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## My Taxing Brand Experience

Published on February 22, 2018



**Rob Adams**

Creative Director • Brand Champion • Change Agent

[www.robadamscd.com](http://www.robadamscd.com) • [www.linkedin.com/in/robadamscd](https://www.linkedin.com/in/robadamscd)



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Ah, February. The month of candy hearts, Healthy Hearts, and the annual task that weighs heavily on my heart – filing my taxes.

The folks at my DIY tax software had been emailing more frequently – they’ve gotten to know me over the past few years. Surely, I wouldn’t expect them to know *just* how much passion and purpose I bring to my W2 every day. Or the wonder I felt the first time I held my older f8332. Or how my heart’s capacity for love grew when our younger DEPENDENT, the one my ex claims, was born. They couldn’t have known the horror I experienced fighting and surviving my Schedule A battle. And there’s no way they could possibly have felt the joy that overwhelmed me as I recently changed my W4 from “Single” to “Married”. However, I do hold them accountable to deliver a quality end-to-end brand experience for preparing and filing my taxes.

Their marketing and creative efforts were good – emails throughout the year had useful tips, offers, and tools packaged within a consistent visual identity. The user interface was friendly and helpful as it ushered me through life events, offering guidance by accessing my relevant information from the previous year. But the experience went downhill 90% of the way through. As I selected “File Return”, I got an unidentified ERROR prompt. Without specifics of what the issue was, I assumed it was user error. So, I went back and VERY carefully retraced my steps. Again, I got the error prompt [*TIP: Being more descriptive in their error message would have greatly improved my brand experience*].

I looked for the on-line chat option, but it was not available on Sunday morning [*TIP: There’s a good chance their DIY customer base is using their product in the evening or on the weekend, so having chat available during evenings and weekends from mid-January – mid-April would improve their customer’s experience*]. I looked for a phone number, but as is the case with many on-line services, there was none listed. A quick Google search served up their phone number – along with Google ads and offers for their competitor’s product [*CAUTION: Due to my difficulties with their product, they inadvertently gave me every opportunity to go with their competitor*].

The phone representative was friendly enough, but his advice was frustrating at best. He suggested I use a different browser, because there were KNOWN errors with the one I was using. Known errors?? As a customer, I was highly annoyed. As a brand guy – a boatload of questions came to mind. If they knew this was an issue, why didn’t they tell me ahead of time? Why didn’t the error prompt tell me this? Why wait for an error prompt – they could have guided me when they were emailing me all year? With plenty of opportunity to own this, why would they make their customers jump through so many hoops to use their product?

So, I offer this simple deduction: *It’s not enough to have effective marketing, solid creative, innovative features, differentiated benefits and competitive pricing – you have to make every effort to think like your customer and deliver the same high-quality end-to-end brand experience you would expect if you were the customer.*