

Perspectives

SIXTY SECONDS

ON THE HR–MARKETING RELATIONSHIP

We asked some people-in-the-know to tell us what they think is good, or bad, about the way in which marketing and HR interact.



The oxygen of business life

Some question whether HR is crucial to the marketing effort, but to me that is analogous to asking if we need to breathe to live. Financial services brands depend not only on visionary managers to set forth a stretching agenda but also on knowledgeable and committed staff to enact the brand strategy – for which the HR function is critical. Maybe this assumption is so apparent that many organizations have overlooked it – but that might explain why there are so few valuable financial services brands.

When was the last time your organization audited the extent to which your employees understand the nature of the brand, and also assessed their commitment to deliver the brand promise? If this isn't done at least annually, there is a high likelihood that the brand potential is not being realized and that staff may well be frustrated in their brand-supporting role.

Have you tried to segment staff inside the organization using such data on a matrix that charts brand understanding against brand commitment? The assumption too often made by companies is that the majority of their staff are in the quadrant indicating a high level of understanding about the brand and a notable commitment to delivering the brand. This aspiration may not always be reality. Think about those employees who enjoy working in the financial services domain, have a good understanding of financial services principles, are highly committed to delivering good brand experiences, yet sadly don't properly understand the essence of their brands. If so, they may be wasting corporate resources – resources that would have been more effectively focused on a narrower or more precisely-defined target group.

In contrast, consider an alternative scenario, with employees who are highly-astute politically and can decode the organizational culture and understand the extent to which they can “get away” with things. They cruise along, ever aware of the brand and the expectations of their role, but lacking any commitment to deliver the brand promise. Just think what may be happening to the bottom line there as well.

Surely it is only if HR and marketing work together that such tools can be used effectively to identify those employees who are the brand champions and give them further support to help grow the business. Likewise, if marketing works closely with HR it is easier not just to identify the underperforming employees but to appreciate why their performance is below par.

Brands may be conceived on paper, but it is the way that HR and marketing work together that brings them to life and sustains the brands' well-being.

Leslie de Chernatony PROFESSOR OF BRAND MARKETING BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL



Between the brand promise and the delivery ...

Marketing managers utilize all their experience and significant resources to create the brand promise that meets their business needs. Companies spend hundreds of thousands to support their brand promise, but few commit the time or resources required to assess accurately whether their employees are delivering against that brand promise.

Employee brand management is about narrowing the gap between customer service expectation and employee delivery. It is an integrated research approach that helps to identify what employee action and support is required to help ensure both repeat business and new business.

Example key questions include how easy is it for the customer to do business with the company, and what things customers would change about the way the company does business with them. Answers to these questions can help to identify the key people and process issues that must be addressed to maintain and increase sales and profitability.

With products (including most of financial services) that are not easily differentiated in the market, it is critical that all employees understand and engage with the service expectations reflected in the brand. Front-line employees tend to have a clear line of sight to the needs of the customer, but not always the skills to deliver. Support functions are often oblivious to the service expectations espoused by marketing, but are key to enabling customer-touching staff to deliver. Ensuring that *all* employees engage and deliver against the brand message is key to shaping the on-going success of the company.

If the gap between the brand promise and brand delivery widens, those companies with standard products will be more likely to lose market share in an increasingly competitive environment. Those that continually keep abreast of market changes and are able to reflect these in their product and employee brand management practices will be more likely to capitalize at the expense of their less-enlightened competitors.

Janet Ogundele HEAD OF HR VOLKSWAGEN FINANCIAL SERVICES UK



Working together – dream or reality?

Brands today are no longer seen as “nice-to-have” marketing accoutrements but as powerful management tools driving and shaping businesses. However, there are still many companies who tell their customers what makes them great but forget to tell their employees.

Dragon’s latest survey amongst leading brands shows that, in recent years, many businesses have woken up to the fact that creating strong belief in the brand requires clear sponsorship from the top and a culture in which HR, internal communications and marketing work closely together. For most companies, this requires a new way of thinking and working – something that is not yet second nature. In reality, the responsibility for the brand is often delegated to marketing, who don’t necessarily have the influence in the business or the communication skills to really have the required impact.

Our survey also shows that today in two-thirds of businesses the chief executive or managing director takes ownership for the direction of the brand. That is good news. This level of senior commitment and the integration of different areas of the business is a fairly new development, and not many companies master the art of truly integrating these aspects to create a brand experience that is inextricably linked internally and externally.

In most companies, the separate messages (often about the same thing) promulgated to customers by marketing, to employees by HR, and to the rest of the world by PR, are often uncoordinated and mismatched – undermining the strength and consistency of the brand experience. It is therefore no surprise that our survey shows that the internal and external brand experience and perception are the same in only 40% of businesses.

This is partly because the brand is genuinely seen as “the way people go about business” in only about a third of companies, and partly because in two-thirds marketing continues to have the sole responsibility, but not necessarily the best skills or the necessary influence, for driving the brand on a day-to-day basis within the organization.

Saskia Diemer CONSULTANT, DRAGON



Three steps to living the brand

For me, corporate brand and human resource are inextricably linked. Perhaps it’s because I’m not a marketing or human resource specialist that I just don’t get any other side to this argument. Interestingly, my marketing and human resources colleagues don’t view it differently either. Neither group sees the brand as being “their property”, but both understand their vital role in bringing it alive for customers. It probably helps that we’re in the process of a brand re-launch, though!

Time and our customers will decide whether we consistently live our brand, but I think we have taken three key steps to make sure we give ourselves the best chance for success.

Step one was making sure that we restated our brand in a more relevant way for our target customers, whilst avoiding the temptation of “glitzing” ourselves up to be something we’re not. After all, our current customers, staff and potential customers must believe this is what we stand for and that we’re capable of keeping our promises.

Step two was building an understanding of what behaviours our customers (consumers and colleagues) should expect to see and hear from someone living our brand values. Doing this in an inclusive way, using customer *and* staff views, is incredibly valuable. We learnt how our values might be interpreted, what consequences they might have, and how to keep things simple. It is easy to come up with the all-too-familiar and bland core competency sets inflicted on many organizations, but the trick is getting all employees to understand what customers must see, hear and feel about them.

Step three is about people development. Clever HR tools and processes support the alignment of skills and behaviours with corporate brands, but it is role-modelling of brand behaviours by the most influential individuals in any organization that determines overall success. The key value delivered by human resource specialists is providing an environment that enables and encourages such role-modelling.

Robin Matthews HEAD OF STRATEGIC PLANNING AND DELIVERY PRINCIPALITY BUILDING SOCIETY