The Branch
and The Brand

How Q-Flow® helps brand managers maintain the corporate identity within service centers and stores.

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Implementing the Q-Flow® system in the service branches of the organization requires more than a mere change in customer service and sales processes. When fully realized, Q-Flow implementation influences the customer waiting experience, the media and promotional channels surrounding them, and the branch environment fundamentally.

The marketing experts who manage corporate branding are therefore required to consider these influences in order to correlate the implementation with the organization's marketing goals, and to leverage the Q-Flow system influence to accomplish these goals.

Branding and Creating a Corporate Identity

Branding is a fundamental strategic process, in which the organization performs comprehensive marketing analysis aimed at understanding the basic needs and motives of their customers. The product of this process is the brand, which represents the organization's ideal response to the customers needs. This ideal (i.e. the brand) should portray the most basic human values. In the process of creating the corporate identity, the brand is enveloped in visual elements such as a name, a logo, a motto, a design, and more – all aimed at conveying the organization's fundamental values by means of illustration and association.

A smart branding and corporate identity design is one that successfully combines the unchanging long-term values of the brand with shorter-term organizational processes. It should figure out the permanent basic characteristics of its target market, and apply brand values and corporate identity that are relevant in the long run, while providing an infrastructure for the marketing department's continuous operative actions in both the medium-term (for example designing and developing new sales channels) and the short-term (different campaigns).

The Branch and Its Significance

The branch plays a double role in the context of the organization branding. Primarily, as part of the organization, the branch is required to match the corporate identity and its design is derived from that of the identity.

Additionally, the branch is a pivotal marketing arm (even when its formal function is to provide customer service), and as such, it is one of the main tools the brand managers and marketing people have for conveying the organization's image and promotional messages to the customers (by running marketing campaigns and so on).

The branch significance, in both these aspects, is great in comparison to other service, sales, and advertising channels. On one hand, the cost of matching a large array of branches to predefined designs may amount to many millions of Dollars. On the other hand, the possible benefit that the corporate identity may gain is very high, thanks to the direct contact with the branch architecture and the face-to-face encounter with the organization's agents. However, the potential damage will also be very high if the branch fails in that aspect.

Designing the Branch

The branch's compatibility with the corporate design is examined by the following parameters:

- **Appearance** – the overall ensemble of visible items. This includes the furniture and wall color, lighting, signposting, decorative objects, and other characteristics of the branch space and its utilization.

- **Ambiance** – the branch ambiance is derived from both its appearance and other elements such as the branch agents' activity and behavior and the branch acoustics and sounds.

- **Accessibility** – is derived mainly from the physical structure and the way it allows (or blocks) customer access to different areas and elements. The branch ambiance and employee attitude towards the customer flow influences this parameter as well.

- **Products** – the products look and arrangement in the branch is also considered one of the branch design elements, assuming this is a sales center.

The basic requirements is that the branch's overall appearance complies with the fundamental lines of the corporate identity (such as use of fonts, colors, and symbols). However, there are countless ways to design a given space so it complies with the basic lines dictated by the corporate design guidelines. It is most important to find the optimal way to represent the ambiance, the accessibility, and the products.

For example, researches found that most customers link a spacious reception area with high prices, while crowdedness is often linked with low prices. Other researches showed an associative connection between minimalist color arrangement and premium quality products, while use of a variety of seemingly random colors was linked to cheaper low quality products. Some organizations try to surprise their customer with high-end appearance that winds up in a price tag lower than expected (though usually, such confusing set-ups tend to fail). These are only a few examples out of thousands or researches and methodologies that are currently used in the science of branch design

The Branch as a Marketing Arm

As part of the marketing arm of the organization, the branch provides a platform for dynamic activities fitted to the current business requirements. These activities may include introducing new products, passive promotion (using signs, promotional displays, templates, and so on), active promotion (using the branch employees or specially hired sales representatives), broadcasting messages and media, and so on.

It is essential to base the branch design on a well-planned branding process, which incorporates a long-term outlook, since the branch design and all of the activities detailed above are derived from it. For example, an electronics shop that frequently updates its product line will prefer to design a branch that allows quick rearranging and display of products, while refraining from basing the branch structure on rigid visual elements that may one day collide with the functional demands of arranging the products. A Swiss bank, on the other hand, may invest in furniture and decorative elements without having to replace these items often.

Customer Experience in the Branch

The separate components described above finally merge when the customer arrives at the branch. Customers cannot tell these components apart. From their perspective, the branch appearance and the marketing activities taking place in it are absorbed into their mood, purpose, and their interactions with the branch agents to create an overall experience. The customers may recall exceptional events, such as receiving poor service or a unique design element, but their overall impression will eventually be linked to their perception of the brand.

It may come as a surprise to learn how a solid brand, combined with a matching branch design, could even dim the effect of a poor service and minimize decisions to leave the company (this power is obviously limited, and recurring incidents may very well tip the scales towards a negative customer experience).

Regardless of specific negative and positive elements, the overall customer experience may contribute to the perception of the brand when it correlates with its core. For example, an organization that wants to appear exclusive and prestigious, and builds a corporate identity that reflects itself in a crisp and luxurious look and correlating messages, will have to incorporate matching elements in the branch design. These may include thick luxurious rugs, LCD displays by a well-known brand, and agents wearing a tie. These elements will help set the prestigious atmosphere the organization aspires to create. If, on the other hand, a customer who enters one of these high-end branches will encounter an improvised sign taped to the wall with peeling masking tape – that one miserable item may collapse the entire effort of the organization to project a luxurious image.

For more details please visit our [Customer Experience Solutions](#)

Waiting in Line and Queue Management

It may seem that queue management bares no added values and is impossible to utilize for reinforcing the brand values. In fact, queue management offers many different opportunities for supporting the organization marketing goals and different brand values. Here are a few examples:

- **Customer Reception** – many organizations regard choosing whether the customer will be received by a receptionist or by a self-service kiosk, as a mere financial consideration. You may think "We will use an agent in our large branches and automated kiosks in our smaller ones" while in fact, receptionists convey a message of a personalized, conservative, and respectable (depending on the agents' dress code and demeanor) approach, while a kiosk sets an innovative and highly efficient vibe.

- **Kiosk Design** – when choosing a self-service kiosk, it is advised to match its design to the overall style of the branch. Using a Queue Management System that does not offer a variety of kiosk models may damage the branch design fundamentally.

- **Ticket and Brochure Design** – the media printed by the Q-Flow system, which includes tickets and personalized brochures, is the basis for delivering specific messages. On top of that, the look of the printed media adds to the organization branding. For example, highlighting the customer name and a greeting ("Welcome Mr. Smith") conveys a personal message, which will complement a manned reception point, as opposed to highlighting the customer queue number that fits an automated kiosk .

- **Waiting Area** – this is an inseparable part of queue management. A relatively crowded waiting area may convey a message that fits an organization that deals mainly with young customers or user communities, while sparsely scattered sits set a luxurious, yet static, vibe. The Queue Management System must be able to adapt to various types of waiting areas, by implementing directing facilities (such as large displays for spacious waiting areas or smaller ones for more crowded areas) and functions (such as the option to update the customer when their queue number approaches in cases the waiting area is remote from the service counters).

- **Personal or Team Queues** – a common dilemma (mainly in banks) is whether to assign a personal agent to each customer, or should the customer be served by the first agent available. Apart for the economic considerations, there is also the essential difference between individual service, which is considered more luxurious but less efficient, and more streamlined service, which prevents a personal connection between the customer and the agent.

- **Differentiation** – Some branches are supposed to serve different types of customers in several different ways (for example VIP customers as opposed to regular customer) or support several sub-brands (which may be the case with credit cards and mortgage departments in banks, or with a dentist clinic located inside a large medical center). The Queue Management System is then expected to be flexible enough to route different customers in the organization in different ways, and set different components of the system in different areas of the branch (for example, a kiosk in the general service area and a manned reception counter at the VIP area).

In addition to treating each component separately, it is also very important to maintain consistency across the board (as in any design task). Imagine arriving at a customer service center and being greeted by a tie-wearing agent who approaches you by your name, but then directs you to a highly efficient, prompt, "no small talk" agent for further service. Wouldn't that send a mixed message? Not only does this scenario misrepresent the corporate identity, but it also renders the financial investment in employing the receptionist quite futile.

Q-Flow's Contribution

The Q-Flow system contributes to many of the aspects discussed in this article:

- Q-Flow's media management elements contribute to conveying general contents relating to the organization's image. Not only does the system support brand management, but it also turns the branch into a marketing arm, which actively promotes sales using elements such as advertising and informative displays in the waiting areas and printed media handed to the customer upon arrival (tickets and brochures).

- The Q-Flow Queue Management System is flexible enough to allow organizations to customize the waiting experience according to the business needs (in the ways discussed above) and to differentiate certain areas of the branch when necessary.

- The Q-Flow system lets the business choose hardware (kiosks, displays, and so on) freely, so it can match any branch design imaginable

    For more information about: Queue Management System

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