

Inside Branding

– Are your employees aware of Job #1?

White Paper

Marschallin+Sachs

Branding on the inside is as critical as branding on the outside.

While branding is usually viewed as an activity the organization carries on in relation to its outside audiences, much of its real power comes from the effect it can have on internal audiences. No matter what your role – business owner, sales and marketing executive at a medium size firm or chief communications officer for a Fortune 500 company – it's essential to remember that branding is also an inside job.

Are you aware of the competitive advantages an internal brand awareness program brings?

One of the interesting developments of modern business is that the majority of employees have become further and further removed from the front lines. This new remoteness has resulted in the loss of healthy awareness of how aggressive the marketplace is, and what it takes to compete. Corporations do surprisingly little to make employees aware of the competitive challenge, but a comprehensive internal branding effort can help staffs understand that they have a meaningful role in marketplace success and that success translates into corporate growth, job retention and even increased benefits and compensation.

A well-conceived internal branding program can do a lot to transform and empower your organization from the inside. It can:

- Inspire, through pride in the brand and its accomplishments, higher achievement, greater firm loyalty and even dollar support in the marketplace.
- Develop in employees a comprehensive understanding of the brand and what it stands for, making them better representatives of the brand.
- Make employees fully aware of the corporate and product promises being made to the public, the importance of keeping them, and the seriousness of the situation when those promises aren't kept.

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- Make expected modes of behavior clear – decisions become easier when made in the context of the organization’s mission and goals.
- Improve morale – brand success in the marketplace gives employees a valuable sense of personal and corporate pride.

Think you’re too busy to educate your employees about your brand – or that it’s too hard?

An internal branding program can actually be quite simple, with three essential elements:

Employee Orientation Program

This is one gateway that every employee must pass through, and yet, even large corporations miss the opportunity to include a branding segment in employee orientation programs. It is perhaps the single best – and most critical time – to impress on each employee the importance of brand and branding in general, along with the corporation’s specific brand messages. And for some organizations, simply preparing an overview document for incoming employees could prove a useful exercise in defining the brand.

Essential Updates

Brand requires regular monitoring and modification. Changing business practices, technological advances, mergers, acquisitions, competitive initiatives and new product introductions require revisions and improvements to the brand effort. Each of these should be communicated effectively to those in the ranks. Employees cannot effectively implement changes unless they’re fully aware of them and understand all the implications.

To introduce new brand developments, many large financial institutions, for example, undertake impressive workshops at many levels of management – with presentations of varying complexity and depth depending on the audiences involved. Your approach may not need to be quite so elaborate. Similar results are possible in smaller organizations by the distribution of CD-ROMs, online presentations or company communiqués, but the effort should be organized strategically and should involve every level to the extent deemed essential.

Frequent Reminders

The perception of brand in the marketplace relies on the actions of an entire organization presenting itself in a myriad of ways. In the throes of each day with its pressures and demands, it’s hard to stay fully focused on the important role each of us plays in building the organization’s brand in the marketplace. The “smile” in the customer service rep’s voice is an element of brand, but it’s easy to forget that on a grey day after fighting traffic on the way to

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the office. An ad has hundreds of verbal and visual details, but it's difficult to remain vigilant about every aspect of the ad's impact on the brand when worrying about media buying dollars and whether the right model can be found for the photo shoot.

We all need reminding – in general about brand principles and in particular about the specifics of our individual branding job.

Wonder how you can keep your organization focused on brand?

Here are some practices that can establish a lasting brand focus, assist in revitalizing the brand, and even make the whole process fun.

Basics

- Maintain a clearly worded, focused, current mission statement and make sure that all employees are familiar with it.
- Consider including behaviors that affect branding in all employee evaluations.
- Require all employees to attend an annual refresher in basic orientation principles, including branding.
- Make sure that the organization conducts itself regarding social and political issues in a way that is easily squared with employees' view of the brand.
- Provide easy access to information about the brand – offer tools to make presentation of the brand increasingly easier and more effective, as well as technical support to answer questions, resolve conflicts and adjudicate new branding situations.

Interesting Possibilities

- Conduct periodic – yearly or bi-annual – corporate forums to discuss the organization and its brand positioning, both to assess current practices and to identify developing trends in the marketplace that may require retooling the brand.
- Encourage employees to give back to the community – and provide time and financial support for these efforts. Making money and being a good citizen are inextricably linked in our unique blend of representative democracy in which capitalism plays a central role. So such community activities, while deriving from goodwill and an earnest corporate wish to be a good citizen, can be appropriately highlighted by the corporation with press notifications and other promotional actions. For instance, if team community work is involved, providing the team with project tee shirts both makes them identifiable in the community and builds a sense of team among the employee volunteers that they can carry back to the workplace.
- Provide a channel for branding improvement ideas, either on the organization's internal website or through a designated corporate officer.

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Encouraging Behavior

- Treat employees in a way that will encourage them to treat customers similarly – fairly, respectfully, professionally, even generously.
- Reward employee behaviors that promote positive brand images – and draw the attention of all employees to these examples.
- Identify new practical examples of good branding practices from outside the organization and broadcast them to all staff members on a regular basis.
- Offer rewards to employees for identifying competitive branding threats or best practices that should be adopted.
- Make sure that employees are conversant with industry developments and competitive challenges. Without understanding these aspects of the business, employees cannot fully appreciate the brand position.

Living and Working in a Brand Environment

- Provide a work environment that is conducive to staff morale and visually reflective of the principles of the brand (e.g., we wouldn't expect IBM employees to be working with out-of-date equipment or administrative systems).
- Use the same care and quality for employee communications as for external communications and incorporate the same level of attention to presenting the branding message.
- Make company flags or banners available for all company social events.

Making it Fun and Inspiring

- Circulate news of brand successes on a periodic basis. Match the frequency – weekly, monthly, semi-monthly or annually – to the level of news.
- Spend time creating clothing and gift items with company markings that employees want to own. Offer them at prices competitive to non-company branded items – even if the company must subsidize this effort.
- Try to establish connections between the brand and your employees' larger lives, so that the brand comes to be seen as contributing to broader happiness and opportunity for your employees and the community. There are many ways to do this, from acknowledging family milestones to establishing a matching fund for employee charitable contributions to family-centric ad campaigns. The famous GE tagline: "We bring good things to life," is a vivid example of how to make a meaningful connection between the brand and everyday life. Just make sure that what you do – or offer – is something your employees will really value and that it genuinely ties into their lives.

The Bottom Line: Employees can be a valuable asset in building your brand.

There is a tremendous amount to be gained from an internally-focused branding program, both in terms of employee loyalty and performance and in terms of marketplace achievement.

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The converse is also true: much can be lost if you don't take the time and energy to focus on getting your employees to understand – and believe – your brand and all that it promises to your customers.



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About Marschallin+Sachs

Marschallin+Sachs is an image strategy firm focused on corporate identity and branding. It is dedicated to helping its clients gain the bottom line benefits that come from strategically developing and deploying a powerful brand. The firm offers a range of services from creating new image programs to producing powerful single pieces, with particular expertise in using the latest electronic media to enable organizations to get the most from their brands. Clients include Fortune 500 companies, mid-size businesses and startup enterprises.

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