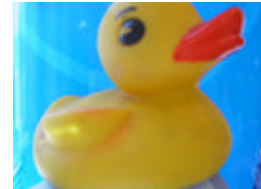


Every Brand Needs to Have Its Own Duck

by Bernd Schmitt, CEO

More than five years ago, I stayed for the first time in the Conrad Hotel in Hong Kong. In the bathroom on the rim of the bathtub they had placed a bright yellow rubber duck with a red mouth. I fell in love with the idea (and the duck) immediately; I liberated the duck and took it with me; when I stayed again, I picked up another one until I had a whole duck family at home. I sometimes use it when I take a bubble bath. This little duck has become part of my life; I mention it in my speeches. They have really struck a chord with this little duck. It's the one thing that I always remember when I think about the hotel -- and it becomes the **starting point of remembering the entire hotel experience.**



How much does it cost to produce a rubber duck like that? I do not have the exact figures, but I estimate a few cents in the South of China. **A few cents of production costs translate into memorable experiences for a lifetime and ongoing customer loyalty.** Not unexpectedly, the duck is now featured as part of the hotel's advertising campaign.

In the summer of 1999, I checked in at the new **W hotel in San Francisco**. At the desk they gave me an "aromatherapy teabag for my eyes" to relax and refresh me. This little item, again cheap to produce, frames the entire experience at the W hotels. The web-site describes the W experience exquisitely: "Unparalleled in service. It starts with the rooms-- fully stocked with everything from Aveda bath products to plush down comforters. Need anything else? Just let us know. Our staff knows their stuff inside and out. Supper for two at the chicest spot in town? You don't even have to leave the building.... And our fitness centers are just the thing to keep your mind and body balanced. We've revamped the business traveler's entire experience. Welcome to W." It's all true, but what remains most vivid in my memory are the soothing teabags for my tired eyes.

The lesson here? **Every company needs to have a duck for its brand.** That is, a little element that triggers, frames, summarizes, stylizes the experience.