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The Magic of L.L. Bean— A Profile

John Rohn, a famous motivational speaker once said, “If you make a sale, you make a living. If you make an investment of time and good service in a customer, you can make a fortune.” From the time that the company’s original product, the Maine Hunting Shoe, fell apart upon distribution to customers, L.L. Bean has dedicated themselves to maintaining customer satisfaction, proving that the investment of time and good service in a customer enables a company to prove immensely successful. L.L. Bean *still* adheres to its values of providing superior customer service and quality products today, even in a world where corporate corruption runs rampant, the economy under goes plummeting figures, and the marketplace proves an eat-or-be eaten world.

What Keeps the Company Going?

A professor at a well-known business school once said the following concerning L.L. Bean: “The company has grown and prospered through maintaining their values over the decades and in the face of many changes to the company, economy and market place” (Gorman 273). The preceding quote serves as a valid summation of L.L. Bean’s 94 year life. The company has undergone many trials and changes in its evolution from a one-man, one-product business in Freeport, Maine to a 1.2 billion dollar company known around the world. It is not the company’s widespread reputation that keeps them going strong, nor its faithful customers, nor its quality products. What remains crucial to L.L. Bean’s ongoing success remains its clearly stated founding values, which have barely altered since L.L. Bean first established the business in 1912. The company has transitioned between three leaders, all of which have committed themselves to conveying the company’s founding values to their customers and the world through all of the company’s actions. L.L. Bean does this through committing itself to excellent customer service and superior, quality products. Although setbacks have occurred throughout the company’s 94 year life, the company has survived by adhering to their founding values as opposed to embarking down the road of corporate corruption. Through viewing L.L. Bean’s values and policies, its history and growth, its communication with customers and its setbacks, one can see the true role of clearly stated values in a company’s longevity. Furthering the reasons for the company’s success, comparing L.L. Bean with similar companies, such as Lands’ End, also reveals some of the unique factors contributing to the company’s success.

Company Values and Policies

"As you climb the ladder of success, check occasionally to make sure it is leaning against the right wall." This anonymous quote describes one of the prime factors in L.L. Bean’s success—always ensuring that the company is adhering to its values throughout its growth

and expansion. In order to check for the adherence to values, however, the company must have a “right wall” to lean against, meaning it must have a clearly stated set of values.

The Golden Rule

When Leon Leonwood Bean first founded the business in 1912, he made his own version of the Golden Rule and rendered this rule the foundation of his company. L.L. Bean’s version of this rule is: “Sell good merchandise at a reasonable profit, treat your customers like human beings, and they will always come back for more” (“L.L. Bean: Company” 4). To this day, the company’s customer service policies, such as the 100% Satisfaction Guarantee Policy, reflect the L.L.’s Golden Rule, and the rule remains evident throughout the company’s history.

Founding Values

Furthermore, the company possesses values that serve as guidelines for the company’s actions. These values dictate not only how L.L. Bean conducts business, but rather permeate all forms of communication with the company’s customers. The values include: outdoor heritage, integrity, service and perseverance (Gorman 274). Figure 1.1 explains these values in greater detail.

The Importance of Policies and Values

L.L. Bean’s policies and values do not exist merely for show. In fact, they prove good communication in that they are very clearly stated, conveying the foundation of the L.L. Bean persona to both customers and employees.

The Golden Rule serves as a vital part of the business. First of all, this statement provides employees with a guideline for interacting with customers. The fact that L.L. Bean clearly articulates such a strong commitment to the customer renders it more likely that that employees will know how to treat the customers they interact with; they must adhere to the ways the company values dictate in order to keep working for the company. In this sense, having clearly stated guidelines like the Golden Rule proves a valid means of communication, in that it provides a foundation for employee interaction with the customers, and therefore preserves the L.L. Bean value of outstanding customer service. The statement also sets apart the company from others, as many customer service policies of other companies fall short of this policy: be it in terms of rude employees or unsatisfactory service that cause customers to feel that they did not receive their money’s worth.

L.L. Bean’s Founding Values	
	<p>Outdoor Heritage- Acknowledging the enduring worth of the natural environment and the physical and spiritual value of the outdoor experience.</p>
	<p>Integrity – The physical quality of the products, guaranteeing satisfaction 100 percent, abiding by L.L.’s Golden Rule.</p>
	<p>Service – Treating customers like human beings with the best, personal service possible. Meeting all responsibilities to employees, owners, communities.</p>
	<p>Perseverance – In good times and bad L.L. Bean will not yield in its values</p>

Figure 1.1—L.L. Bean’s Founding Values

L.L. Bean does not merely possess values, it lives them, allowing these value to dictate the company's every action. In turn, these values preserve L.L. Bean image that derives from them. For example, L.L. Bean would not sell unsatisfactory products and then refuse to refund them, for it violates the integrity and service principles that the company is founded upon. Violating these principles would therefore distort the L.L. Bean image. L.L. Bean's 100% satisfaction policy wholly reflects the service value. Once again, having a clearly stated set of values allows employees to carry them out, as opposed to employees having no idea as to the company's beliefs and morals. The clearly stated set of values serves as a vital means of communication to customers, employees, and the world in helping maintain the company's image of integrity, outdoor heritage, quality products, excellent customer service and perseverance.

Company History and Growth

Since its foundation in 1912 by Leon Leonwood Bean, L.L. Bean has undergone many changes. The company's leadership has changed three times. The sequence of leaders is as follows:

- *Leon Leonwood Bean*: 1921-1961
- *Leon Gorman*: 1967-2001
- *Chris McCormick*: 2001-present

Under these three leaders, L.L. Bean has evolved from a one man business with a flyer and with a limited range of outdoorsy products to a multi-billion dollar business with 21, 000 products (Montgomery 2), extending toward men, women, and children,

	L.L. Bean	Leon Gorman	Chris McCormick
Product Range	Outdoors-oriented	Expanded range.	21,000 products.
Catalog	Transformed from a simple flyer into a 52-page catalog.	First full color catalog published. Layout and language altered.	Ensure that company's image is conveyed
Targeted Customers	Mostly males.	Mostly males, extending to women.	Men, women, children. Original product base.
Goals	Personal testing of products, Honesty, customer satisfaction.	Carry on L.L.'s values. Superior service. Convey L.L. Bean persona. Ensure company's longevity.	Superior products and excellent service. Further growth. Expand retail business.

Figure 1.2—The Evolution of L.L. Bean

an elaborate catalog, a website, and retail

stores across the country. L.L. Bean's past two leaders have dedicated a lot of time and effort toward preserving the values and image Leon Leonwood Bean established for the company. Figure 1.2 summarizes the evolution of the company under its three leaders.

Notably, despite the changes taking place over the course of these 94 years, the goals of the three leaders do not really have any extreme variances; all three men commit themselves to

keeping customers satisfied with quality products. This goal exhibits the priority of maintaining the original L.L. Bean personality.

Leon Leonwood Bean

L.L. Bean began when Leon Leonwood Bean returned from hunting in the Maine wilderness with soaking wet, cold feet. Inspired, he hired a cobbler to stitch leather tops onto workmen's rubber boots. When he was finished, he had created a boot that prevented feet from getting soaking wet, proving comfortable, resilient, and ideal for roaming the Maine woods (“L.L. Bean: Company” 1).



Figure 1.3—The Maine Hunting Shoe

The Maine Hunting Shoe spurred on the creation of the L.L. Bean company. L.L. began his business in the basement of his brother’s apparel shop, making a list of all men who held hunting licenses and sending out flyers acknowledging that he himself was a hunter who had personally tested the boots. The first attempt of his business, however, did not meet immediate success. 90 out of the first 100 customer orders were returned because the leather tops of the boots separated from the rubber bottoms (“L.L. Bean: Company” 1). He refunded the customer’s money, borrowed some more, sent out more flyers and began the process all over again. From this experience, “L.L. had learned the value of personally testing his products, of honest advertising based on firm convictions and of keeping the customer satisfied at any cost” (“L.L. Bean: Company” 1). Even this early setback reflects the values of service, integrity, outdoor heritage and perseverance.

The Transformation under Leon Leonwood Bean

Over the next 40 years, the simple flyer transformed into a 52 page catalog. Product descriptions were long and wordy, but honest. By 1937, sales passed the \$1 million dollar mark. Fulfilling his forming reputation for ultimate customer service, L.L. opened his only existing retail store in Freeport, Maine for 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Previous to this, Leon Leonwood Bean always allowed customers to visit his stores, no matter how late it was—all they had to do was ring a night bell to get a night watchman, or some times Leon Bean himself. The doors on that store do not lock to this day (“L.L. Bean: Company” 2). The range of products also expanded, while still maintaining the outdoors-based products that L.L. Bean was becoming known for. “The catalogs of the 1950s showed a pronounced shift to humdrum street wear. But the Maine Hunting Shoe, Chamois Cloth Shirt, Zipper Duffel Bag, Coastal Decoys, Hudson’s Bay Blankets, Camp Moccasins, and a few other core products continued to carry the business” (Gorman 19). In keeping the original items around which the company grew, L.L. Bean therefore was still adhering to its original identity. Furthermore, the fact that the company’s product line centers around the outdoors portrays the outdoor heritage value.

L.L. Bean was often reluctant over the subject of business expansion or change, saying “I’m eating 3 meals a day, and I can’t eat 4” (Harkavy 1). He balked at the idea of updating the product line and changing the ordering procedures. These changes were often suggested by his grandson, Leon Gorman.

Leon Gorman

Leon Gorman, Leon Leonwood Bean's grandson, came to work for L.L. Bean in 1961 after being honorably discharged from the Navy. Having attended business school, he saw many opportunities for improvements, but L.L. was reluctant, especially when it came to expansion. Gorman found a way to expand product range, however, with the Holiday catalogs, which passed under the eye of L.L. with little protest, as he considered them lesser publications (Gorman 49).

When L.L. Bean died in 1967, his family considered concealing the news in fear that the news would jeopardize his business, since almost every order that came through the company was personally attended to by L.L. himself. Obviously the family decided against it, although Gorman acknowledges that the business was dilapidated (Harkavy 1) and new that changes needed to be made if the company was to survive long-term.

The Transformation under Leon Gorman

Under Gorman's leadership, the company experienced great growth, without L.L.'s reluctance for change or expansion. The following changes occurred within the company.

- **The first color catalog** was published in 1979, with a new layout and use of language.
- **Customer contact centers increased** around 1985, with the addition of toll-free numbers for the catalog.
- **The first liquidation outlet** opened in 1988 in North Conway, New Hampshire.
- **The company moved** into a facility with more ergonomic facilities,
- **An addition was added to the Flagship store** in order to display the expanding product range.
- **The company expanded into international business** with an opening of a store in Japan in 1992.
- **E-commerce** began with the launching of LLBean.com in 1995 ("L.L. Bean: Company" 3).

In opening liquidation outlets and founding a website that allows customers to shop online, L.L. Bean deviated from an almost wholly catalog-based business and differentiated its sources of sales.

The change in the breakdown of sales conveys the expansion in the ways in which L.L. Bean was communicating with customers—from almost exclusively catalog based to international, internet, and outlet mediums.

One can see the sheer differences in the breakdown of sales in both in 1960 and 2000 Figures 1.3 and 1.4.

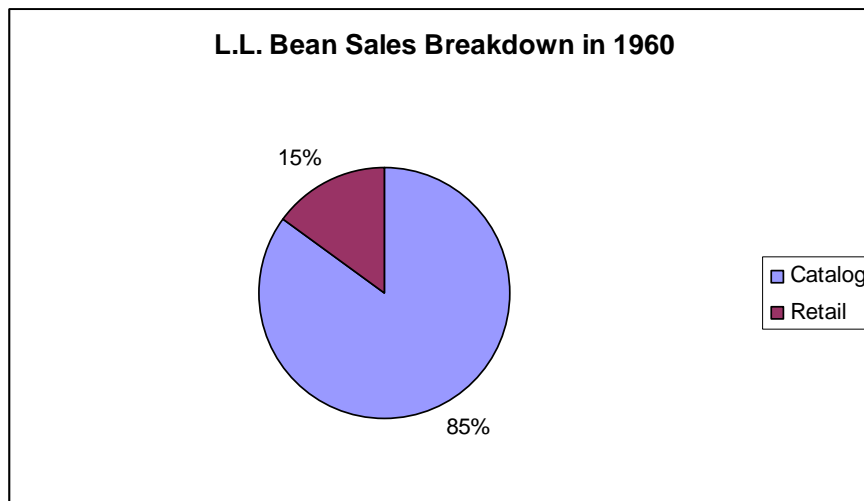


Figure 1.4—Sales Breakdown in 1960

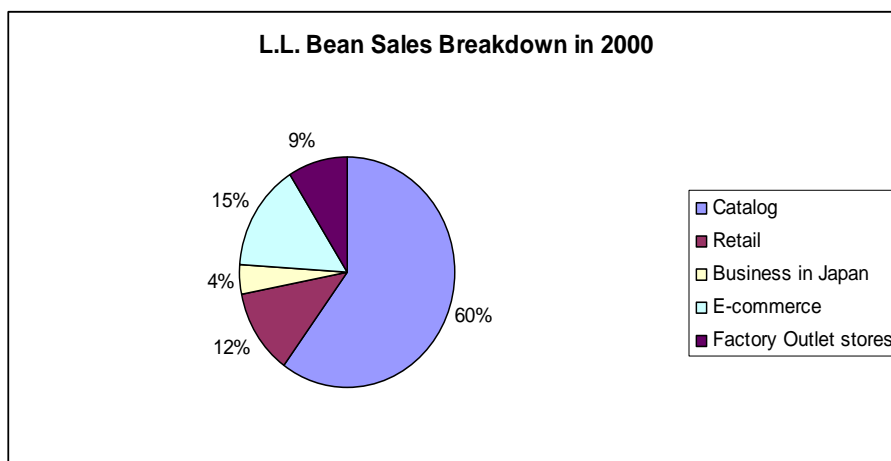


Figure 1.5—Sales Breakdown in 2000

Throughout these expansions, Leon Gorman concerned himself with the persona of L.L. Bean that was being portrayed, as he did not want the company to turn into an impersonal, corporate super giant, but rather a wholesome company that adhered to its values. Gorman succeeded in these attempts. Gorman states that “A brand is more than a selling proposition or marketing device. It should be the embodiment of all that the company stands for” (Gorman 266). No matter how much L.L. Bean has changed over the years, one thing remained crucial to them: conveying their image and founding values through every interaction with the outside world. This means that the language on the website and catalog, interaction with customers, and conduct in the business world must reflect the company’s Golden Rule, the company’s founding values and other company policies.

Chris McCormick

After a long 34 years, Leon Gorman retired from L.L. Bean in 2001. Chris McCormick took over as president. Chris McCormick is the first L.L. Bean executive that is not part of the Bean family (Abelson 2). Despite this, McCormick remains committed to Bean's and Gorman's goals of providing superior quality products and excellent customer service, along with setting up the company for further growth while still maintaining its iconic image of providing quality goods and superior customer service.

L.L. Bean's Communication Methods

Over the years, L.L. Bean has mastered communication with its customers. The main forms in which the company communicates with customers exists as the catalog, the actual retail stores, and the company's website. The amount of communication to different groups, such as women, has also received some debate.

The Catalog

The catalog is L.L. Bean's original form of customer communication. When Leon Gorman took over the company, however, Leon Leonwood Bean's catalog underwent the following changes:

- Changes in product descriptions
- Change in layout
- Caters to customer's potential questions or concerns

The descriptions in the early catalog proved very long and wordy, and products that were important yet not high dollar items were getting entire pages devoted to them, eliminating the space that could potentially be devoted to high dollar items needing more elaboration (Gorman 54). Gorman, then, set out to bring more coherence and understanding to L.L. Bean's overall product line, thus rendering it more orderly, easier to read, and also updating the L.L. Bean personality. For example, the original catalog devoted an entire page to sheepskin innersoles, which proved staple product but did not cost a lot of money. Gorman, then, reduced the amount of space devoted to the innersole to a quarter page and sold the same amount (Gorman 54). Figure 1.6 serves as an example of catalog layout, in which the text is aligned with the product picture, allowing for easy reading. Since the Adirondack Barn Coat is a higher dollar item, it receives an entire page dedicated toward it, allowing for more elaboration and product detail.



Figure 1.6—Catalog Layout

Leon Gorman also transformed the wording in the catalog, thus changing the way in which product information was communicated to customers. In *L.L. Bean, the Making of an American Icon*, Gorman acknowledges the re-working of the information communicated to customers, stating “I rewrote most of the product copy, keeping L.L.’s prose where it added color and made sense” (Gorman 54). Combining the original information from the company’s founder with his information of “tight, to the point writing” (Gorman 54) increased the efficiency in which product knowledge was communicated to potential customers. The language utilized in the L.L. Bean catalog is concise with strong verbs, and portrays the product in an attractive manner without embellishment

Furthermore, L.L. Bean caters to any potential questions customers might have in the product descriptions. In *L.L. Bean, the Making of an American Icon*, Leon Gorman states that, “I tried to write from the customer’s perspective and answer the questions I would have if I were considering a purchase. In addition I tried to create an identity for the product. We were not selling a flannel shirt but the Scotch Plaid Flannel Shirt, Bean’s definitive version” (Gorman 54). L.L. Bean desires the catalog to be more reflective on what customers want to buy, not what L.L. Bean wants to sell (Gorman 55). This desire indicates the service and integrity aspects of the company’s core values. Instead of utilizing flowery adjectives and unrealistic ideals in order to sell their products, L.L. Bean instead caters to the customer’s concerns in realistically describing products with strong, concise language. In doing so, the company remains honest and serves the customer through portraying their products in an accurate manner.

Correlation between the Website and Catalog

Many companies make their print catalogs available online, but L.L. Bean takes this one step further. L.L. replicates their print catalogs page-by-page on their website in their “Shop By Catalog” feature, “taking advantage of shoppers’ built in familiarity with the catalog format, while leveraging technology to improve its presentation in the web environment” (“L.L. Bean: Shop” 1). The fact that L.L. Bean takes extra measures in order to tighten links between the catalog and the website for the convenience of the customer further enforces L.L. Bean’s service value. The catalog exists as what the customer is the most familiar with, therefore making the website correlate strongly with the catalog proves good communication, not only in doing business, but in communicating the service value to customers. The internet can prove an unfamiliar, intimidating place for people, especially older generations, and L.L. Bean lessens this intimidation.

The catalog also has a convenient item number, as indicated in Figure 1.7 This number overlaps with the Quickshop feature on the L.L. Bean website, which strengthens the link between the catalog and website. Instead of communicating a lot of different numbers for one product, L.L. Bean has one per product, thus increasing organization.



Figure 1.7—The Item Number

Communication to Different Groups

One dilemma that L.L. Bean faced throughout their growth and expansion remained deciding what groups to communicate and direct their advertising towards, while still maintaining their personality. One group that received much debate was women. Gorman states that “Women had become the gatekeepers to purchasing for their families, as well as being customers themselves” (Gorman 191). As the company had mainly catered toward men and outdoors-oriented products for the majority of its existence, the growing number of women becoming customers and deciding factors on a significant percentage of business proved puzzling.

Gorman furthers this statement, saying that “there was this basic tension between the notion that the brand should be more masculine than feminine, and the fact that most of our shoppers, and in increasing numbers, were women.” (Gorman 191). In order to decide whether or not to change the L.L. Bean persona due to this change, Gorman insists that the only way in which the dilemma could be solved was through discussion and the hands-on involvement of senior marketing managers.



Figure 1.8—Women’s Products.

The Communications Steering Committee

The conveyance of the L.L. Bean persona faced many similar dilemmas, leading to the formation of the Communications Steering Committee in 1990. “The purpose this committee serves is to better align the communications of the L.L. Bean persona across the company, catalogs, retail stores, and Web site” (Gorman 266). The formation of this committee proves important in that it serves to ensure that the L.L. Bean persona, a defining aspect of the company, does not become lost amidst the company’s growth and expansion. The committee will also ensure that its values stay intact and unaltered. Throughout the generations, people have come to know L.L. Bean as the company with excellent customer service policies and quality, reliable outdoors-oriented goods and clothing. To lose this image might prove detrimental to the company, and might result in the loss of formerly faithful customers that have come to depend on the company’s service and integrity.

L.L. Bean vs. Lands’ End

L.L. Bean and Lands’ End have proved competitive since Lands’ End expanded into selling similar products to L.L. Bean. Leon Gorman states that Lands’ End had good qualities quite like L.L. Bean’s, thus making them a bigger competitor. “Their catalog graphics and copy were attractive, effective, and innovative and they cultivated a friendly, light-hearted, and helpful attitude. Good communicators” (Gorman 152). Through looking at the company’s history in comparison to L.L. Bean’s and the language utilized while communicating with customers on their websites, one can observe the differences between the two companies.

Comparative History

Lands’ End does not possess the long, dynamic history that L.L. Bean does. Also, unlike L.L. Bean, Lands’ End was not always a merchant of the types of products that it is today. Founded in 1963 by Gary Comer, Lands’ End was originally a company that exclusively sold

sailboat equipment. The misplaced apostrophe in the company's name was originally an error, but the founders decided to keep it since the advertising and promotional materials were already made ("Lands' End" 1). Eventually the company expanded to selling clothing and home furnishing, and moved to Wisconsin. L.L. Bean's headquarters, on the other hand, have remained in Maine throughout the company's life, as the state remains part of the company's heritage.

In 2002, Sears bought Lands' End, unlike L.L. Bean, who has never been bought out by another company and has always remained its own business with close ties to its original leaders. Sears, however, kept Lands' End's mail order catalog and website running, and merely added the clothing line to their store. Soon after the purchase on Lands' End, however, K-Mart bought Sears. Since K-Mart is a low-end department store, struggles have occurred with integrating the clothing line into the new form of business, as Lands' End is considered higher quality clothing than that sold at K-Mart or Sears ("Lands' End" 1).

Customer Communication

Both Lands' End and L.L. Bean prove to be effective communicators to their customers, utilizing friendly tones and attractive details in their product descriptions. Both companies rely on their catalogs and websites for a lot of their business. The language of the catalogs, however, along with the layout of the websites, differ as follows.

The Catalogs

L.L. Bean's catalog features "tight, to the point writing" (Gorman 54), increasing the efficiency in which product knowledge is communicated to potential customers. The language utilized in the L.L. Bean catalog is concise with strong verbs, and portrays the product in an attractive manner without embellishing. Figure 1.9 serves as an example of the type of language found in the L.L. Bean Catalog—strong verbs such as "heightens" and "resists," as well as realistically descriptive terms such as "soft fleece" and "pill resistant."

For a "Winter Fleece Robe"

"Greet winter mornings in comfort. Our plush, soft fleece offers superior warmth, even on the coldest of days. And the pill-resistant polyester fleece will look good for years. Imported. Machine wash and dry."

Figure 1.9—L.L. Bean Language

Also evident in Figure 1.9 remains the fact that the description caters to the customer and any questions or concerns that customer might have. Stating that the robe is "pill resistant" and "will look good for years" exists as an example for this aspect of L.L. Bean's customer communication, as clothes pilling proves rather irksome to people, and customers are often concerned with longevity of the products, wanting to ensure that they are getting their money's worth. L.L. Bean desires the catalog to be more reflective on what customers want to buy, not what L.L. Bean wants to sell (Gorman 55). This desire indicates the customer service aspect of the company's core values. Instead of utilizing flowery adjectives and unrealistic ideals in order to sell their products, L.L. Bean instead caters to the customer's concerns in realistically describing products with strong, concise language.

The language utilized in Lands' End catalog proves friendly and light-hearted, with short and concise descriptions. Figure 1.10 provides an example of

language in the Lands' End catalog. The friendly aspect of the language remains evident in the adjective “fluff” and “thirsty 100% cotton” as opposed to using something like “plump” or “absorbent,” which sound a little less friendly and lighthearted. The description, however, caters less to potential customer questions. The Lands' End description devotes more time to describing the product appearance—“Fold-up cuffs and patch pockets,” as opposed to answering potential questions that customers might have concerning the longevity and durability of the product. Lands' End, then, caters less to the customer in their product descriptions.

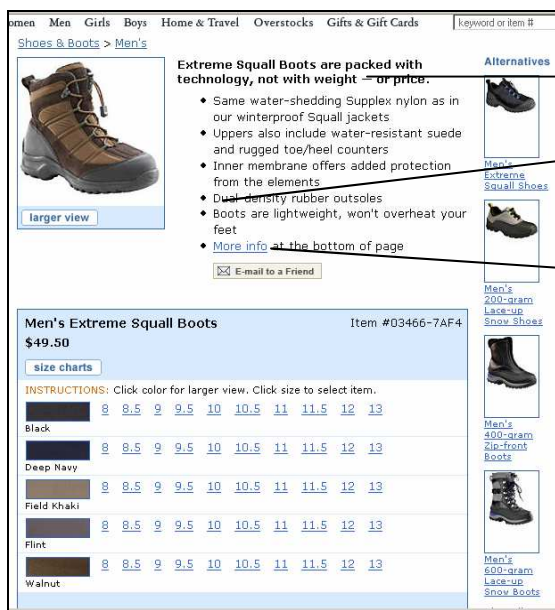
For a “Turkish Terry Robe”

“We fluff this 11-oz. terry to its fullest so you’re wrapped in plenty of *thirsty* 100% cotton. **Fold-up cuffs and patch pockets. Machine wash.”**

Figure 1.10—Lands' End Language Example

The Websites

Both companies remain strong in E-commerce, each company has possessed their own individual websites since 1995. The catalog call numbers and the product call numbers on the websites correlate with each other for both companies. However, although Lands' End's website provides the opportunity to search by an item's catalog number, the site does not feature “Shop By Catalog” option that has been previously discussed. Differences also exist, in the content and layout of the websites. Figures 1.11 And 1.12 provide visuals for these differences.



Long title.

Bulleted overview for the product description

“More info at bottom of page.” Product information is scattered over the page.

Figure 11.1—Lands' End Website

Shorter, more concise title

“To order” section immediately on the page with easy to follow steps.

Separate tab for details about the product, but product info is all in one spot.

Figure 1.11—L.L. Bean’s Website

One can see in Figure 1.10 and 1.11, that the L.L. Bean website layout proves more accessible, with a shorter, more concise title, and a to-the-point overview of the product with a separate tab leading to more details. Furthermore, a “To-Order” option with easy to follow steps is immediately on the page. The Lands’ End website, however, features long, wordy titles with hardly distinction in font between the actual name of the product and the rest of the title. Lands’ End gives a bulleted list as an overview for the product as well, however, one must scroll down to the bottom of the page in order to gain more details about the product.

In comparing these two websites, one can see that once again, L.L. Bean caters to the customer, making the online experience convenient and product information very accessible.

L.L. Bean’s Setbacks

Like any company, L.L. Bean has experienced various setbacks throughout its 94 year life. One of the most recent setbacks occurred in 2000, with L.L. Bean’s attempt to expand their retail stores into a chain of 26 stores across the nation. L.L. Bean’s existence as a catalog based company, however, was evident in this attempt, as several communication and organization setbacks occurred, displaying a lack of retail experience and skills.

What Went Wrong

One of the problems that occurred with this transition was the lack of merchandise organization within the stores. Through L.L. Bean’s attempt, merchandise arrived without price tags or size stickers, thus leading to confusion among customers (Abelson 1). In this sense, L.L. Bean was not accurately communicating product information to the customers. The lack of communication could in part be contributed to L.L. Bean’s lack of retail experience, as the only store they had previous to this attempt was as old as the company.

Never before had the company had experience running more than one store and shipping merchandise to retail stores.

In addition to this lack of organization and communication to customers, the location of the retail store proved problematic. Customers had no easy access to parking, such that they had to lug big-ticket items such as kayaks and canoes across long distances or through malls (Abelson 2).

These situations and setbacks inadvertently violated the L.L. Bean founding value of ultimate customer service. L.L. Bean did not fulfill their responsibilities to provide accurate product information and provide the best service possible, as customers were quite inconvenienced by this setback.

How they Overcame

In 2002, L.L. Bean withdrew from its retail store expansion. Before attempting to expand again, which it did in 2006, L.L. Bean took measures in order to ensure that these problems would not occur again in the future.

L.L. Bean consulted with another merchant that possessed both a catalog and a retail chain—Williams Sonoma (Abelson 2). In turn, the merchant gave L.L. Bean advice as to how to prove successful in the retail world. These tips are as follows.

- Create inventory and distribution systems that are separate from the catalog operation.
- Strategic location with quick access to parking.
- Hire executives with retail experience.
- A fresh product assortment that reflects merchandise in catalogs (Abelson 2).



Figure 1.12—The L.L. Bean Freeport Retail Store

On the subject of retail stores, McCormick relates his sentiments on retail store expansion, saying, "It's an eat-or-be-eaten market. The way to survive is to steal customers—which means opening more stores." (Abelson 2). Currently, the Burlington store in Massachusetts, which has just recently re-opened, the company has piled kayaks two stories high and installed fish tanks in the middle of the store.

Although this setback inadvertently violated the company's founding value of service, in retreating and taking time to hone their retail skills, the company still maintained their value of perseverance. Instead of taking an easy way out, they persevered and didn't violate their values, but rather retreated and, with a lot of hard work and learning, learned how to ultimately serve the customer in the retail world.

Conclusion

According to Gorman, had the business not expanded or changed like Leon Leonwood Bean desired, the company would have reached the stage where it could no longer turn a profit (Harkavy 1). Back when the business was still young, the company had mastered customer service, yet staying small and not expanding would have proved detrimental to the company, and L.L. would have had to sell it under adverse conditions due to no profit (Harkavy 1). And if the company had been sold, most likely the company would not have maintained the image that has led to a reputation of superior products and unfailingly courteous customer service.

L.L. Bean's growth and expansion over the past 94 years is indeed impressive. Even more impressive, however, is the maintenance of its original image and the adherence to its original values throughout these changes. All three leaders have maintained that quality products and superior customer service remained priority, and struggles have occurred with what actions to take in order to maintain the company's values of outdoor heritage, perseverance, service and integrity. Communication to groups like women, for example, were thought to threaten the L.L. Bean image, as it had always catered toward men and the outdoors, and therefore the dilemma received much debate. The Communications Steering Committee was founded in 1990 to solve dilemmas such as these, and to align the image of L.L. Bean along all lines of communication to the outside world.

A crucial element of L.L. Bean's success proves its master-minded customer communication. The catalogs contain efficient layouts and concise, honest language that cater to the customer's questions. The website features a "Shop by Catalog" aspect on the website that allows those unfamiliar with the internet to revert back to the familiar online, and an ordering option is available immediately on the page. These characteristics of making things convenient for customers truly set apart the company from others of its kind, such as Lands' End.

Having now established that the world should view L.L. Bean as immensely successful, what about the company's founder, Leon Leonwood Bean? Hesitant to change, Gorman says that Bean would view the company with mixed emotions, stating that that Bean probably would not have been contented with the size of the business (Harkavy 1). Regardless of this, L.L. most likely would have been proud of the fact that his Golden Rule and founding values are still intact. From a one man, one product business to a 1.2 billion dollar company, L.L. Bean has proved a true rarity in the business world, where at times a fine line exists between right and wrong and values seem to be going out of style.

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