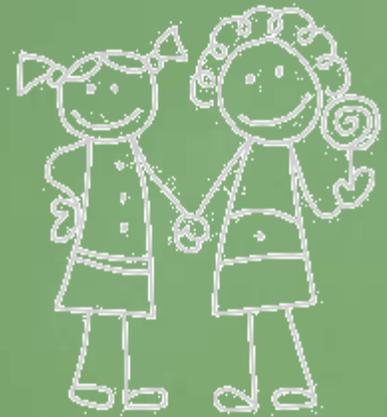


Brands seeking to define and implement Relationship Marketing need look no further for inspiration than how a child might describe their relationship with their best friend.

My Best Friend.

They never let me down
They will probably be forgiven if they do
They will support me when I am down
They will look out for me
They will talk with me often
I can share my thoughts with them
I will say nice things about them to others
I always want to play with them
I would miss them if they were not around



Brands are challenged to consistently deliver their brand promise, create trust and act transparently - admitting when they are wrong. Brands that help customers when they have a change of circumstances or provide useful ideas and recommendations show they care, really care.

Best friends talk to each other often. If the content is relevant, enlightening, entertaining or just plain useful then brands have more of a chance of cutting through. O2 Priority Moments are a case in point.

We share our thoughts with best friends. Brands that want to hear what customers are saying actively take part in dialogue; however, there is always a potential downside. Whilst a best friend conversation generally involves the exchange of positive ideas and emotions, the dialogue with a brand is likely to be less clear cut. Brands that have used social media still need to tread carefully. They are not in control.

We talk positively about our best friends to others. In the world of brands this is akin to ensuring customers feel comfortable recommending the brand to others - positive word of mouth or advocacy.

Where feasible we try to spend more time with best friends. In the world of brands we might define this as repeat purchase or frequency of visit, and use phrases like Brand Loyalty.

Finally, the most challenging characteristic to emulate is whether the brand would be missed if it was not around. How many financial sector brands would be missed if they disappeared tomorrow? However, there are brands and companies we love enough to stop them from disappearing. The consumer backlash when Coke changed its flavouring and the potential delisting of Heinz Salad Cream are cases in point. There are others.

My advice: Emulate best friend relationships in the context of a deep understanding of the role your brand and category plays in the lives of your customers. This can be achieved by researching your customer base extensively.