

**An Approach to
Branding Services**

by

Y.L.R. Moorthi

October 2000

Please address all correspondence to:

**Dr. Y.L.R. Moorthi
Associate Professor (Marketing Area)
Indian Institute of Management
Bannerghatta Road
Bangalore - 560 076
India
Fax: (080) 6584050
E-mail: ylrm@iimb.ernet.in**

Copies of the Working Papers may be obtained from the FPM & Research Office

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an approach for branding a service. The approach integrates David Aaker's Brand Identity framework, with the 7Ps of services marketing and the economic classification of goods. The 7Ps of services are product, price, place, promotion, physical evidence, process and people. The economic classification divides goods into search, experience and credence goods. In general products have more search properties and services have more experience and credence properties. The paper argues that the key to branding search, experience and credence goods is, giving the customer information, delight and education respectively.

AN APPROACH TO BRANDING SERVICES

Though there is extensive literature on services marketing not much of it addresses the issue of branding services. A significant amount of literature on services deals with measuring or delivering customer satisfaction (James Carman, 2000; Gronroos, 1983; Parasuraman, Zietaml and Berry, 1988, 1991, 1994; Spreng and Mackoy, 1996; Jones and Suh, 2000). Another stream of literature deals with issues that relate to business success in services (Sin and Tse, 2000; Berry, 1999; Keaveney, 1995, Martilla and James, 1977; Schlesinger and Heskett, 1991). A fair amount of literature deals with the operational aspects of services (Maister, 1984; Larson, 1987; Lovelock, 1984; Chase, 1981). There is also literature on what type of organization and personnel support the delivery of high quality service (Carlzon, 1987; Gronroos, 1990; Lovelock, 1992; Davis, 1989; Wyckoff, 1991). There is however not much literature on how to brand a service.

Extant literature that deals with branding of services directly or indirectly is presented here. Dobree and Page (1990) list 5 steps for effectively branding services. These are i) building a brand proposition ii) overcoming internal barriers iii) measuring delivery against proposition iv) continual improvement v) expansion. They also recommend developing a “service contract” internally to create ownership for the service brand across the organization.

Onkvisit and Shaw (1989) differentiate between the two levels of service offerings: the form and the brand. For instance credit cards have several forms namely bank cards, airlines cards, car rental companies’ cards, oil companies cards, store cards and travel and entertainment cards. Each of these forms requires a different type of branding effort. In fact they suggest launching different brands for different service forms.

Gale (1994) defines a power brand as a “name that means satisfaction, quality and value to the customer”. He recommends understanding customer needs, delivering superior quality on attributes that matter to customers, low “cost of quality”, overall cost leadership and effective positioning as some of the steps that lead to building a powerful service brand.

Kapferer (1992) opines that branding culture is not strongly embedded in service firms. He specifically notes branding in banking services. He touches on the issues of intangibility and invisibility of services. He also gives

suggestions on how to name brands. Berry and Parasuraman (1991) give a more comprehensive checklist for naming brands.

Levy (1996) contends that successful service brands can be developed based on the principles of fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) branding. These principles are product definition, clear product benefit identification, brand differentiation, consumer motivation and measurement of product strength.

De Charnatony and McDonald (1998), like Levy, feel that the FMCG model of branding can be used, with modifications, to build service brands. Like other authors, they too think, that branding efforts in services industry do not match the rapid growth of the industry itself. They sum up some of the important issues that effect branding (e.g. characteristics of services, importance of symbols in brand building, empowerment of staff, consumer participation in developing the brand).

Extant literature, as explained above, does throw light on how to build a service brand. But it does not suggest a comprehensive approach for branding services. This paper proposes to present such an approach by applying Aaker's brand identity framework to the economic classification of three types of goods and the 7Ps of services.

Aaker's (1996) brand identity framework proposes four elements under which an identity is typically developed for a brand. These are brand as product, brand as organization, brand as person, brand as symbol (Fig 1). Brand as product is about the product related attributes of the brand. This dimension deals with the tangible and the intangible aspects of the product and the manner in which the customer relates to it. Brand as organization deals with the organization's innovation, consumer concern etc., which are important for building strong brands. Brand as person deals with the personality aspects of the brand. This tells us what happens to the brand when it is converted to a person by endowing it with sociographic, demographic and psychographic values. Finally Brand as symbol deals with the symbolic aspects of the brand like visual imagery, logo, brand heritage etc. Any given brand can be described in terms of these four elements. This basic framework has been extended in this paper to brand a service.

The approach presented in this paper firstly blends the 7Ps of services marketing with the Aaker's brand identity framework. A service's marketing mix consists of 7Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, Physical Evidence,

Process and People) (Booms and Bitner, 1981). In this paper the first 5 Ps in the above list have been mapped to Aaker's Brand as product. People dimension along with organizational culture, values and other issues are put under Brand as organization. Process dimension has been highlighted separately as "Brand as process". This is because the customer is intimately involved in the process of delivery of the service (Lovelock, 1992). Brand as person and Brand as symbol, retain their usual meaning in the new model. Aaker's model and the modifications proposed to it are shown in Figure 1 and 2 respectively.

The next step in the proposed approach is to relate the modified Aaker model to the three-fold classification of goods by economists (Nelson, 1970; Darby and Karni, 1973). The discipline of services marketing has borrowed this three-fold classification. The three types of goods according to this classification are a) search goods b) experience goods c) credence goods. Products have more search properties while services have more experience and credence properties (Ziethmal and Bitner, 1996). Therefore most services are either experience goods or credence goods. By relating the three types of goods to Aaker's modified framework this paper provides an approach to branding services. The results of this application are shown in Table 1.

Figure 1
(Aaker's Brand Identity Model)

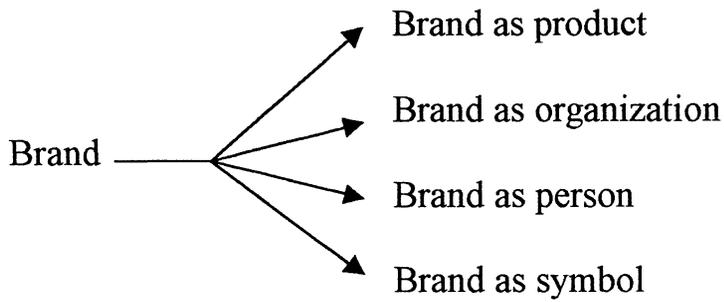


Figure 2
Proposed Services Branding Model

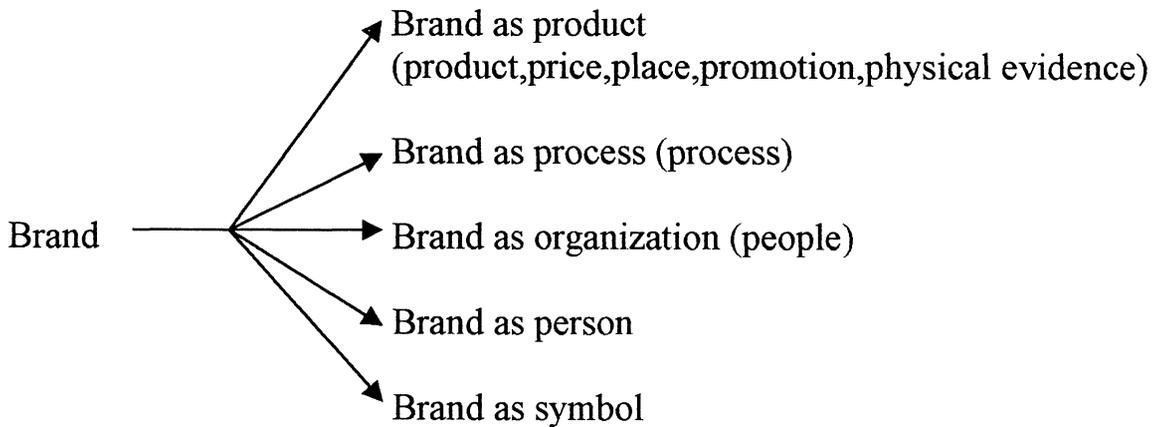


Table 1
(Application of model in Fig 2 to three types of goods)

BRANDING \ TYPE OF GOOD	search good	experience good	credence good
1.0 BRAND AS PRODUCT			
1.1 Product			
Typical Example	scooter washing machine	airline restaurant	doctor consultant
Product/Service Promise	more explicit	more implicit	more implicit
Product related attributes	more product less service	via media	less product, more service
Heterogeneity	low	medium	high
Inseparability	low	medium	high
Nature of benefits sought by customer	more tangible	intangible	more intangible
Perceived risk	low/medium	medium	high
Outcome	more important than process	as important as process	process as important as outcome
Service provider's goal	demonstration	delighting	confidence building

1.2 Price

Price estimation	easy	relatively easy	difficult
Ability to price premium	difficult	difficult	easier

1.3 Place

Physical location	close to the customer	reasonable distance	distance not an issue
Risk in relying on channels	relatively low	high	very high

1.4 Promotion

Nature of advertising desirable	provide information	word-of-mouth from satisfied customers	general word-of-mouth
Advertising Message	direct	indirect	indirect

1.5 Physical Evidence

Physical evidence needed	high	medium	low
Physical infrastructure (machines)	important	very important	less important

Front stage vs. Backstage	Front stage important backstage more important	Front stage as important as backstage	Front stage important backstage more -important
Core vs. Supplementary components of service	core important so is supplementary service	Both equally important	core more important

2.0 BRAND AS PROCESS

Process of Interaction	standardized	fairly standardized; exceptions customized	customized
Exceptional Requests	not often	not often	often
Degree of Customer Involvement	medium	medium to high	high
Content of interaction with customer	clear	somewhat nebulous	ambiguous
Visible cues in the process	high	medium	low

3.0 BRAND AS ORGANIZATION

Organizational Culture	product driven	innovation driven	knowledge driven
Skill Set Required	basic	basic but tuned to delight the customer	advanced skills
Employee Training Needs	trained for relatively routine tasks	trained for tasks of medium complexity	trained for tasks of high complexity
Employee Compensation	not high	not high	high
Type of person needed	specialist with narrow focus	specialist with slightly broad focus	specialist with a very broad comprehension

4.0 BRAND AS PERSON

Role	problem solver	entertainer	advisor
Role expectation	doer	doer and talker	doer and thinker
Personification	friend	spellbinder	teacher
Typical person	Friday (Crusoe)/ Watson (Holmes)	Charlie Chaplin/ Merlin	Einstein/ Archimedes

Attitude	trouble shooting	delighting	confidence -inspiring
Age	young man	middle aged	graying
Relationship with customer	fraternal	avuncular	father-figure

5.0 BRAND AS SYMBOL

Adjectives for the brand	useful, convenient	lively, vibrant	deep, wise
Typical Slogan	“Non-stop performance”	“Come, discover”/ “At your service”	“Complete solution”/ “Your search ends here”
Typical Sponsorship	Chat Show	World Tour/ Food Carnival	College debate/ Chess championship

1.0 BRAND AS A PRODUCT

1.1 Product

Items 1.1.1 through 1.1.3 deal with the differences in the three types of goods on the product dimension. 1.1.4 through 1.1.6 explain how customer's expectations are different in each type of goods. 1.1.7 outlines the service provider's goals given consumer expectations.

1.1.1 Typical Example

A typical example of a search good is a scooter. Before buying a scooter a customer goes through a lot of information search. He typically makes inquiries from friends and acquaintances before he opts for a brand. For instance, he may like to check up about its fuel efficiency, ease of maintenance, price on the road. All these are measurable and therefore make the brand promise more explicit in the case of a search good. By contrast, in an experience good like a restaurant, a customer demands satisfaction with the totality of experience. This means he would like synergy in everything from the cuisine served, through the manner in which it is served, to the ambience. A gestalt of the tangibles and intangibles is more important for the customer than the individual elements of an experience good. Further since there is a considerable degree of intangibility, the promise to the customer is implicit in an experience good. A credence good (eg: consultant) on the other hand, is chosen overridingly for its reputation. There is greater intangibility in this case than in search or experience goods. Therefore brand promise in a credence good is implicit.

1.1.2 Heterogeneity

Since the service component is less and the product component more in a search good, heterogeneity is not a predominant feature. This means that a Ford car (search good) bought anywhere in the world aspires (at least) to be the same. On the other hand two singers (experience good) may not offer the same experience though both might be specializing in rock music. In a similar fashion heterogeneity is high in credence goods. (No two attorneys or doctors are the same.)

1.1.3 Inseparability

Inseparability is also low in search goods because the service component is low as compared to the product. On the other hand in an experience good the service provider can never be separated from his service (eg: The Beatles

cannot be separated from their songs). The same is true of credence goods. A doctor or a consultant cannot be separated from the service they provide.

1.1.4 Nature of benefits sought

A search good raises more tangible expectations from the customer than an experience good. This is because a scooter can be touched and felt while the mood in a restaurant can only be felt. Similarly an experience good raises more tangible expectations in a customer than a credence good. This is because there are more tangible elements in an experience good like a restaurant as compared to credence good like a consultant's advice.

1.1.5 Perceived Risk

The perceived risk in judging the performance of the product is higher in buying services than goods (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). Services like medical diagnostics are so technical that the consumer possesses neither the knowledge nor the experience to evaluate the service (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). The relative intangibility of credence goods is what causes an increase in the perceived risk from the customer's point of view. Besides credence goods are difficult to judge even after using them (Choi and Scarpa, 1994). For instance, not many viewers find it easy to understand Picasso's paintings. Also many admirers of art lack the information or the expertise to differentiate a fake from a genuine work of art. This information asymmetry between buyers and sellers creates strong incentives for the sellers of such credence goods to cheat (Emons, 1997). This adds to consumer risk. Perceived risk may be lower in an experience good as compared to a credence good because the former has more tangible elements in it. Similarly perceived risk may be lower in a search good in comparison with an experience good because there are more tangibles associated with the former. Thus in terms of the ability to judge, the perceived risk is low/medium in search goods.

1.1.6 Expected Outcome

The outcome expected from the three types of goods is also different. The expected outcome in a search good is more tangible, namely the product. Therefore a trouble-free product is of paramount importance to the customer. In this case consumption of the product follows production. On the contrary, in experience and credence goods, production and consumption happen simultaneously. The consumer is a part of the process of generating the service. Therefore the process dimension becomes important in experience and credence goods. For instance, in a credence good like medical advice,

the process of investigation of the disease is as important for the patient as the eventual cure. In a professional service it is not always clear either to customer or the professional what the eventual result will be (Lovelock, 1992). Therefore, it is important for the service provider to admit the client into the process, so that he eventually prepares himself for the outcome. This is because the client's confidence can be gained only if the process is explained and the client made comfortable with it.

1.1.7 Service Provider's Goals

The service provider's goals are therefore different for each of the three types of goods. In a search good, since the tangible aspects are predominant, demonstration (e.g.: driving the scooter) is what a customer desires. An experience good should go beyond demonstrating the benefits. It should enthrall the customer to go through the experience again and again. Walt Disney's ability to make people happy, to bring joy to children, to create laughter is what made Disneyland so popular (Collins and Porras, 1994). J. Willard Marriott Sr., the founder of Marriott chain of hotels wrote in an article addressed to his employees titled "Guideposts to Management" in 1964 that "keeping a sense of humor and making business fun" is the essence of their job. His successor Willard Marriott reiterated the same slogan in 1984 (Collins and Porras, 1994). Thus the goal is "delighting" the customer. This can be inferred from the approach of leading service providers like South West Airlines (Lovelock, 1992). A credence good is associated with wisdom and therefore need not aim to delight the customer. It provides valuable solutions to the client's complex requirements (doctor, accountant). Thus the emphasis is on "confidence building".

1.2 PRICE

It is difficult to give blanket recommendations on pricing. Price is a function of the competitive structure of the product-market besides the cost structure. Therefore the approach recommended here on price is purely from the point of view of the nature of the three different type of goods.

1.2.1 Price Estimation

It is easy to cost a search good because the costs that go into producing it are known. So there is an anchor point available for setting the price. Competition, of course, changes the final price at which the customer gets

the product. But price estimation per se, is not difficult. Cost estimation is a more elaborate exercise in experience goods, nevertheless, costs can be estimated. Even here, in a given competitive structure price setting is not very difficult.

However, price setting is difficult in credence goods. Despite stiff competition in the market, a renowned doctor or consultant can charge a premium. Further legal or medical service providers are rarely able to estimate price in advance, because in many cases they do not know themselves in advance, what the service will involve, until they have fully examined the client (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). Thus pricing in credence goods is difficult with the best of intentions.

Often credence good providers do “price framing” for the benefit of customers. Price framing is providing a justification or an anchor for the price. If the customer accepts the price-anchor, he accepts the price (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). Price framing becomes necessary because, the pricing depends not so much on costs, but the skill needed for arguing a legal case or for suggesting solution to a complicated managerial problem.

1.2.2 Ability to charge premium

The customer makes a detailed analysis of the options available to him, before buying a search good like a consumer durable. Literature shows that price plays a role not just in the diffusion of high priced and medium priced durable goods but in low priced goods as well (Parker, 1992). Low price therefore assists the adoption of the product. Further, price is an important issue in replacement purchases as well. Appropriate price can advance replacement purchase by one year (Bayus, 1988). Therefore charging a premium in search goods is not easy.

Charging a premium is difficult even in experience goods as the following discussion shows. Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) show how customers define value in some services.

- For airline - value is when airline tickets are discounted
- For a hotel - value is price first and quality second

For an MBA degree - value is the very best education I can get

For medical services - value is high quality

Note that the first two are experience goods and the last two are credence goods. Observe also that in experience goods the customer is concerned with price and in credence goods with quality. This makes credence goods relatively price-inelastic. Besides, in high risk situations, many of which involve credence services such as medical treatment or management consulting, the customer will look to price as a surrogate for quality (Zeithaml, 1982). There is, thus, a need to peg the price at a particular level, keeping in view, customer expectations. Therefore charging a premium is easier in a credence good than in an experience good.

1.3 PLACE

1.3.1 Physical Location

Among place decisions the physical location decision is being discussed here. A scooter showroom (search good) should be as close to the customer as possible. However, customers are ready to travel a reasonable distance to avail the services of an amusement park (experience good). (Usually these are located at the outskirts of a city). For a credence good like a chartered accountant, customers are ready to travel any distance to get the right person. Therefore the physical distance dimension becomes progressively less important to the customer as one moves from search goods to credence goods.

1.3.2 Risk of relying on channels

The distribution/franchising function can be delegated to a franchisee or an intermediary in search goods but not so easily in experience goods. It can be done with great difficulty in credence goods (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). For instance, the distributorship of scooters and washing machines is routinely offered to intermediaries. While the same is done in experience goods like fast food restaurants (eg: McDonald's franchise), the process is much more difficult (Love, 1995). McDonalds lays down systematic procedures the franchisees adhere to. A credence good is much more

difficult to delegate to a franchisee. This is particularly true in the West where consumer awareness is high. In such cases, the doctor or the lawyer cannot take the risk of bad delivery in service. Besides, in credence goods like management consultancy and architecture, the execution of a complex offering that conforms to the standards of the principal may be difficult for a franchisee to deliver (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996).

1.4 PROMOTION

1.4.1 Advertising Needs

Communication needs of the three types of goods are different. In search goods, communication should be designed to present as much information about the product as possible to the customer. This is because information remedies are likely to be efficient in search goods (Martin Cave, 1985). Also the information in product messages if unique, insulates companies from adverse effects of price increases (Boulding, Lee and Staelin, 1994). Therefore, it is important, to make the content as well as presentation of communication, informative in the case of search goods. Further, since providing information is the key, the content of advertising can be direct.

On the other hand, since intangibles play a greater role in experience and credence goods, the thrust of advertising is indirect (Phillip Nelson, 1974). In experience goods, while communication from the company is important, triggering positive word-of-mouth is more important. This should be achieved through satisfied customers. In experience and credence goods, therefore, information alone will not serve the purpose as it does in search goods. Word-of-mouth communication becomes important (Ekelund, Mixon, and Ressler, 1995). Advertising for experience goods should, in fact, be restrained so that it does not over promise. For instance, if a MacDonald's commercial shows a young, smiling woman, the customer is likely to expect the same at the outlet (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). Therefore the thrust of advertising is indirect.

In a similar vein, for credence goods, mere information will not suffice. The emphasis has to be on customer education. For high involvement services, such as long-term medical treatment or purchase of a home, customers are also unlikely to comprehend or anticipate the service process. Therefore they have educated about each step in the process (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). Besides the word-of-mouth communication for a highly rated credence good

is almost generic. A good doctor or a famous accountant is familiar to everybody in the town and not just his clients. Since generic word-of-mouth is what drives the brand, advertising if any, should be circumspect and indirect.

1.5 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

1.5.1 Need for Physical Evidence

The need for offering physical evidence is high in the case of a search good. A scooter, for instance, should have a trouble-free start and smooth running. There is an insistence on tangible evidence from the customer. Besides the perceived condition of the present unit is an important variable that decides replacement decisions in durables (Bayus and Gupta, 1992). Therefore physical evidence in the present purchase has a bearing on future purchases as well. Experience goods, on the other hand, demand tangibles as well as intangibles. For instance the giant wheel running at optimum speed (tangible) is as important as the joy of spending a holiday with one's family (intangible) in an amusement park. For credence goods like a doctor, his ability to gain patient's confidence is as important as curing the patient. Significantly the intangible (confidence in the doctor) comes first and the tangible (curing the patient) later. Therefore the insistence on tangible evidence is lower in a credence good than an experiential good.

1.5.2 Physical Infrastructure

Physical evidence is demonstrated through physical infrastructure. The importance of physical infrastructure also varies across the three types of goods. Physical infrastructure is important for a search good like durable. The showroom for a scooter or car should obviously demonstrate some of the positives that the product possesses. However, it is a support function and the product itself is more important. By contrast, for an experience good like amusement park, the physical infrastructure is the key to delivering the experience. Therefore physical surroundings become important (Lovelock, 1992). Professional services on the other hand are labor intensive (meaning the ratio of labor-cost to capital equipment cost is high). The expert is more important than the physical infrastructure in credence goods (Lovelock, 1992). Thus while physical infrastructure is more important in an experiential good, it is less important in a credence good.

1.5.3 Front Stage vs. Back Stage

For search goods, front stage and back stage are both important. A customer will not buy a scooter, if the front office of the showroom is not appealing. At the same time back office is important because high quality service depends on prudent inventory management and logistics. These are typically back stage operations. On this count experience goods appear to be similar to search goods. Back stage is as important as the front stage in an experience good because, a DisneyWorld or a hotel cannot perform if the two do not operate in tandem. By contrast, credence good, entails a consultative role. Therefore, the advice offered, is more important than the equipment that assists it. In fact, what distinguishes an expert from a novice, is his ability to size up the client's problem quickly and efficiently. Thus the expert himself is more important than front stage.

1.5.4 Core vs. Supplementary Services

Similar arguments can be extended for the relative importance of the core and supplementary services in the three types of goods. For a scooter, the core product is important. So is the range of supplementary services like ease of billing, front office etc. In the case of an experience good, since what the customer rates is the totality of experience, core and supplementary aspects of the service are equally important. To illustrate, if a hotel is well kept but there is inordinate delay in billing or indifferent hospitality, its rating goes down. Therefore supplementary services are as important as core service. In this respect, a credence good is different from a search good or an experience good. For a credence good like a consultant, as explained earlier, the paraphernalia are less important than the advice he tenders. The key issue is the expertise of the consultant. Thus the core service becomes more important than the supplementary elements.

2.0 BRAND AS A PROCESS

2.1 Process of Interaction

Consumer buying behavior is a well-researched area. The buyer of a consumer good follows certain well-known steps before he reaches his decision (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard, 1994). The requirements of the customer can, by and large, be standardized through approaches like mass-customization (Wright, 2000). An experience good can also be standardized with time, but there is scope for variation. For instance, a customer in a restaurant, might insist on less milk and more coffee and to that extent the

flow of activities exhibit variation. However a standard book of instructions can be easily prepared because of the relatively routine nature of the work flow (Berry, Zeithaml and Parasuraman, 1990). A credence good on the other hand needs a lot more variation. For instance, it is possible that no two criminal suits a lawyer handles, are the same. On a similar note, customization and judgement in service delivery are higher in the case of health services and education (Lovelock, 1992).

2.2 Exceptional Requests

Given the nature of the three types of goods, exceptional requests are uncommon in a search good. This is despite the fact that, companies like Toyota do extensive customizing. In an experience good there are more deviations from the norm (e.g. a customer demanding a specific filling in a burger in a restaurant). Despite this skilled service providers of experience goods try to standardize as much of the service as possible. In the hands of a seasoned service provider, the process of interaction in an experience good, is rigorously scripted. Disneyland treats a work shift as performance, employees as cast members and job description as script (Collins and Porras, 1994). However sometimes in experience goods like expensive restaurants special requests are entertained. But such occasions are more an exception (Bitran and Hoeh, 1990). Exceptional requests are common in the case of a credence good because each case that a doctor or an attorney attends may be unique in its way. Thus airlines, hotels and resorts (experience goods) call for less customization while professional services (credence goods) demand more customization (Lovelock, 1992).

2.3 Degree of customer involvement

In a search good, at least some variables that contribute to the performance of the product can be separated from the customer. For instance, the fuel efficiency of a scooter is independent of the customer and is an objective measure. Thus the content of interaction is clear to the customer and the seller. On the other hand the customer cannot be separated from an experiential good like the restaurant or the airline he uses. Therefore his degree of involvement in the process is high. But whether the interaction is fruitful or not, is decided, overridingly by the chemistry between the customer and the service provider. Thus the customer's contribution to the interaction is somewhat nebulous. A credence good demands and gets a lot of involvement from the customer. For instance, if a client gives wrong inputs to his doctor, the latter will find it difficult to diagnose the ailment. However, the customer's contribution is only to the extent of providing

inputs and an experienced doctor is supposed to be able to isolate the wrong clues from the right ones. Therefore while the patient's inputs are important, the doctor's handling them is much more important. Thus the customer's role is much more ambiguous in a credence good as compared to an experience good. The involvement in the process is also higher in the former case.

2.4 Visible cues in the process

It is relatively easy to satisfy the customer in case of a search good because there are visible cues in the process of interaction. For instance, the customer can see visibly whether tires of a scooter have been inflated or the speedometer has been checked. On the other hand, the customer is not just an observer but a participant-observer, in an experiential good like DisneyWorld. Therefore the visible cues, as well as intangibles, become equally important. By contrast, since most diagnosis whether by a doctor or a lawyer (credence good) is a multi-tiered process visible cues are the least important aspect of the process.

3.0 BRAND AS ORGANIZATION

3.1 Organizational Culture

Since tangibles are important in a search good like scooter, the product drives the organization. Thus the organizational culture is fundamentally **product driven**. On the other hand, since making the process exciting and pleasurable is what matters in an experience good, the service provider has to find new ways of satisfying customers. Thus the organization is more **innovation driven**. Innovation need not always mean a paradigm shift in the offering. It means a constant attempt to offer something new to the customer, however small that novelty may be. (This does not mean that a search good does not demand innovation. Innovation in that case is typically directed towards the product.) Credence goods, on the other hand, are primarily **knowledge driven**. Whether it is cerebral scanning or tax planning, the practitioner needs to be equipped with cutting edge skills.

3.2 Skill Set Required

The skills needed for handling a search good are somewhat simple, because the problems posed by the customer are routine. The skills demanded of an experience good, though basic, are more various and aimed at engaging customer's interest and attention. Wal-Mart's slogan, for instance, is

“Exceed customer expectations”. Nordstrom’s “service to the customer above all” is an unchanging part of its core ideology (Collins and Porras, 1994). Providing such service demands a more advanced skill set. The skills demanded by a credence good, are even more advanced, because each client demands a specific solution for his case. Therefore upgradation of skills is an ever-present challenge. For instance, research suggests that in accounting firms, it is important to impress upon recruits the insufficiency and inadequacy of their routine preparation for the job. Those who fare well in the profession are those who break the mold of traditional role transition and take up challenges of unknown assignments (Fogarty, 2000). Thus the skill set becomes more varied and complex as we move from search goods to credence goods.

3.3 Employee Training Needs

As can be inferred from the discussion on skill set, the training needs of employees are somewhat simple for a search good, more complex for an experience good and much more complex for credence good. Training counter salespersons for a scooter agency (search good) is less demanding than doing the same for escorts in Disneyland (experience good). Training a doctor (credence good) with the latest to equip him for surgery is even more difficult.

Also, for a credence good like doctor, qualifications add to the credibility. Therefore applicants for professional occupations are expected to have certain minimum qualifications (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). This is because a basic degree, say in medicine, is seen as equipping the person with the minimum skill set, needed to perform something complex like a surgical operation. In an experience good, however, the native skills of the employee are more important than his qualifications. The training needs, therefore, grow more complex as one moves from search goods to credence goods.

3.4 Employee Compensation

The compensation packages given to an average employee in search and even experience goods is not high. On the other hand, even frontline employees in credence goods have much higher expectations and better compensation packages. Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) call the frontline employees, “boundary spanners”. A typical boundary spanner in an experience good is a waiter (restaurant) or a steward (airline). But a typical boundary spanner in a consultancy is a consultant, on whom often, the prospects of winning or losing a high value client are hinged. The

emoluments in the latter case are therefore higher. The quality of work life demanded by employees is also an important issue in the case of credence good (Lovelock, 1992).

3.5 Type of Person Needed

The employee needed for supporting the service function in a search good is a specialist who can solve routine problems. Therefore his attention span is somewhat narrowly focused. Though, in a similar fashion, the focus is narrow in the case of an experience good there is need for a little more flexibility. For instance, a child in an amusement park or a customer at a restaurant can make a hitherto unheard demand. Thus an experience good demands more sensitive handling and creative problem solving. A credence good, on the other hand, needs a specialist but with a depth of comprehension in that specialization. Therefore employees associated with handling a credence good, despite being specialists, need a wide knowledge base and ability to deal with uncertainty. For instance, accountants are also expected today to know risk assessment, business performance measurements, electronic commerce and information systems. Such ever-increasing demands on expertise call for a wide knowledge base (Sausser, 2000). Therefore the knowledge horizon widens as one moves from search goods to credence goods.

4.0 BRAND AS A PERSON

The dimension, brand as person, reveals as to what happens to the brand when it is given human qualities and made a person. It is also called brand personality. Aaker defines brand personality as the set of human characteristics associated with a brand. Thus brand personality encompasses such characteristics as gender, age, and socio-economic class as well as classic human personality traits such as warmth, concern and sentimentality (Aaker, 1996). The human aspects of the brand are discussed under the headings role, role expectation, personification, attitude, age and relationship with the customer.

4.1 Role

The role played by the brand in the three types of goods is different. In a search good the service/good provider has to assume the role of a "routine problem solver". The concerns are usually immediate (eg: punctured wheel in a scooter) and so are the solutions. In experience goods, though the

concerns are immediate, the role of the service provider is enchanting the customer. This is more difficult than routine problem solving. Whether it is a restaurant or an airline the challenge is to keep the customer engaged and interested. Therefore the role of the service provider is that of an "entertainer". In a credence good however the role of the service provider is consultative and hence that of an "advisor"

4.2 Role Expectation

The role expectation in the case of a search good is that of a "doer" because the emphasis is on immediate problem solving as in the case of a scooter. The expectation in an experience good is that of a "doer and talker". Since the totality of experience is what holds the key to satisfaction, communication with the customer is important in an experience good. This communication ("talking") helps the service to deliver customer's expectations. Thus there is need for an experience good to be seen not just as a doer but as a talker as well. The role expectation from a credence good, like a doctor or a consultant, is more serious. The service is expected to be a "doer and thinker". This is because a client would like his lawyer to be thinker first and doer later. Besides the successful delivery of service is crucially dependant on thinking rather than talking in credence goods.

4.3 Personification

When a search good is personified it becomes a "friend". This is because a friend typically helps us in solving problems and a search good demands routine problem solving. He is thus a trouble-shooter and he is there when you need him. Aaker and Joachimstahler (2000) dwell on this issue. "What kind of a friend should he be? A party friend? A friend who is "there for you"? A travelling companion? A friend you go to baseball games with? A business friend?" From the above, if we may personify a scooter, it will be a friend who is travelling companion. A washing machine is a friend who is your personal assistant. Thus the personification of such a friend is what Friday is to Robinson Crusoe or Watson is to Sherlock Holmes.

The personification of an experience good on the other hand is that of a "spellbinder" because he delivers excitement. He casts a spell with his performance like Merlin, the magician or Charlie Chaplin. The personification of a credence good, by contrast, is that of a "teacher". He earns the confidence of his client through wise counsel. When personified he is an Archimedes or an Einstein.

Aaker and Joachimstahler (2000) suggest 7 role models for brands namely peer (validating, approachable), mentor (aspiration, wisdom), teacher (knowledge, admiration), expert (skill, credibility), innovator (visionary, innovative), institutional (logical, power) and religious (respect, spiritual force). From this classification a search good should be a peer (ready to offer information and help decision making), an experiential good should be innovator (finding new ways to delight the customer) and credence good should be primarily an expert, then a teacher and finally a mentor.

4.4 Attitude

The attitude of a search good provider is functional because the activity is routine trouble-shooting. In most experiential goods the service is directed at people while in credence goods (e.g.: accounting, legal services) it is often directed at the things people possess (e.g.: money, property). Therefore experience goods have an immediate need to “delight” customers. (A Nordstrom employee ironed a new-bought shirt for a customer...another cheerfully gift-wrapped products bought at Macy’s...the Nordie who warmed customer’s cars in winter...(Collins and Poras, 1994)). On the other hand a law suit or an insurance claim cannot be settled immediately. Therefore, the crux lies in inspiring confidence in the customer (Lovelock, 1992).

4.5 Relationship with the customer

When demographic characteristics are read into a search good it can be imagined as a "friendly young man". An experience good like a restaurant or an amusement park can be visualized as "avuncular"and middle-aged. A good restaurant can be imagined as an uncle who knows all your needs and takes pleasure in fulfilling them. A credence good by contrast is like a graying "father-figure" to whom you look up to for advice.

5.0 BRAND AS A SYMBOL

Since intangibles are more pronounced in services, branding them involves careful handling of symbolic aspects. This is presented in Table 1 under the heading Brand as symbol. Several caveats have to be mentioned before we look at the items under this heading. Firstly, there are several ways of branding a product or a service and the outline provided here is just one of the several possibilities. For instance, several companies have used

intangibles to brand search goods, though the predominant aspect of a durable is the tangibles it offers. The thrust recommended for branding in this article, therefore, flows from the properties exhibited by the three types of goods. But there might other effective ways of branding. Secondly the illustrations provided here for branding are stylized and are meant for demonstration. They should not be regarded as all-encompassing solutions to symbolism in brands.

We first explore the meaning of “symbol” as discussed in branding literature. Kapferer (1992) opines “A brand is a symbol, a word, an object and a concept – all at one and the same time”. He also delves into the meaning of symbols. He states “... the flying red horse of Mobil, or the tree or the emblem of bull...have been deliberately chosen to reflect their brand’s personality and culture. Personality and certain other values are considered of primary importance among the guide lines governing a company’s design and graphic identity program”. Aaker and Joachimstahler (2000) give a more detailed description of what a symbol stands for. “A symbol can provide cohesion and structure to an identity, making it easier to achieve recognition and recall. Symbols can be anything that represents the brand: a tagline (“Nobody doesn’t like Sara Lee), a character (the Pillsbury doughboy), a visual metaphor (the Prudential rock), a logo (Nike’s swoosh), a color (Kodak’s yellow), a gesture (Alstate’s “good hands”), a musical note (Hellmann’s Mayonnaise), a package (the blue cylinder for Morton Salt), or a program (the Ronald McDonald House Charities)”. Some of these aspects have already been described under brand as a person. The others like the logo, slogan and sponsorship are described here.

5.1 Adjectives for the brand

Projective techniques help us understand the idea behind a brand. Such techniques convert a brand into an adjective or an animal or an emotion or a person. The adjectives that probably best fit a search good like washing machine are “useful” or “convenient”. Given that most durables are seen as personal assistants by their owners the above adjectives are best descriptive of the benefits they deliver. On the other hand, for an experience good like an airline or a hotel, the descriptive adjectives are “lively” and “vibrant”. A typical symbol or logo for such a service would be “a smiling face”. The brand name for an experience good could be “Fun-and-Frolic” or “Dreams Unlimited”. As opposed to this, a credence good like a professor or a consultant would need a descriptor like “deep” and “wise”. The logo and name need to reflect these adjectives. Thus a typical logo for such a service

would be “Rodin’s Thinker”. A typical brand name, say, for a consultant is probably “Synergy” or “Gestalt” to reflect the values that go with the service.

5.2 Typical Slogan

A typical search good has more tangibles associated with it than intangibles. Thus the slogan would be “non-stop performance” to reflect convenience and ease-of-use of the product. On the other hand, an experience good should have a more enticing slogan (e.g.: “Come, discover”). Credence goods should have slogans that reflect a high degree of competence (e.g.: The “Complete Solution” people).

5.3 Typical Sponsorship

A search good will probably sponsor a chat show that suggests remedies for household problems. This is in line with what the search good itself stands for, namely, problem solving. An experience good should sponsor an event that is identified with celebration of life (e.g.: Food Carnival or World Tour). On the other hand, a credence good may like to sponsor an event that is cerebral (e.g.: chess competition).

CONCLUSION

The effort in this paper should be seen as a first cut attempt at conceptualizing branding of a service. There is lot of literature in services marketing addressing different aspects of the 7Ps. This paper tries to bring together that knowledge and uses it for branding services. Special emphasis has been placed on the intangible aspects namely, brand as a person and brand as a symbol, something that has not been adequately addressed so far. **To sum up, this paper contends that the essence of branding search, experience and credence goods lies in providing information, delight and education respectively to the customer.** The approach suggested has its limitations, though. For instance, if the service brand under consideration, is a multi-product brand or a corporate brand, this approach cannot be used directly. Frameworks related to corporate branding will have to be integrated with this approach to brand a multi-product entity like GE. This work can be carried forward by borrowing from the literature on the 7Ps of services. For instance, there is significant amount of literature on pricing services. This can be used in conjunction with the approach recommended here to address advanced issues in branding. Including all the nuances of the 7Ps would

have made the present paper unwieldy. Future work, in branding services therefore, lies in assimilating new developments in research of services marketing, especially those dealing with 7Ps and applying them to the theory of branding.

References

- Aaker, D. and Joachimstahler, E. (2000), *Brand Leadership*, The Free Press, New York, NY.
- Aaker, D. (1996), *Building Strong Brands*, The Free Press, New York, NY.
- Bayus B.L. and Gupta S. (1992), “An Empirical Analysis of Consumer Durable Replacement Intentions”, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 9, August, pp. 257-67.
- Bayus B.L. (1988), “Accelerating the Durable Replacement Cycle with Marketing Mix Variables”, *The Journal of Product Innovation Management*, Vol. 5, Iss. 3, September, 216-26.
- Berry L.L. (1999), *Discovering the Soul of Service: The Nine Drivers of Sustainable Business Success*, The Free Press, New York, NY.
- Berry L.L. and Parasuraman A. (1991), *Marketing Services - competing through quality*, The Free Press, New York, NY.
- Berry L.L., Zeithaml V.A. and Parasuraman A. (1990), “Five Imperatives for Improving Service Quality”, *Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 29, Summer, pp. 29-38.
- Bitran G.R. and Hoech J. (1990), “The Humanization of Service: Respect at the Moment of Truth”, *Sloan Management Review*, Winter, pp. 89-96.
- Booms B.H. and Bitner M.J. (1981), “Marketing Structures and Organizational Structures of Service Firms”, in Donnelly J.H. and George W.R. (Eds), *Marketing of Services*, American Marketing Association, Chicago, pp. 47-51.

- Boulding W., Lee E. and Staelin R. (1994), "Mastering the Mix: Do Advertising, Promotion and Sales Force Activities Lead to Differentiation", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 31, May, pp. 159-72.
- Carlzon J. (1987), *Moments of Truth*, Ballinger, New York, NY.
- Carman J. (2000), "Consumer perceptions of service quality: an assessment of SERVQUAL dimensions", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 66, No. 1, pp. 33-
- Cave, M. (1985), "Market Models and Consumer Protection", *Journal of Consumer Policy*, Vol. 8, Iss. 4, December, pp. 334-50.
- Chase R.B. (1981), The Customer contact Approach to Services: Theoretical Bases and Practical Extensions, *Operations Research*, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 698-706.
- Choi, C.J. and Scarpa, C. (1994), "A note on small versus large organizations", *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, Vol. 24, Iss. 2, July, pp. 219-24.
- Collins J.C. and Porras J.I. (1994), *Built to Last – Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, Harper Collins, New York, NY.
- Darby M.R. and Karni E. (1973), "Free Competition and the Optimal Amount of Fraud", *Journal of Law and Economics*, Vol. 16, April, pp. 67-86.
- Davis .W. (1989), "Enabling is as Important as Empowering: A Case for Extended Service Blueprinting", in *Service Excellence: Marketing's Impact on Performance*, Eighth Annual Services Marketing Conference, AMA, Chicago, ILL.
- De Charnatony L. and McDonald M. (1998), *Creating Powerful Brands*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.
- Dobree J. and Page A.S. (1990), "Unleashing the Power of Service Brands in the 1990s", *Management Decision*, Vol. 28, Iss. 6, pp. 14-28.

- Ekelund, R. B. Jr., Mixon, F. G. Jr., Ressler, R. W. (1995), "Advertising and information: An empirical study of search, experience and credence goods", *Journal of Economic Studies*, Vol. 22, Iss. 2; pp. 33-43.
- Emons, W. (1997), "Credence goods and fraudulent experts", *The Rand Journal of Economics*, Spring 1997, Vol. 28, Iss. 1, Spring, pp. 107-19.
- Engel J.F., Blackwell R.D. and Miniard P.W. (1994), *Consumer Behavior*, 8th Ed., Dryden Press, Fortworth.
- Fogarty, T.J. (2000), Socialization and organizational outcomes in large public accounting firms, *Journal of Managerial Issues*, Vol. 12, Iss. 1, Spring, pp. 13-33.
- Gale B.T. (1994), *Managing Customer Value*, The Free Press, New York, NY.
- Gronroos, C. (1990), *Service Management and Marketing: Managing the Moments of Truth*, Lexington Books, Lexington, MA.
- Gronroos, C. (1983), *Strategic Management and Marketing in the Service Sector*, Marketing Science Institute, Cambridge, MA.
- Jones M.A. and Suh J. (2000), "Transaction-specific satisfaction and overall satisfaction: an empirical analysis", *The Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 147-59.
- Kapferer J.N. (1992), *Strategic Brand Management*, The Free Press, New York, NY.
- Keaveney S.M. (1995), "Customer Switching Behavior in Service Industries: An Exploratory Study", *Journal of Marketing*, April, pp. 71-82.
- Kingman-Brundage, J. (1984), "The ABCs of Service System Blueprinting", in Lovelock C.L. (Ed.), *Managing Services*, pp. 96-102.
- Kotler P. (2000), *Marketing Management*, 10th Ed., Prentice-Hall of India, New Delhi.

- Larson R.C. (1987), "Perspectives on Queues: Social Justice and Psychology of Queuing", *Operations Research*, Vol. 35, November-December, 895-905.
- Levy M. (1996), "Current accounts and baked beans: Translating FMCG marketing principles to the financial sector", *The Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, pp. 95-9.
- Love J.F. (1995), *MacDonald's – Behind the Arches*, Bantam Books, New York, NY.
- Lovelock C. (1992), *Managing Services – Marketing, Operations and Human Resources*, 2nd Ed., Prentice-Hall Inc., New Jersey, NJ.
- Maister D.H. (1984), "The Psychology of Waiting in Lines", in Lovelock C. (ed.), *Managing Services – Marketing, Operations and Human Resources*, Prentice-Hall Inc., New Jersey, NJ.
- Martilla J.A. and James J.C. (1977), "Importance-Performance Analysis", *Journal of Marketing*, January 1977, pp. 77-9.
- Nelson P. (1970), "Information and Consumer Behavior", *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 20, pp. 311-29.
- Nelson P. (1974), "Advertising as Information", *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 82, Iss. 4, July-August, pp. 729.
- Onkvisit S. and Shaw J.J. (1989), "Service Marketing: Image, Branding, and Competition", *Business Horizons*, January-February, pp. 13-8.
- Parasuraman A., Zeithaml V.A., Berry L.L. (1994), "Alternative scales for measuring service quality: a comparative assessment based on psychometric and diagnostic criteria", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 201-30.
- Parasuraman A., Zeithaml V.A., Berry L.L. (1991), "Refinement and Reassessment of the SERVQUAL scale", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 67, No.4, pp. 420-50.
- Parasuraman A., Zeithaml V.A., Berry L.L. (1988), "SERVQUAL: a multiple item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 64, No.1, pp. 12-40.

- Parker P. (1992), "Price Elasticity Dynamics Over the Adoption Life Cycle", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 29, August, pp. 358-67.
- Sauser, L.D. (2000), "The CPA profession: Responding to a changing environment", *S.A.M. Advanced Management Journal*, Vol. 65, Iss. 2, Spring, pp. 36-40.
- Schlesinger, L.A. and Heskett, J.L. (1991), "Breaking the Cycle of Failure in services", *Sloan Management Review*, Spring, pp. 17-28.
- Sin L.Y.M and Tse A.C.B (2000), "How does marketing effectiveness mediate the effect of organizational culture on business performance? The case of service firms", *The Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 14, No. 4 & 5, pp. 295.
- Spreng R.A. and Mackoy, R.D. (1996), "An empirical examination of a model of perceived quality and satisfaction", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 72, Summer, pp. 201-14.
- Wright S. (2000), "Mass customization could be the key to getting our industry back on track", *Apparel Industry Magazine*, Vol. 61, Iss. 7, July, pp.104.
- Wyckoff, D.D. (1991), "New Tools for Achieving Service Quality", in Lovelock C. (ed.), *Managing Services – Marketing, Operations and Human Resources*, Prentice-Hall Inc., New Jersey, NJ.
- Zeithaml V.A. (1982), "The Acquisition, Meaning and Use of Price Information by Consumers of Professional Services", in Bush, R. and Hunt S. (Ed.s), *Marketing Theory: Philosophy of Science Perspectives*, American Management Association, Chicago, pp. 237-41.
- Zeithaml V.A. (1988), "Consumer Perceptions of Price, Quality and Value: A Means-End Model and Synthesis of Evidence of Professional Services", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 52, July, pp. 2-22.
- Zeithaml V.A. and Bitner M.J. (1996), *Services Marketing*, McGraw-Hill, Singapore.