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Table of Contents

[Introduction](#) [3](#)

[1. Communication – Definition and Meaning](#) [4](#)

[2. Communication Model- The Shannon Weaver Model](#) [4](#)

[3. Integrated Marketing Communications](#) [6](#)

[4. Promotional Strategies](#) [8](#)

[5. Branding and Brand Equity](#) [10](#)

[6. Keller’s Brand Equity Model](#) [11](#)

[Strengths and Weakness](#) [12](#)

[7. Customer Journey Map](#) [13](#)

[Benefits of Customer Journey Map](#) [15](#)

[Customer Touchpoints](#) [16](#)

[8. Total Engagement Model](#)

[Conclusion](#) [20](#)

[Reference List](#) [22](#)

Introduction

In today's business landscape, where competition is fierce and customer satisfaction is paramount, companies strive to ensure they provide excellent service and keep their customers loyal. Apple, a leading global company, has long been known for its customer-centric approach. However, focusing solely on touchpoints can detract from the entire customer journey. To achieve a seamless and enjoyable customer experience, companies must develop innovative marketing strategies that can handle and assess the customer journey across different communication channels. This task will critically evaluate how Apple can accomplish this objective.

We will explore how Apple can formulate marketing strategies to increase brand awareness, manage the entire customer journey, and evaluate the efficacy of these strategies. Communication is an essential element of the customer journey, and we will examine how Apple can utilize various communication channels to engage with their customers and provide a customized experience. We will also analyse how Apple can leverage theoretical frameworks like the Customer Experience Journey (CEJ) and Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) models to create effective communication strategies that cater to their customers' wants and preferences.

Communication – Definition and Meaning

Marshall McLuhan, a well-known communication theorist, coined the phrase, "The medium is the message," which suggests that the medium used to communicate is as significant as the message itself, as it shapes people's interpretation and perception of it. This means that the medium utilized to transmit information has a profound impact on how individuals receive and process the message. McLuhan, a Canadian philosopher, is renowned for his theories on the influence of media and technology on society. He contended that various types of media have distinct effects on our perceptions and experiences and that comprehending these effects is crucial to understanding communication's role in shaping human culture and consciousness (Voorveld, 2019).

Communication Model- The Shannon Weaver Model

The Shannon-Weaver model, proposed by mathematician Claude Shannon and scientist Warren Weaver in 1949, is a widely-used communication model that focuses on the process of transmitting a message from a sender to a receiver. It is also known as the "Transmission Model" and comprises six basic elements.

Sender: The sender is the individual, group, or organization that originates the communication process. The sender creates a message with the intent to communicate it to the receiver.

Message: The message is the content or information that the sender wants to convey to the receiver. It could be conveyed in various forms such as spoken or written language, images, videos, symbols, or gestures.

Channel: The channel is the medium through which the message is transmitted from the sender to the receiver. It could be a physical medium, such as airwaves or cables, or a digital medium, such as email or social media (Umeozor, 2020).

Noise: Noise refers to any factor that could interfere with the successful

transmission of the message. There are different types of noise, such as physical noise (e.g., background noise), semantic noise (e.g., language barriers), and psychological noise (e.g., distractions or biases).

Receiver: The receiver is the individual, group, or organization who receives the message. They decode the message to understand its meaning and significance.

Feedback: Feedback is the response of the receiver to the message. It allows the sender to gauge whether the message was effectively transmitted and understood, and to make any necessary adjustments to their communication strategy (Miazga and Królikowska, 2020).

The Shannon-Weaver model is a unidirectional communication model, portraying communication as a process that flows from the sender to the receiver. The model highlights the significance of accuracy and clarity in encoding the message and the need to address any obstacles or interruptions that might disrupt the transmission of the message.

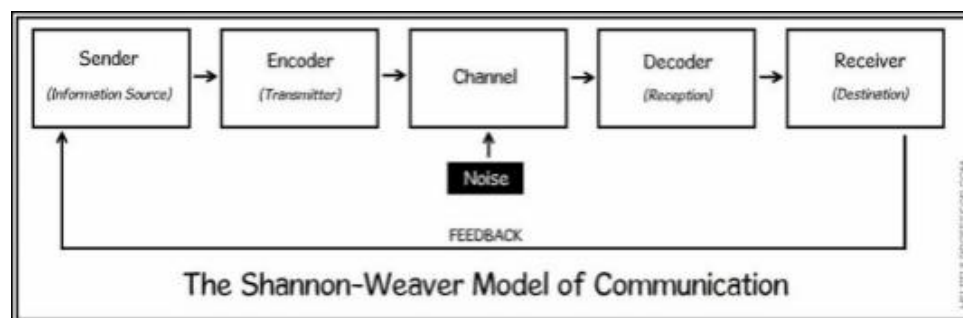


Figure 1: The Shannon Weaver Model

(Source- Ijemt.org, 2019)

Strengths - While the Shannon-Weaver model offers a straightforward framework to comprehend the fundamental elements and processes of communication and identify potential sources of interference or distortion, it has come under criticism for oversimplifying the complexity of communication and disregarding the social and cultural factors that influence it. Detractors argue that the model overemphasizes the transmission of information while neglecting the social, cultural, and psychological facets of communication.

Weakness - The Shannon-Weaver model of communication, while providing a useful framework for understanding the basic elements and processes of communication, has been subject to criticism due to its limitations. These include:

1. Linear representation: The model presents communication as a one-way process, which fails to capture the interactive and complex nature of most communication interactions.
2. Overemphasis on message transmission: The model places too much emphasis on the process of transmitting a message from sender to receiver, disregarding the social, cultural, and psychological factors that shape the way messages are created, encoded, and decoded.
3. Assumes a passive receiver: The model assumes that the receiver is a passive recipient, ignoring the active role they may play in interpreting and responding to messages (Kimmel, 2020).

3. Integrated Marketing Communications

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is a comprehensive and strategic approach to marketing that involves the unification of all communication efforts of a company. The goal of IMC is to create a clear, consistent, and compelling message that resonates with the target audience and promotes the company's brand identity. The essence of IMC lies in the coordination of various marketing channels such as advertising, public relations, direct marketing, sales promotion, and personal selling. IMC aims to deliver a unified message to the consumer through both traditional and digital channels, such as print ads, television commercials, billboards, email marketing, social media, and more.

Consistency in messaging is paramount in IMC. Every element of the marketing mix, including product design, packaging, and customer service, should reflect the same brand message and identity. The integration of traditional and digital marketing techniques is also a crucial aspect of IMC. While traditional marketing techniques remain important, newer digital marketing strategies such as social media marketing and content marketing

are increasingly essential to a successful IMC strategy. Overall, IMC is a powerful tool for companies seeking to build a strong brand identity, improve customer engagement, and drive revenue growth. By coordinating different marketing channels and creating a unified message, companies can achieve their marketing goals effectively (Percy, 2023).

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) campaigns are executed in a series of carefully planned stages to ensure that the communication efforts are unified and consistent across all channels. Here are some elaborations on these stages:

Stages of IMC Campaign

1. **Situation analysis:** The first stage of an IMC campaign involves thorough research and analysis of the target audience, their needs, and their behaviour. This research helps to identify the key insights and opportunities that will inform the development of the IMC campaign
2. **Setting communication objectives:** In this stage, clear and measurable communication objectives are set for the campaign.
3. **Developing the message:** The message developed in this stage should be crafted to resonate with the target audience and communicate the brand's unique value proposition. It should also be consistent with the brand's positioning and personality, and inspire the audience to take action (Fill and Turnbull, 2019).
4. **Selecting communication channels:** The most effective communication channels and tools are identified to reach the target audience in this stage. This selection includes traditional channels such as television, radio, print, and outdoor advertising, as well as newer digital channels such as social media, email, and content marketing.



Figure 2 – Stages of IMC campaign

(Source- Emerald.com, 2020)

5. Developing a media plan: A media plan is developed in this stage to outline how the selected communication channels and tools will be used to reach the target audience

6. Implementing the campaign: The messages are delivered through the selected communication channels and tools in this stage.

7. Evaluating the campaign: The final stage involves evaluating the effectiveness of the campaign against the communication objectives set in stage 2. Metrics such as reach, engagement, leads, and sales are used to measure the campaign's success.

4. Promotional Strategies

Apple Inc. is an established brand, yet continuous exploration and implementation of innovative promotional strategies can always improve its efforts to increase brand recognition and expand its customer base. The following are potential strategies that Apple Inc. can explore:

Push and pull strategies are two different promotional approaches that companies use to reach their target audience. A push strategy involves direct marketing

efforts to end-users, while a pull strategy creates demand for products through advertising and other promotional tactics. Apple can use a combination of both push and pull strategies to effectively promote its products. For instance, Apple can use direct mail, email, or telemarketing for push strategy and advertising, public relations, and other promotional activities for pull strategy.

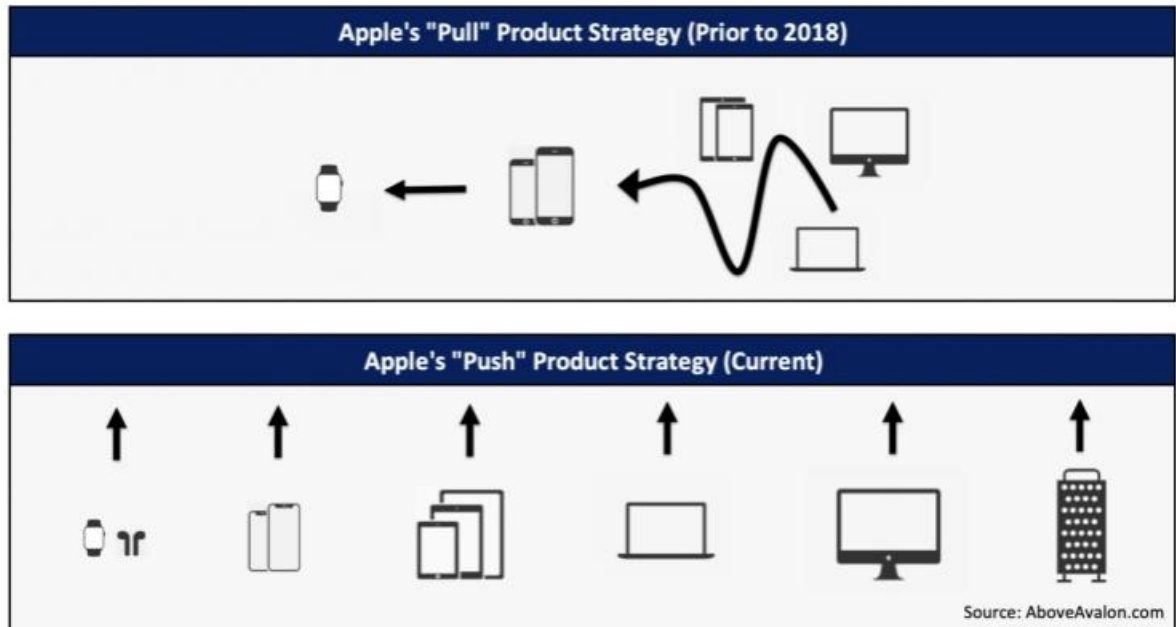


Figure3: Push and Pull strategy

Public relations (PR) are an essential aspect of building a company's positive image and reputation through various activities such as participating in charitable events, sponsoring cultural events, or creating educational programs that align with the company's values and mission. Apple can utilize PR to indirectly promote its products by creating trust and credibility with its customers (Egan, 2022).

Publicity is another promotional strategy that involves generating buzz and interest around new product launches or other company news by issuing press releases, hosting media events, and using social media influencers to promote the products. Apple can leverage publicity to create a sense of excitement and anticipation around new product launches and keep customers engaged.

Sponsorship is a promotional strategy that involves supporting events or organizations that align with a company's values and mission. By sponsoring cultural events, sports events, or educational institutions, Apple can promote its products and build brand awareness while also demonstrating its commitment to social responsibility.

Digital marketing, on the other hand, involves promoting products or services through online channels such as social media, search engines, display advertising,

and email marketing. By leveraging these channels, Apple can reach a large and diverse audience, engage customers through interactive content and personalized experiences, and build relationships with them over time (Ferrell *et al.*, 2021).

By incorporating these and other promotional strategies, Apple can create a comprehensive Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) campaign that reaches customers through multiple touchpoints and channels. By using a variety of tactics, Apple can create a more effective and memorable brand message that resonates with customers, builds brand loyalty, and drives engagement. Ultimately, an effective IMC campaign can help Apple achieve its marketing and business objectives while also building stronger relationships with its customers.

Advertising: Apple's advertising campaigns are known for their innovative and visually stunning approach. They use a variety of media channels to reach their target audience, including TV, social media, billboards, and online display ads. The company's ads often focus on highlighting the features and benefits of their products, showcasing sleek designs and high-quality visuals. Apple's advertisements are aimed at creating a strong emotional connection with their customers, often using music and storytelling to engage their audience. The company's advertising strategy is highly effective in building brand awareness and influencing consumer behaviour, resulting in a loyal customer base and strong sales figures.

5. Branding and Brand Equity

Branding is a crucial process that involves creating a unique name, design, or symbol that sets a product or service apart from its competitors. The main aim of branding is to establish a distinctive and memorable identity for a company or product that resonates with customers, engenders loyalty, and inspires advocacy. In contrast, brand equity denotes the value that a brand brings to a product or service beyond its functional benefits. It reflects the impact that a strong brand has on customer attitudes, behaviours, and loyalty. A brand with robust equity is one that customers recognize, trust, and hold in high esteem, which allows it to command a premium price and foster customer preference and loyalty over time.

6. Keller's Brand Equity Model

Keller's Brand Equity Model is a widely accepted framework that helps businesses understand the value that their brand holds in the eyes of customers. This model encompasses four main components that are vital for building and managing a strong brand. Apple Inc. is a brand that has been successful in implementing these components to create a strong brand image. The first component, Brand Salience, refers to the level of recognition and awareness that a brand enjoys among customers. Apple has a strong brand salience as its products and logo are instantly recognizable worldwide. Brand Performance is the second component, which relates to the quality and value that a brand provides through its products or services. Apple is known for its innovative, high-quality products that are perceived as the benchmark in the tech industry (Kodrat and Melinda, 2021).

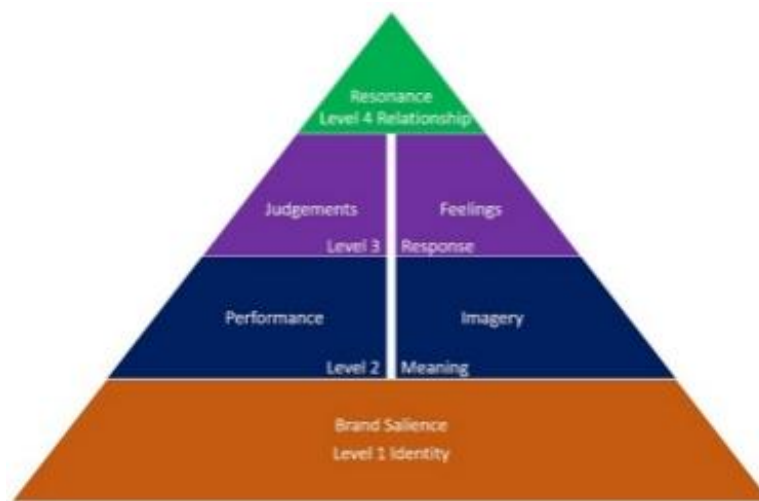


Figure 3 – Keller's Brand Equity Model

(Source - Ceeol.com, 2021)

Brand Imagery, the third component, encompasses the associations and perceptions that customers have about a brand, such as its personality, values, and style. Apple is often linked with sleek, modern design, innovation, and a focus on user experience. The fourth

component, Brand Feelings and Judgments, represents the emotional and rational responses that customers have towards a brand. Apple is often perceived as a premium brand that inspires loyalty and admiration among its customers. Keller's Brand Equity Model provides a roadmap for companies like Apple to build and manage a strong brand by focusing on each of these components. However, one disadvantage of this model is that it can be challenging to measure and quantify brand equity.

Strengths and Weakness

One of the strengths of this model is its ability to identify the key components that are necessary to build and manage a strong brand. It allows businesses to focus on the critical factors that drive brand equity and improve their brand's perception in the market.

Another strength of this model is that it provides a clear and structured approach to brand management. Companies can use this model to develop a brand strategy that aligns with their business objectives and target audience. It helps businesses to define their brand personality, values, and style, which creates a unique brand identity and helps to differentiate the brand from its competitors.

However, one weakness of this model is that it can be challenging to measure and quantify brand equity accurately. The model provides a theoretical framework, but it does not offer practical tools to measure brand equity. Measuring brand equity requires a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, which can be expensive and time-consuming.

Another weakness of this model is that it assumes that the customer's perception of the brand is solely based on the four components of the model. However, the customer's perception of a brand can also be influenced by external factors such as pricing, availability, and customer service. Therefore, it is essential to consider these external factors when managing and building a brand.

7. Customer Journey Map

Awareness Stage:

Apple utilizes popular social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to inform customers about new products and updates.

Apple promotes its products through various means such as TV ads and billboards to increase brand awareness.

Online display ads and public relations events are also used by Apple to create a buzz around their products (Harris *et al.*, 2020).

Consideration Stage:

Apple's website offers customers detailed information on product specifications and pricing, which can help them make an informed decision.

Customers can try out products and interact with sales representatives through in-store demos, providing a personalized experience.

Feedback from friends and family, as well as product reviews, play a crucial role in customers' decision-making process.



Figure 4 – Customer Journey Map
(Source – By Author)

Purchase Stage:

The Apple online store provides a hassle-free shopping experience, allowing customers to browse and purchase products from the comfort of their own homes. Retail stores offer an immersive shopping experience where customers can interact with products and seek advice from sales representatives.

Apple's mobile app allows customers to easily browse and purchase products using their mobile devices.

Customer service support is readily available through various channels such as phone, email, or online chat (Ramjan and Campiranon, 2021).

Post-Purchase Stage:

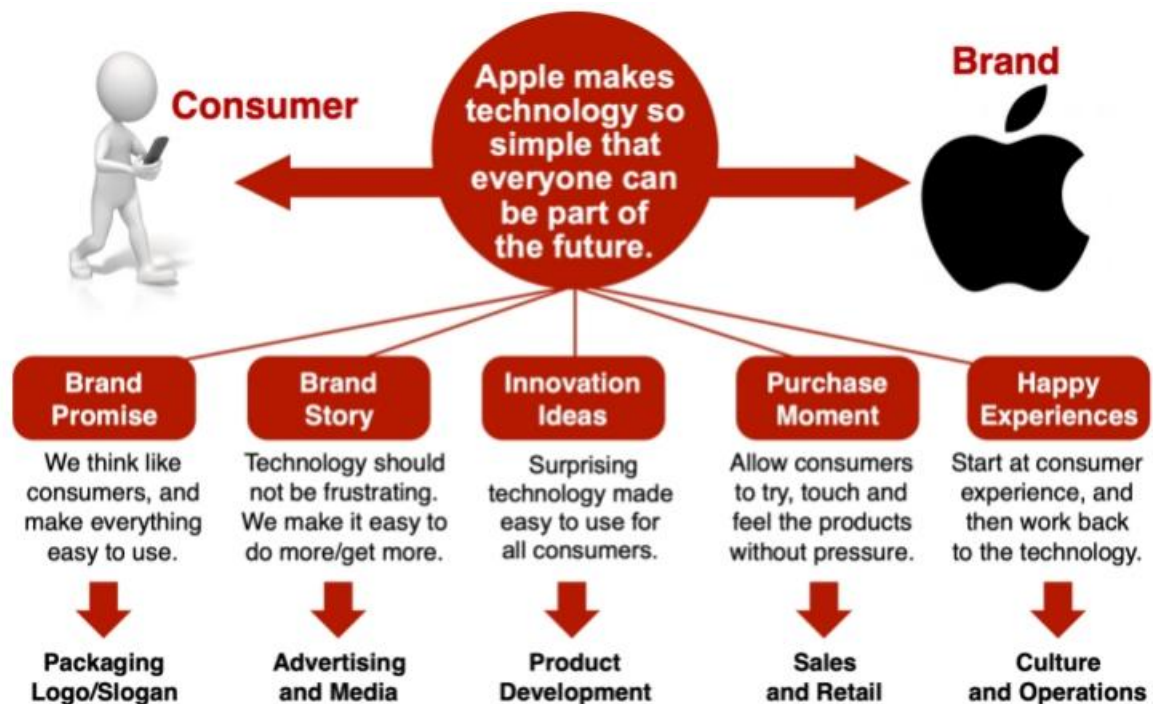
Apple's customer service team offers support to customers who may require assistance with their products.

Online forums and social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook provide a platform for customers to share their experiences and seek advice from other users. Email marketing campaigns provide customers with information on new product releases and promotions, while also encouraging feedback and product reviews.

Benefits of Customer Journey Map

A Customer Journey Map provides several benefits for businesses, including a better understanding of their customers' needs and preferences, increased customer engagement and loyalty, and improved customer experience. By mapping out the customer journey, businesses can identify pain points and areas for improvement in their customer interactions. This allows them to tailor their marketing and customer service efforts to meet the needs of their customers at each stage of the journey, increasing the likelihood of conversion and repeat business. Additionally, a well-designed customer journey map can help businesses build a strong brand image by providing a consistent and positive customer experience, which can result in positive word-of-mouth marketing and increased brand advocacy.

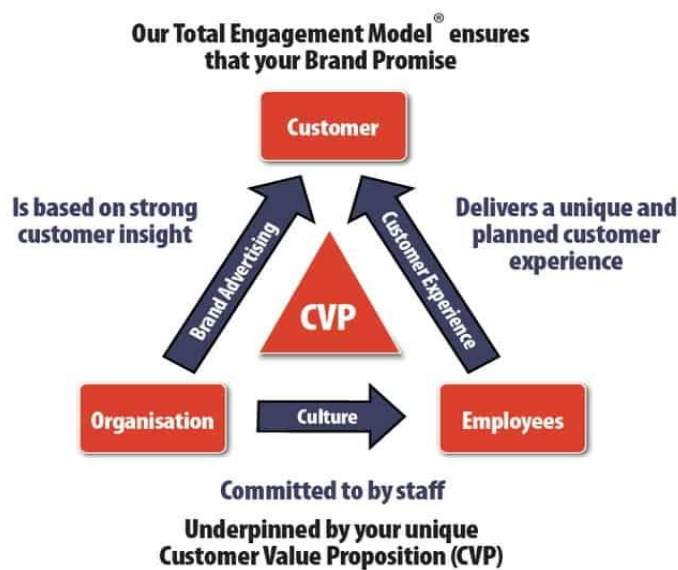
Customer Touchpoints



Apple's customer touchpoints include popular social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, TV ads, billboards, online display ads, public relations events, the Apple website, in-store demos, feedback from friends and family, product reviews, the Apple online store, retail stores, the Apple mobile app, customer service support through phone, email, or online chat, online forums, social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook, and email marketing campaigns.

8. Total Engagement Model

The Total involvement Model is a marketing management paradigm that tries to establish a full picture of the customer journey and their involvement with a brand across many touchpoints. It considers many dimensions of consumer engagement, including as emotional engagement, behavioural engagement, and cognitive engagement, and aims to construct a comprehensive picture of a customer's interactions with a brand.



The model begins with the assertion that important strategic parts of a business must be established and coordinated in order to produce engaged consumers. These aspects may be found in the majority of firms, and the individual advantages are widely proven. They are as follows:

- Simply said, your Customer Value Proposition (CVP) is the value you provide to your consumers. In other words, this is why buyers should choose you over your competition.
- Not only your logo or name, but your brand is the whole amount of who you are and what you stand for. Your value proposition must be an important component of your brand and brand promotion, which is how you communicate the brand to consumers.

- Culture refers to 'the way we do things around here,' and it represents the organization's internal features, such as its aims, values, and internal behaviours. This should be designed to foster an environment in which employees can consistently deliver the brand's value proposition and planned customer experience.
- Customer Experience is a combination of physical and emotional elements that customers encounter while dealing with a brand or an organisation.

1. A Focus on Relieving Purchasing Anxiety

Anxiety about whether or not a product will operate properly is one of the most common reasons buyers do not purchase it, especially if it is pricey or distinctive. Concerns that receiving a response from the firm will be difficult if the product does not operate correctly also enter the picture.

Apple alleviates this worry through customer service, guaranteeing buyers that they will receive full support for whatever item purchased.

2. An Obsessively High Attention to Details

Apple does not simply provide high-quality, dependable products. The company goes above and beyond and pays close attention to the slightest things. Apple's commitment to detail extends beyond the items themselves, into the packaging and the experience that comes with it. One of Apple's greatest assets is best described by a simple rule: **"Sell an experience, not a product."**

3. A focus on employee satisfaction

- Apple was one of the first firms to use **eNPS**. Apple began polling its own employees every four months to determine their willingness to recommend the store as a place to work.
- When employees work in teams, rewards are applied to team performance.
- Apple created a culture of fandom at work by letting employees use company products regularly, giving them discounts, and even some products as free gifts to them.

- Apple provides staff with frequent training sessions to help them improve their abilities and produce better ideas.
- person contributions at Apple are judged not by how long a person has been with the firm, but by how many projects an employee has worked on.
- Apple employees can get a raise without a promotion
- The brand invests in creating an atmosphere for its staff that mirrors Apple principles and inspires them to put out the same effort in their products and customer service.

4. Unique Customer Experiences

Replace a phone for free because a consumer waited too long for the problem to be identified, or replace a month-old computer with a brand new one because a key was depressed for a college student. Apple pushes staff to get to know their customers better in order to provide them with greater convenience and personalisation.

5. A Clear Understanding of the Power of Simplicity

When you consider that most Apple services have single sign-on features, Apple's emphasis on simplicity is readily apparent. Apple's emphasis on simplicity is also evident when considering their omnichannel assistance.

6. A Brand Built on Innovation

One of Apple's biggest selling points is its **unique hardware and software**. The brand never ceased to progress. Apple was always looking for new opportunities, new ideas, aiming to give customers not only what they want, but anticipating their needs. Hence, they were ready to lose sight of the shore – of what was popular with many users, in order to be able to come up with better and bolder solutions.

7. Continued improvement of customer satisfaction

Every level of work at Apple, from the big picture to day-to-day shop operations, is affected by a focus on constantly improving and raising Net Promoter Score. On a daily basis, NPS input is analysed and distributed to retailers. When Apple receives a bad score

from a Detractor, the store manager calls to resolve the issue within 24 hours. The answer is swift, and it has a significant favourable impact on Apple's ratings.

8. Focus on customer value, not money

According to Deloitte & Touche research, customer-centric organisations are 60% more lucrative than non-customer-centric enterprises. If Apple's primary goal had been to make more money, they would not have been as successful as they are now. Instead, they concentrated on their clients, and it paid off.

Conclusion

Effective communication and integrated marketing strategies are critical in today's highly competitive corporate environment for increasing brand awareness and ensuring client satisfaction. Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's communication model provides a fundamental framework for understanding the communication process. Similarly, the stages of an IMC campaign, such as situation analysis, communication objectives, message formulation, channel selection, media planning, campaign implementation, and evaluation, are critical in the development of effective marketing strategies. Apple Inc. can use numerous promotional techniques such as push and pull marketing, digital marketing, and public relations to promote brand awareness. Using Keller's brand equity model can also aid in the development and maintenance of a strong brand image by focusing on elements such as brand salience, performance, imagery, and feelings and judgements. In addition, mapping the customer journey and identifying touch points throughout the buying process can assist improve customer engagement and happiness.

Businesses like Apple Inc. can use these tactics to produce effective marketing campaigns that increase customer engagement and happiness, ultimately leading to greater success and growth.

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