

# DRIVING A BRAND CULTURE



Most companies *speak* of

brand in literature and

advertising. Consistent

*delivery* at every point of

customer contact, however,

is the differentiator between

the true leaders and the

“also rans.”

There are two ways to approach a brand launch. The first is as an identity initiative with a primary focus on architecture and expression. The second is to use the brand roll out as a tool to drive execution of the strategy and deliver bottom line results. Some of the most successful brand launches focused on the latter. Here’s why:

With a focus on results, brand communication can be designed to influence and lead the organization to change behavior in order to improve performance and drive enterprise-wide strategy. Using brand as a strategic tool to help align leadership and employees will ensure the brand is delivered at every point of customer contact. Success in achieving this alignment and focus can serve as a means of differentiation in the marketplace, which in the end will help achieve the end goal of sales and profits. It’s as simple as that, right?

Yes and no. Brand delivery that gets results strives to change specific employee behaviors and actions, including those of management, that consistently deliver the expected brand experience and customer satisfaction. The challenge is to get everyone in the organization to do the right things— at the right time, each time—to succeed in satisfying each customer. Often that means changing how people think about their jobs and doing things differently. And that’s not simple to do.

Preparing the organization for the brand launch is a critical step, and lays the foundation for acceptance and success in the launch phase. This behind the scenes work involves developing a comprehensive plan, aligning leadership behind the brand, enlisting leadership support among key groups in the organization who will have the greatest impact on brand delivery, and building the infrastructure that will be needed to roll out the brand and drive behavior change.

## Brand Strategy = Business Strategy

For a brand launch to be optimized for business success, it must be part of the overall mosaic by which management leads the organization—vision, mission, values, and strategy—not another, separate thing we ask the organization to do. Therefore, brand's effectiveness in driving strategy depends on the clarity and consistency of leadership's direction to the organization around the brand and the strategy. In essence, brand strategy must reflect business strategy, and vice versa. It's critical they are not only mutually supportive, but also two integrated parts of the same directive to the organization that tells all employees what we want them to do and when.

Getting employees to understand what's to be done is the first half of the challenge. Getting them to take action with a sense of purpose and urgency is even more important. Therefore, leadership's direction must appeal to the emotional needs of employees—what makes people *want* to change their behavior and take action. Information drives understanding, but emotion drives action. With that in mind, brand can be an ideal platform for such motivation, as brands often define the emotional connection among customer, product, company, and employee.

With this in mind, the pre-launch begins with creating a strategic plan for brand roll out and execution. While the plan will be dynamic in that it will be revised and amplified as you go along, the plan must include some key components: It must set objectives, establish measurement, organize leadership and resources, prioritize audiences, determine timing and identify actions.

In order for the brand to be a tool that leadership can use to execute strategy and deliver specific results, expectations for the roll out—and for employee behavior as it relates to the brand—must be as specific as possible. Listing business outcomes is a good start at setting such objectives.

The brand promise should answer the question: “What do you want the organization to do and when?” in very specific terms. The answers to these questions are often found in leadership's overall strategies. It is often necessary for companies to work through the issues around the detail required in brand articulation to lead and provide direction to the organization.

As clarity is achieved around the brand delivery requirements, a good way to measure the success of the internal brand roll out is by how well the organization delivers on the behaviors required for success. Moreover, the benefit of the desired employee behaviors should be quantified and measured to the best degree possible. This will help create a common

understanding of and commitment to the expected return on management's investment in internal brand delivery, while also providing a strong business case on which the entire internal brand effort can be sustained over time.

The formal and informal leadership of the organization must be enlisted to successfully drive the brand through the organization. Some ways that companies organize their leadership is through creation of Core Strategy Teams, Brand Management Councils and Directors of Brand Strategy, as well establishing ancillary and advisory groups, such as a Global Communications Council and so on. This idea isn't to relinquish control of the brand process, but win support and buy-in for execution. Moreover, at this stage it's important to specify resources to assist in brand roll out and delivery.

Changing behavior across a large organization with many employees should be approached in a measured fashion. The plan must prioritize internal audiences, because certain functions and regions will have more impact on brand delivery than others. We call these "key impact groups." In addition to enlisting functions to drive the brand roll out (as discussed below), it is necessary to prioritize those key impact groups.

Finally, the phases of the brand roll out and delivery plan should be plotted against an overall timetable that outlines milestones, resources required and specific actions. Resources considered should include budget, people and leadership time.

### Integrating Brand Messaging

There are six requirements brand messaging must fulfill in order to drive behavior: provide direction, clarity, simplicity, consistency, integration, and emotion. A single message platform should be created to integrate all strategy messages, brand messages, vision and values messages, and all the messages leadership delivers to the organization. That message platform will provide clear, consistent direction to employees so they understand in no uncertain terms what they need to do and when. Simply put, on one day we're not pursuing the vision, and the next the brand, and on the third day the strategy. Everyone needs to charge down one path, and only one path.

More than that, those messages should be constructed and delivered to motivate employees to take the right actions with a sense of commitment and urgency. As mentioned, people act on emotion. We must appeal to those emotions to drive action. That motivation usually revolves

around the “why” behind the direction and how it ties to employees’ fundamental emotional levers.

In one company we worked with, the emotional lever was pride. People there changed their behavior because they wanted to feel proud of what they did and the products they built. To feel that pride, senior managers took new, innovative risks and went the extra mile to perform; middle managers turned from blockers and bystanders to drivers; and front-line employees took action to deliver on the brand even to the point of sacrificing hard-won provisions of their union contract. It’s important to consider that the emotional levers are different from company to company, however, and sometimes from employee group to group. At another company, for example, front-line employees were motivated by team participation. They don’t take action because of pride in the product they product, but because of their desire to support team members.

In addition to motivating employees, the message platform should prepare employees for the brand introduction. It will anticipate brand messaging, while relating to the full group of strategic messages leaders deliver to the organization. This preparation will pave the way for brand messaging during the launch phase so the new brand is not a surprise or cliff event, but the natural evolution of the strategy. When the brand is officially launched, we want employees to say, “I’m glad we’re headed in this direction;” not “Where did all this come from?”

This initial platform is then delivered primarily through existing channels in three ways: by integrating the messaging into leadership messages now being delivered, making a concerted effort to showcase those employee groups inside the organization who already exhibit the best of the brand attributes, and bringing the customer “inside” the organization as much as possible to show their preference for the brand attributes identified. This will help create a predisposition among employees to accept and support the brand (and associated strategies) when it is rolled out.

### Aligning Leadership

Employees need to see management acting and talking in alignment around the brand (and overarching strategies). If words and actions don’t match, employees become confused and disheartened, and it is difficult for leadership to drive the desired behaviors. Therefore, it is important to align management around the messaging developed, and to align planned actions around the messaging.

This alignment begins in the message development process. In that process, the management structure must be in place and constructed to help promote alignment. The right groups (as identified in the planning process) must be represented as well.

To work toward alignment, concrete, clear messages are presented to managers for their credibility, ease in communications and ease in comprehension (both in meetings and in individual input sessions). Through that interaction, differing points of view are usually identified within the management team, and work must be done to achieve language and content that represents those viewpoints (while simultaneously moving the perspectives of the various leaders closer together). If views are diametrically opposed, or if personality issues preclude alignment, those issues should be raised and a new path to achieving alignment should be pursued. This might involve bringing in more internal or external resources. Often this work is done closely with a company's human resources department to determine the best alignment methodology.

Also as part of the messaging process, it is a good idea to involve organizational and geographic cross-section of the informal leadership of those parts of the company deemed most critical to strategy execution. This means gathering input and testing the message platform among various levels of the organization to ensure it is believable and deliverable. While inviting that participation and using input, initial understanding and support of the brand is created among the informal leadership of the organization.

### Engaging Brand Champions

The next step is to enlist support at the local level to implement the brand and work with the team to change employee behaviors to deliver the brand. One effective option is to engage marketing leaders throughout the company as "brand champions" – this works particularly well if you have a global company or one that has expanded recently through merger or acquisition. They will have a keen interest in brand evolution, as well as a vested interest in aligning (or blocking) support for the brand. To win their support, we will need to put mechanisms in place to conduct a healthy dialogue around the brand, its rationale, and opportunities. Another group that can be critical as brand champions in early efforts is communications. Communications departments can be effective in supporting information flow throughout the organization.

In addition to the groups that need to be enlisted as brand champions, formal and informal leadership across the organization also need to be targeted. This could include leaders in operations, research and development, distribution and other employee groups. This group could

also be used to test messaging (in that process, message ideas are “bounced” off informal leaders to determine how they might be accepted by employees at large.)

While enlisting the support of leaders throughout the organization, they can be showcased to the rest of the organization as people to emulate. You don't have to wait for everything to be finalized to do this (for example, the brand attributes or the message platform). There are components of the brand strategy that are directionally complete, therefore, part of the rollout should communicate to the organization *now* in order to move it forward and prepare it for further change. For example, leadership conferences can be effective venues to reinforce strategy messages and lay groundwork for the brand roll out and the vision roll out (both must be integrated with brand and strategy messages). This groundwork can be laid not by discussing the brand in specific, but by discussing company strengths, needs, business conditions and strategies in a way that makes the brand obvious, and that enhances what the company is already doing from a brand standpoint.

Many parts of the organization and many employees already deliver the brand. As these employee groups are identified, internal communications vehicles can be used to showcase those activities well before the brand is actually launched. This can also be an opportunity to enlist the support of those employees as early champions of the brand.

In some cases, a more aggressive approach is necessary to demonstrate brand effectiveness. In those instances, a pilot initiative can be created that is specifically designed to get results that will convince non-believers of the effectiveness of the strategy. In one instance, Gagen MacDonald conducted pilots that demonstrated that new pricing objectives were attainable, and that the new selling strategy was effective. Those demonstrations not only changed minds and behaviors among front-line employees, but also helped solidify alignment among the leadership of the organization.

### Organizing Internal Systems and Resources

Preparation of internal systems and resources should be done early to ensure they are ready at launch time. It is preferable to leverage the systems a company has in place to drive change instead of introducing new systems. These include communications infrastructure, as well as other systems deployed by human resources, finance, planning, sales, marketing, regulatory affairs, etc. Those systems need to be assessed to ensure they are working in concert with the brand/strategy initiatives, and so they are constructed and deployed in a way that will drive the

desired organizational behavior. Through that assessment, adjustments are often recommended. For example, changes are often made to some of the metrics by which finance measures efficiency in order to drive employees to focus more on delivery credibility, or incentive payouts are adjusted for front-line employees to focus people on the right outcomes.

Since communication is a critical part of the brand roll out, an inventory of the existing communication channels (all of the ways a company moves information) should be done at this time. This includes the usual channels such as leadership meetings, publications, intranets and electronic channels, video communication and other traditional methods. Other sources of information flow in a company should be looked at as well, including orientation and training programs, financial reporting tools, process meetings and the like. With each of these channels, look for opportunities for brand communication.

Beware: It is not a good idea to layer another level of communication resources on top of those that already exist (unless those resources do not exist, or it is absolutely necessary from a skills and competency standpoint). These resources might include local marketing groups, public relations agencies, advertising agencies, graphic designers and so on. Global companies should work with what's already there to add to efficiency, but also to ingrain brand values and actions. Adding new, temporary resources could create more resistance among some managers and leaders. It also tends to reinforce the idea that brand is a short-term initiative rather than a new way of doing business. Finally, local managers often gravitate toward and rely on their trusted resources, so if the support of those resources is won by involving them to some degree in planning and implementation, more influences are added to the effort instead of detractors. Conversely, if they are excluded or, worse, replaced, they most likely will oppose the brand efforts and turn into blockers.

With the right resources, structure and systems in place, the foundation is set to execute a powerful brand launch. Integrated brand messages are in place with effective channels to drive them. They are backed by an aligned leadership team and engaged brand champions. And the brand is being used as a strategic tool to motivate employees and drive new behaviors. It's time to get everyone doing the right things, every time, to deliver what the customer values – and improve results.