Hey, Hey, We're the Best

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Over the summer, I finally fulfilled a lifelong dream -- I met The Monkees. I've been a fan practically since the day I was born, even though they were already celebrating their 20th anniversary by that point. When I heard they were touring for their 45th anniversary, I knew I had to go. Sadly, it would be the last Monkees tour for Davy Jones. He passed away on February 29 after suffering a heart attack in Florida.

But let's go back to happier times.

The concert was awesome. People of all ages were there, and they were holding up signs, singing along and dancing in the aisles. It was like we were all back in the '60s. It was the most fun I have ever had at a concert in my entire life. And you could tell that the rest of the audience felt the same way.

When I got to meet them after the show, I was so nervous that I almost passed out while I was waiting in line. When it was my turn, all I could manage to say was, "Can I hug you?" I felt like the biggest idiot, but Peter Tork just said "Aww," and gave me a huge hug. It's the little things like that that helped me to understand how their fans have remained so dedicated over the years.

Then I started thinking about other musical groups, and then even major companies. How do they keep their fans and customers hanging around? Not everyone has been in business 45 years or more. I know what keeps me coming back for more of The Monkees, but what keeps me coming back to certain companies and brands? I can narrow it down to three things: price, quality, and customer service.

Price

I love the Internet. If I'm spending more than $50 on something, I've done my homework on it. I've checked reviews, I've checked the specs and I've definitely checked the price.

I'm a coupon queen who hates to pay full price for anything. I know everyone is out to make a profit, but that doesn't mean I'm willing to pay for a 100 percent markup in price.

Consider the process of buying a car. I know there is a price on the windshield, but you'd have to be on something to think I'm going to pay it. I will negotiate for as long as it takes to come up with what I think is a fair price. If you won't come down far enough, I'll leave. I had to get up to leave four times the last time I bought a car, but I got what I wanted.

Unfortunately, when the economy is clinging to life, price becomes a tricky issue. I know the company is out to get as much as they can, and I know that I don't have that much to spend. I'll try to get the cheapest price I can find, but there are certain sacrifices that I won't make, namely in terms of quality.

If Company A is cheaper than Company B, but Company A makes a crappy product, I'm going with Company B. I know that seems like simple logic, but when money is tight, I know plenty of people who consider price to be the deciding factor and end up paying for it later.

Quality

Price is meaningless if the quality sucks. I'm sure I could get a car for under $10,000, but would I trust it on a snowy, windy road? Not a chance. I'll pay extra for a vehicle built like a tank.

To me, the perfect example of quality over price involves alcohol. From my college days, I can tell you that there is a plethora of cheap alcohol out there. Good economy or bad, I'll still pay extra for my Yuengling lager (which just so happens to be America's oldest brewery -- 180 years and counting -- so they have to be doing something right).

Customer Service

I've never had to complain about the quality of my Yuengling lager, but being a family-run brewery, I trust Yuengling to have a pretty good customer service unit. If my name was on the can, I know I would. Sadly, not all companies seem to care about customer service. Customer service is the most important factor for me, which is why I will never shop at Home Depot again.

I had purchased a grill from the Home Depot website. When I received it, I noticed that it was beat up and borderline mangled. I immediately called the customer service line and explained the problem. The representative I spoke to assured me that he would process the return forms for me. All I had to do was take the damaged grill back to a Home Depot store, and the new one would be sent to my door.

I went to a local store to return it and found out there was no record of the return. There were, however, two separate orders with my name and my credit information for two of the exact same grill. The representative only did the new order, not the return. I spent three hours on the phone with people telling me they couldn't fix the problem. I was eventually able to return the broken one and stop the order on the new one. I then took my money to Lowe's and swore I would never go back to Home

Depot again.

Call me petty, but if you cross me, I have no time for you. Mistakes happen and things break. A single product can be defective. But if it's easier to sneak into the White House than it is to deal with your customer service department, you will no longer get my business.

OK, now that all my ranting is done, it's your turn. Which factor is the most important to you? Is there another factor that should have made this list? Leave a comment below or email me at amy.lawrence@advantagemedia.com *[1].*

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