

# Forbes

## How to Make Fun Your Customer Strategy



Getty Images

by Chip Bell

Is your organization about fun? How often do your customers giggle? How much of your business strategy is about funniness--not just entertainment, but customer experiences made joyful by design? What are your customers' principal memories of their encounters with your organization?

Before we go too far down this "make it fun" trail, there are industry niches that might not embrace fun as a successful customer strategy—emergency rooms and funeral homes come to mind. And there are clearly target audiences that might prefer somber over whimsical. A tax audit firm with a client strategy of fun might seem a

bit sadistic. Yet, it might be worth a closer look in an era of unexciting news and unengaged employees.

Making a customer strategy successful takes a focus on three elements: customer fit, disciplined execution, and complete alignment. Fit means the strategy will produce encounters valued by the target audience. Execution means employees have the capacity, competence, and commitment to make the strategy come alive every day. Finally, alignment means everything about the organization, from leadership practices to frontline communications with customers, operates in complete sync with the strategy.

### Fitting the Target Audience



My father was a high school basketball coach. He could not get me excited about the game, even with a basketball court in our backyard. Then, the Harlem Globetrotters came through our little town. He took me to a game, and I was hooked. They made me laugh so hard that my sides hurt too much to eat a hotdog.

The Savannah Bananas took a page from the Globetrotters and ramped it up a few notches. Started in 2015 by Jesse Cole, the Savannah Bananas did for baseball what the Globetrotters did for basketball. Cole's goal was to bring fans back to the historic Grayson Stadium. And they made even the most bored spectators become raving fans. Every game is a sell-out crowd of thousands with a waiting list of a half-million eager fans.

The secret to their cult-like following is not just spectator fun; it is spectator immersion. You don't just *watch* from the bleachers; you are *in* the circus. Savannah Bananas players run through the crowd to perform fully choreographed country line dances. Every game honors a randomly chosen Banana Baby. *The Lion King* opening music cues the players to kneel around a baby being lifted in a banana costume. First-time visitors sign the fan wall in the right field to leave behind a personalized relic. Players deliver roses to little girls in the stands and get autographs from kids instead of vice versa. If a fan catches a foul ball, the player is out. The strategy fits its target audience, eager to be a part of an athletic experience with non-stop unforgettable surprises. To learn more, read [Shep Hyken's](#) article.

## **Make Execution Simple for Everyone**

Hotel Monaco is a medium-priced hotel chain in IHG's Kimpton Group. It seeks to enchant business-traveling guests with unpredictable additions. Mind you, the basics are done superbly—check-in is efficient, the rooms are immaculate, and the staff is friendly and helpful. But that is what all hotels seek to provide.

"We think if people have fun at our hotels, they're going to remember us...they want a place that has sensory spirit," says Kimpton Group CEO Mike DeFrino. And how do they do it? "I want to inspire a movement where people can be their authentic selves and work without fear." Kimpton Hotels treats their associates as personally as they treat their guests. While Kimpton's master brand provides continuity, it empowers each property and property staff members to create its own detours. Their core values of passion, creativity, and personality are on full display.

What does fun look like? The bathrobe is leopard or zebra skin print, not boring white. At check-in, you would typically be asked if you would like a goldfish to stay with you in your room. All they require is that you give it a name. A pet-friendly hotel, there is a dog concierge in the lobby. Visiting pets are offered a bed, nature videos to watch in the guest room, a welcome treat, and a turndown bone/treat at night. Return to your guest room for the evening, and the housekeeper has already made the rounds. On your pillow there will be a thoughtful note and perhaps a unique foreign coin, flower, small bag of popcorn, or even a lottery ticket. Complementary wine and cheese in the lobby at 6 pm might feature a palm reader or mime for extra fun.



## **Ensure Complete Alignment**

A discussion of a fun customer strategy would only be thorough with an online example. Poppin is an online office supply distribution company with a clear "fun-driven" strategy. However, their success lies in their attention to every process, procedure, and communication operating in sync, like a well-oiled machine. Their website declares their purpose: "Whether you are making grocery lists, taking notes at the latest TED conference, or pitching your next big account, Poppin believes you

should be able to do it with a smile and style." Their culture highlights their associates who: "Love tape dispensers, file cabinets, and the way a new notebook sounds (and smells) when you turn the cover for the first time."

In an interview last year with [TechDay](#), Senior Director of Poppin's Brand Marketing and Communication, Meredith Zenkel, described their strategy this way: "The original Poppin marketing focus was keeping the voice consistent at every touch point. For example, when you get a box from Poppin, bubble wrap cushions say, 'Meet me in the supply closet.' Making the customer smile at every touch point has always been a major goal...We work to keep the Poppin personality infused in everything we do while showing customers we take our product and services seriously."

When you order supplies, you get an email: "We know you and your Poppin staff are really going to love each other!" Once your shipment is en route, you get another email: "We know you and your order are both incredibly excited to see each other. While in the throes of such anticipation, it's totally understandable to lose track of the details, so here they are." But the fun continues with correspondence. Unwrapping the box of supplies, you will likely see a sign that reads: "I was so excited to see you, I could hardly breathe." Everything about the Poppin experience envelopes you in fun.

Many brands make fun a part of their strategy. Take a look at brands like Hello Tushy, Bratz, Liquid Death, Dollar Shave Club, and Poo-Pourri, to name a few. A marketing strategy is about presentation; a customer strategy is about participation. Ads and brand image drive a marketing strategy; experiences drive a customer strategy. And the more the customer is in the driver's seat, not on the passenger side, the more influential the attraction is.

"Remarkable takes originality, passion, guts, and daring," wrote Seth Godin in his best-selling book *Purple Cow*. "Today, the one sure way to fail is to be boring. Your one chance for success is to be remarkable." Fun as a customer strategy takes imagination, guts, and daring! As the "remarkable" word picture implies, when done well, customers will enthusiastically *remark* about their experiences with infectious passion and invitational rhetoric.

*About Chip Bell*



Chip R. Bell is a renowned keynote speaker and the author of several award-winning, best-selling books. Global Gurus in 2024 ranked him for the tenth year in a row in the top ten keynote speakers in the world on customer experience. He is also an alliance partner with On3.ai that specializes in mobile based, AI-driven field learning programs with high level transfer of learning and retention and an instructor with MyFuel.io. He can be reached at [www.chipbell.com](http://www.chipbell.com).