



# The Raphael Report

**Observations on marketing,  
advertising, sales and  
promotions  
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## Under Promise and Over Deliver

*"What is least expected is the more highly regarded"*  
- Balthasar Garcia, Spanish philosopher (mid 1600s)

Michael Howard was recently elected as the new leader of the Conservative Party in Britain. In his first public statement as the new Tory leader he said, "My approach is a simple one: promise less, deliver more."

Howard's philosophy is the secret to success in business as well as politics. And yet . . . many retailers do just the opposite. Here are some personal examples:

I gave a contract to a local carpenter for some repairs in our house. He said he'd start work the following Monday. Two weeks later I was still waiting.

I leave messages on his phone and never receive an answer.

My electrician came to fix a wall socket. He put in a temporary fixture and said, "I'll bring the permanent fixture tomorrow."

That was a month ago. I'm still waiting.

I saw a landscape gardener working on a neighbor's lawn. Would he like to do our work as well? "Sure!" he replied and asked, "How's the day after tomorrow?" I agreed. That was the beginning of the summer and now the snow is falling and I'm still waiting.

What's happening?

People who make a promise and don't deliver is becoming more prevalent in today's service community.

I like the line from poet Robert Service, "A promise made is a debt unpaid."

STORY: When Vrest Orton opened his Vermont Country Store in the tiny village of Weston, Vermont (population 400) many years ago, he did a good tourist business. Wanting to expand, he decided to go into mail order with a catalogue offering his goods. He called L.L. Bean in Freeport, Maine who was achieving good success with his catalogue. Vrest asked if could come and see him for advice. L.L. agreed.

Vrest went to Maine with several yellow pads and sharpened pencils for instructions from this successful mail order pioneer.

When he met with Bean, Vrest asked, "What do I have to do to be successful in mail order?"

Bean told him, "Just write down one sentence, memorize it and you can go home. Here it is: **Make sure the story isn't better than the store.**"

What was he saying? This: Whatever you tell the customer they will receive from you, make sure the product is better than the offer.

Why do customers buy from you? One major reason: trust. They believe what you say is what you mean.

A survey from the Ernst and Young accounting firm said most businesses feel that the personal relationship with the customer is only 10 percent of the buying decision. When they asked the customers, they said it was 70 percent!

Here are the two reasons people buy:

1. Good feelings
2. Solutions to problems.

A *New York Times* article said a survey revealed that "people who enjoy shopping in a store will spend 20 percent more." (That's "good feelings.")

There will always be retailers who will say, "I'm doing fine. I don't have to try anything new. What works for us in the past, why, we'll just keep on doing." There is a quote attributed to Einstein that says, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, each time expecting a different result."

Are there rules to know, directions to follow, paths to take make sure you under promise and over deliver? Here are a few:

**1. Be specific.** Don't say, "Your order will be ready Monday." Say, "Your order will be ready between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. Monday." And then, for emphasis, "Is that convenient for you?"

**2. Do reminders.** Make an appointment with your doctor and you'll receive a phone call the day before to remind you. When you send invitations to a sale, call your best customers a day or two before the event to remind them. They'll appreciate you took the time and feel they are important to you.

**3. Maintain pricing.** When you advertise a specific price for an item and you discover you under priced the offer, honor the advertised price. Tell the customer you made a mistake but they shouldn't be disappointed by your error. The small loss in profit is greatly overshadowed by your reputation of someone who "keeps his word" which will quickly speed through the community.

**4. Remember the "lifetime" value of your customer.** This means treating all customers as if they are very important. Because they are. Your goal: to consistently exceed people's expectations of the service they will receive from your business.

**5. Offer "Added Value."** We once worked with a furniture dealer in the suburbs of Washington, DC. Most of his furniture was delivered to the customer's home. I asked him what did the driver do after he brought in the purchased item? He said, "They have the person sign they accepted the merchandise."

I suggested the driver make one more trip back to the truck and bring in something "extra." A dozen roses for the new dining room table. A magazine rack for the newly purchased chair recliner. A child's picture frame for the room where the children's bunk beds were placed. How does this work for you? This way: The customer buys what you have for sale. They ask to have it delivered. You agree and settle on a specific time (re-read rule #1). When you bring the package you bring something "extra."

They'll ask, "Why?" or say "I didn't order that." You tell them you simply want to "thank them" for being a customer.

Will they forget that? No. Will they tell others? Yes. Because you "under promised" and "over delivered."

*"The number one rule of business is this: Always under promise and over deliver. It's the extra on the end that makes customers want to return to you and keep coming back. More important - it makes you feel better."*

-- Roxanne Emmerich, business consultant and this year's University of Wisconsin distinguished alumnus award