



The Five Star Charter

Cdr. Bud Slabbaert

Have you ever heard of “Wobegonic Experience”, the charter company where all the aircraft are fast, the flight attendants are beautiful, the pilots are good looking, the dispatchers are above average and the flying is superlative? This charter is a secret tip in business aviation, so secret that very few people have heard about it. The charter operates out of Lake Wobegon Airport in Northern Minnesota. “Wobegonic Experience” is a name that derived from the “Lake Wobegon Effect”, which in academic sources is called the above-average-effect or the better-than-average effect.



Quirky

You probably assumed that something quirky was coming up. You are dead wrong. Branding a company or service is serious business. First some facty fictions. Wobegon is a fictional Indian name meaning “the place where we waited all day in the rain”. You may not find Lake Wobegon on the map because of the incompetence of surveyors who mapped out the state of Minnesota in the 19th century. Actually there is a better reason: Lake Wobegon is the fictional town in a radio series by humorist Garrison Keillor. His own characterization of the fictional community, where “all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average,” has been used to describe a real and pervasive human tendency to overestimate one’s achievements and capabilities in relation to others.

Perceptions drive choice

I personally cannot stand all those boring company names that include words air, jet, wings, aviation, etc. that show a lack of fantasy or a lack of branding knowledge by its founders. A brand is a name is intended to identify a company or its services, and to differentiate them from competitors. “Aviation” does differentiate from “Limousine Services”. However if 10 or more air charter companies use aviation in their name it doesn’t make any distinction between them, does it? Ultimately, a brand is something that resides in the minds of customers reflecting perceptions. There are two things that affect people’s perceptions and preference:

1. communications about an offering
2. experience with the offering

The offering is what it is all about.

Unique is not exceptional

So, what’s wrong with “Wobegonic Experience”? How refreshing it is to encounter a brand that

tells something about the experience that may be expected: above average. Is it daring to have an unusual name? It may have been in the ages where we still lived in trees or caves. Although times have changed, minds have changed to a much lesser degree and daring is still scaring. A positioning statement in a brand provides the underlying platform for communications and by articulating unique strengths it distinguishes offerings from those of a competitor. Needless to say that we are in a people business. People have feelings and emotions. What feelings do you deliver to your customers? Mind you that “Unique Experiences” are half as unique as “Wobegonic Experiences” when it comes to creating a brand. The word unique has degraded to a common expression.

Be a great spirit

Starting a new business or developing a new service is a matter of getting things into place. Getting things into the mind of clients depends on branding. Revolutionary branding and positioning can result in a success story from day one. Highly effective leaders go against the odds or even ignore them. Their courage to tread new ground, to dare and to redefine the rules of their industry, distinguished their businesses from the competition. You can count on it that the path to change is paved with skeptics. Einstein expressed it as follows: “Great spirits have always found violent opposition from mediocre minds. The latter cannot understand it when a man does not thoughtlessly submit to hereditary prejudices but honestly and courageously uses his intelligence.”

The author Cdr. Bud Slabbaert is an expert in Development of Business Aviation at airports. He is initiator and Conference Chairman of the BA-MEETUP.

The 2nd annual BA-Meetup will take place in Lyon France, February 24-26, 2010. It is a Business Aviation joint conference for Schedulers, Dispatchers, Pilots, Operators, FBOs, Executive Handling Agents, Business Airports, and International Service Providers in Europe and the Middle East. Full details are available at: www.ba-meetup.com

