

# Case study: Brand loyalty is very fragile

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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The objective of branding today is to make customers so loyal to your company or product that they don't even think about going somewhere else.

I have always stressed the importance of retaining existing customers not only because this is cost efficient but absolutely critical for growth and sustainability. So, I am always delighted when I experience for myself just how fragile brand loyalty is and how easy it is for a company to change a customer's mindset, almost without that customer knowing it is happening.

For years now, my family and I have been customers of our local branch of Specsavers. Their service has always exceeded our expectation to the point where none of us would go and get quotes from other suppliers. They really have been excellent.

I called in there last week, as I do probably once a year, to have those little nose pads on my glasses replaced when they wear down. I always ask what I owe them for the service and they always smile and say: "It's on the house for our regular customers." - nice touch. But last week, when I asked for the nose pads to be replaced the sales assistant (presumably new as I had not seen her before) said: "That will be R10." (No please, just a statement of fact. When I mentioned that this had always been done for free, she replied: "These are new regulations, we charge R10."

I didn't complain or even look irritated, I just paid. But as I walked back to my car through the shopping centre, almost without conscious thought or premeditation, I popped into a competing optician and asked them what they charged for nose pads. I can't remember the amount but I did walk out of there thinking that in future I was going to get quotes from them on glasses, eye tests and repairs.

Now all of this happened subconsciously. Suddenly that resolute brand loyalty I held for Specsavers was gone. I didn't force it away. It just went.

So who is to blame? Certainly not the new sales assistant. But, most definitely Specsavers management. While they were perfectly at liberty to start charging for nose pads, where they made a mistake was to not think about unintended consequences. Someone there should have thought about the impact, because it is little things like this that damage brand loyalty.

When the instruction was issued to start charging for nose pads, there should have been terms and conditions: "Yes, charge for nose pads but before you do, look up the customer's records and if they are a long-standing customer spending thousands of rands with us every year, for pity's sake don't ask them for a miserable R10..."

Brand loyalty is all in the detail. The tiny, almost imperceptible detail.

It might sound petty. But it isn't, because there are a lot of consumers just like me who have no control whatsoever over their subconscious downgrading of brand loyalty to a company or product that let them down in even the tiniest way.

## ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on [moerdykc@gmail.com](mailto:moerdykc@gmail.com) and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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