency among executives and line managers that underpinned the tactical misalignments across all customer touchpoints. These leaders viewed themselves as being part of a distinctly entrepreneurial project – their actions were driven by an assumption that they were building a company and an industry.

This frontier mentality, though, was at odds with the realities of the mobile industry, which by this point was largely settled territory. There were very few new customers to be had, so a carrier's growth and success derived instead from stewardship of existing customers. Management's entrepreneurial mindset undervalued the existing customer in favor of the largely non-existent new add, a counterproductive corporate ideological bent that fueled churn.

Results

The Gronstedt Group report was well-received by Sprint PCS executives. One former company leader who reviewed the report said:

I know nothing about who the Gronstedt Group is or how they work, but anybody who can penetrate as deeply as they have into what is rarely discussed with candor, and declare themselves so fiercely, constitutes a force to be reckoned with.

Another senior executive noted that the report was "only the beginning... Collectively we need to further assess the problem/opportunity, develop our short and long term solutions, and execute those plans."