Gateway to Success
BTA Mid-America hosts dealer event in Kansas City
by: Brent Hoskins, Office Technology Magazine

BTA Mid-America hosted its 2017 Gateway to Success event June 7-8 at the InterContinental Kansas City at the Plaza in Kansas City, Missouri. The event featured a keynote address, “From the Bottom Up,” by 2013 CNN Hero of the Year Chad Pregracke, founder and president of Living Lands & Waters, an “industrial-strength” river clean-up organization. Featured speaker Dr. Neeli Bendapudi, provost, executive vice chancellor and a professor of marketing at the University of Kansas, followed Pregracke with “Creating the Living Brand.”


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The next BTA event, the 2017 BTA National Conference, will be held Aug. 16-18 at the Mandarin Oriental in Las Vegas, Nevada. For more information or to register, see the ad on pages 2-3 or visit www.bta.org/BTALasVegas.

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In her Gateway to Success session, “The Living Brand,” Dr. Neeli Bendapudi, provost, executive vice chancellor and a professor of marketing at the University of Kansas, challenged attendees to take a close look at their company brands. The perception of all brands, she emphasized, vary and are ever changing.

Bendapudi said she talks about the “living brand” to remind people that a brand is never static. “Why? Because every time you interact with it — especially when you interact with the people [a company’s employees] — the brand either is enhanced and grows, or it declines,” she explained. “If I had my druthers, at the University of Kansas I would have all of my employees ask themselves at the end of the day: ‘Did I build the KU brand? Did I erode the brand or did I keep it static?’”

With any brand, the “experience always trumps the ad,” Bendapudi continued. “You could spend tons of money on marketing campaigns, but when I come in and interact with you, how you treat me, what that interaction is like — that will impact me much more than any ad campaign ever could.”

Bendapudi cited the key areas of focus for brand building.

“There are three layers for any brand — the product, the identity and the equity,” she said. “At the core is the product. Each product is nested within an identity and the identity is then nested in equity.”

When someone talks about the product he (or she) offers, he could talk about its different attributes, features, etc., Bendapudi said. “You could also talk about the quality of what you offer versus what someone else does,” she said. “I looked at a few websites of yours out of curiosity ... It’s fascinating how many of them, when you describe products, tell me about what your products are rather than what they do for me. We call it ‘attributes versus benefits.’ The more technical your offering, the more likely you are to really do attributes only, rather than the benefits.”

Bendapudi quipped that attendees should remember that their customers and prospects listen to the radio station WIIFM ("What’s in it for me?") “I don’t care what you offer,” she said. “What I care about is what it does for me. So, how often on your website and when talking to people do you take the trouble to tell them what it means to them?”

There are a couple of ways to think about the next layer of the brand — its identity — Bendapudi said. “One way for you to think about brand identity is to pretend the brand has a personality and to describe the personality of your brand,” she said. “A second way is to pretend the brand has a relationship with your customer, and the customer describes how they think of the brand. What is the brand to them?”

Dealers should look at the world through their customers’ eyes, Bendapudi advised. “It’s not what you claim,” she said. “Brand identity is how you want to be perceived, but brand image is how we actually perceive you, and you’ve got to know both. Your identity is your aspiration ... You can claim you’re fabulous, but it doesn’t really matter. Does it match up with how I see you — the image?”

The final layer of a brand, its equity, is “what your brand is in the customer’s mind; how the customer sees you,” Bendapudi said. “If the customer would pay one dollar more to shop with you than a competitor with the same product, you have equity. If a customer would drive one mile farther to find you when they have a choice, you have equity. If a customer would defend your brand when somebody criticizes it, you have equity.”

— Brent Hoskins