

Your brand is only as good as your people

It's no revelation that organisations are investing in their brand

If you think of big global household brands like P&G, GSK or Unilever, you'll primarily know them through their consumer or pharma brands. This is changing. They've all invested (and continue to do so) in defining their corporate brand – the brand behind the brand. So you're not just buying Fairy Liquid, you're buying into a company that's proud to sponsor mums. You're not just rinsing your mouth out with Corsodyl, but doing so in the understanding that you'll do more, feel better and live longer. And you're not just eating Ben and Jerry's because you like ice-cream, rather that you believe sustainable living should be commonplace.

They're not the only ones.





Think of big B2Bs like EY, committed to building a better working world; financial services like Seven Investment Management, delivering radical common sense; membership organisations like CIPD, who are championing better work and working lives. Even higher education. You used to select a university because of its reputation, but now you might choose Warwick because you're intrigued by the 'what if'.

Everyone's aiming to define their core purpose. Trying to stand out, to connect with their stakeholders, demonstrating why we should care about them. And this isn't a revelation. What's more interesting is why and what to do about it. Because no matter how slick, polished and professional your brand is, at the end of the day, it's only as good as your people.

The internet has made everything more transparent

The recession has made us a bit more brand savvy and the internet has undoubtedly played a role. Corporate whistleblowers, disgruntled employees, consumer rights groups all have a platform to vent, question, probe and comment. Everyone has an opinion and it's easy to find. Managing brand reputation when you're not responsible for all the brand content is a real headache.

A recent report into managing corporate reputation found that 96% of CEOs completely or mostly agreed that a strong corporate brand is just as important as a strong product brand. This was more pronounced for big organisations moving into newer markets, where consumers are increasingly interested to know who the brand behind the new brand is. The internet makes this easy to do.

Companies are focusing more on what they stand for and crafting messages for each audience to fill any potential void. Brand management is not simply a need to stand out. It's a constant battle to safeguard reputation and be seen as credible.

Attitudes towards work are changing

The much documented Millennial is changing how companies attract and retain talent, particularly if you think they are the largest group entering the employment market with some saying they will comprise 50% of the global workforce by 2020.

Their attitude towards big corporations is different. Reports have suggested that 66% of Millennials expect to leave their organisation by end of 2020 and 56% rule out ever working for a particular organisation because of its values. Post Millennials' attitudes are even more pronounced. How do organisations appeal?

Simply extolling the virtues of the company's historical reputation is no longer sufficient. Companies must be clear about what they stand for – not just words on a page, but meaningful descriptors that guide behaviour and inform culture. Examples that make the company tick. Authentic stories from employees that explain the genuine culture. A brand that's lived and nurtured by its people. In short, the company brand. At the end of the day, talent will make their own choice. All you can do is inform that choice by ensuring what goes out into the marketplace is true to the brand you want to create.

Ensuring brands resonate with people isn't easy

We're talking primarily corporate brands, B2Bs, service sector companies. Companies who differentiate through intellectual property; thought; people.

It's no good promising one thing if at the end of the day the employee experience, or the customer experience they create, are two separate things. Customers will find out and call you disingenuous. Future talent will shun you or leave.

It's not an easy overnight task. Far from it. It takes time, commitment, energy, alignment, persistence. It becomes a way of doing business. A central organising thought. A journey.

A major obstacle stems from who owns brand.

Ultimately brand should be owned by everyone and led from the Board. This isn't always the case. Very simply, marketing has traditionally owned brand. They look after brand communication to the outside world. Then you have HR, who look after people communication (amongst other things). The challenge is ensuring there's one shared and agreed brand. Agencies have carved out an industry developing employer value propositions for HR. Whilst great in principle, what can happen are two brands that sort of look the same but are different, leaving the poor employee confused.

There should only be one brand that works across and flexes to each audience.

Our top five tips to help your people and brand become as good as each other

1

Get marketing and HR on the same page

It's an obvious starting point but easily overlooked or avoided. Success of any brand project relies on getting the foundations right at the start. This includes building the right steering coalition, all aligned behind one cause to build one brand. It should involve marketing and HR as a minimum, and could include representatives from other functions or stakeholders. This doesn't mean establishing an unwieldy process. The coalition's role might be purely consultative, to develop insights and thoughts, and to strength test the brand as it develops. The key is ensuring you have alignment behind the strategy for your brand at the outset.



2

Clarity of purpose and tailored messaging

Your brand needs to appeal to every audience, be they employees, recruits, customers, government, etc... There must be one simple thought that distills why the brand matters for each audience - its purpose. It has to connect emotionally.



Articulating this and flexing it to each audience is an art form. Part of this is through carefully crafted copy, and giving your spokespeople tools so the right messages land with the right audience.

Getting this right at the start avoids the pitfall of having one brand for customers and another for employees, and the lack of clarity this creates.

3

Leader-led communication

Communicating the brand to employees is arguably more important than to customers. How else would they be able to create the desired customer experience without knowing what the brand is?



Communicating the brand throughout the organisation starts at the top. Senior leaders have to take ownership for sharing the vision and strategy in a way that suits them best. Communication has to be compelling and reinforced. The brand has to be seen to be led from the top. It must also be supported by managers. They are the lens through which employees see the organisation and who create the culture at a local level.

Senior leaders and managers are two different audiences, and must be treated as such, with different interventions to help them own, communicate and build the culture for the brand to flourish.

4

Create brand ambassadors by involving your people in making the brand relevant

If brands are only as good as the people who deliver it, those people need to be involved in determining what the brand actually means to them, and what they can do to inform the customer experience. This isn't about creating a new version of the brand or trying to change the organisation over night. It's about thinking about the everyday things within their control that they can focus on to make the brand shine, and being supported by their managers and leaders to do so.



5

Infuse the employee journey with the brand

The employee journey starts by attracting talent. Recruitment advertising has to be built from the brand and demonstrate the potential employee experience – what they'll get and what they'll be expected to give. Employee stories add credibility and authenticity.

The illusion created has to be delivered throughout the remaining journey – from interview to on-boarding. Any chink allows an excuse to question the integrity of the company they expected to join. And if they leave, the experience should be just as consistent. Sites like Glassdoor provide great platforms for employees to share their experiences. You want your people to remain ambassadors even if they leave.



Brands are dialing up their purpose, and rightly so. The challenge is doing so in a way that takes your people with you so they believe it, own it, deliver it, advocate it. The internet has made it a lot easier to discover the truth. So if you're investing in your brand, you need to ensure it endures beyond the launch. Or put differently, ensuring your people are as good as your brand.

**It's a chunky topic to chew over, so here's a KitKat chunky to help.
And while you're at it, get in touch and we'll share our experience.**

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