

The Brand Consultancy Knowledge Board

News, trends and ideas that illuminate the future of brand strategy

Issue 31 • September 9, 2002

Focus on: Internalizing vs. Operationalizing The Brand

At TBC our focus is entirely on leveraging your brand – your reputation – by aligning all aspects of the business with the brand, unlocking its full potential.

According to a recently released survey of more than 700 business professionals across the U.S.:

- Over 90% “don’t understand how to effectively represent their company’s brand”
- Over 75% “don’t support their company’s branding initiatives”
- Over 50% “don’t know what a brand means”

According to the survey, the problem is that “companies **unintentionally keep employees clueless about branding and its significance internally** by not relating their external branding efforts back to their employees or customers and by not connecting their employees to branding initiatives, decisions, and results.”

Enter survey #2, another recently released study, which similarly found that “**the concept of brand strategy is too often paid only lip service**”. Out of 90 global corporations surveyed, just 19 had a long-term brand strategy they were “very satisfied” with. Moreover, 62% of those surveyed “cited lack of senior management support as the most pressing threat to brand’s long-term success.”

This study blames a lack of operationalization for the failure of brand to have a real impact. Meaning, that “business needs to...make it more of an organization-wide driver of business decisions—if they expect to reap the full extent of its top- and bottom-line benefits.”

What is the difference between brand internalization and brand operationalization? Why does the difference matter? **How can each help the brand succeed?** And most importantly, how can a well-integrated brand drive corporate strategic goals?

Let’s begin by defining these terms.

Brand Internalization

We view internalizing the brand as **communicating the brand to all employees**. Initiatives that simply target senior executives miss the mark, because although their buy-in and support is critical, a handful of employees can’t possibly touch enough constituents to have a real effect on the brand. Messages associated with brand internalization have three distinct purposes:

- **Education**—helping employees understand what a brand is, why it is important and what its relationship is to the organization’s reputation.
- **Definition**—communicating what the brand stands for and how it is unique and differentiating.

- **Action**—helping employees understand what behaviors are expected of them, and how their performance of these behaviors will have a desirable effect on external perceptions of the organization.

In addition, these communications must be **inspirational, not just informational**, if they are going to be effective. The idea is for employees to gravitate to the brand, rather than think of it as yet another initiative they must comply with.

Brand Operationalization

Separately, operationalizing the brand ensures that it is driven to all functional areas of the company, and is used as a driver for decision making. For employees, this means ensuring that two key elements are in place:

- **Motivation:** “What’s in it for me?” is a logical response to the behavioral change that branding requires. Consequently there must be a reward for living the brand. This is accomplished by infusing it into performance and compensation programs and setting a platform of rewards and retribution for compliance.
- **Tools:** If employees are going to be responsible for living the brand, they must be adequately equipped to do so. Everyone, whether “on-stage” (customer-facing) or “backstage,” must be given sufficient resources to infuse the brand into their own day-to-day functions.

Since operationalization is such a comprehensive endeavor, **it is most effectively executed step-by-step**. This means holding workshops division by division, functional area by functional area, until the brand promise becomes so specific that each employee finds it meaningful to their role in the company. Building on the level of knowledge and understanding that employees already have about the brand, these workshops should provide:

- **Specificity:** A detailed understanding of the connection between the brand’s external promises (in advertising, PR, and so on) and what it means to actually deliver on those promises every day.
- **Reality Check:** A comparison between the brand promise and the actual experience that constituents are having with the brand. Here employees are asked to consider whether the reality of the brand supports the promise—and what the consequences are for the organization.
- **Integration:** An expansive, but also very specific, view of how the organization will look once the brand is fully integrated into all processes, including product and service development.

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- **Filters:** A set of tools that help the employee continually and effectively discern whether their actions are “on-brand” or not. These tools are critical if the brand is actually going to be used as a basis for daily decision-making.

The overarching intent of both internalization and operationalization is to progressively strengthen the brand. This is accomplished by reviewing, improving, and focusing the quality of the organization’s relationships in very specific ways, including ensuring that its reputation is “on track” with its desired brand state. In this view, **to produce maximum return on investment, the brand must become an integral part of the culture,** inspiring the workforce to collectively support the organization’s vision, strategic direction, and tangible goals.

As **Diane Beecher, Senior Partner and Chief Brand Communications Officer at The Brand Consultancy,** puts it: “Internalizing and

operationalizing your brand can have many positive internal effects. It can align the organization against your strategic goals; motivate a complacent workforce; provide leadership and an inspirational voice; increase retention rates; and even jumpstart recruitment efforts. In the process, **you strengthen your reputation with external stakeholders, as well as your relationships with internal stakeholders. It’s a win/win scenario.”**

By any measure, organizations with strong brands are more valuable than their competitors. What this means in day-to-day reality is that **the stronger the organization’s relationships are, the higher its value is.** The goal of any brand initiative, therefore, is to build organizational cohesion that is focused on, and accountable to, a set of attributes espoused by the brand. This is facilitated by a focus on **both internalizing and operationalizing** the brand, so that the entire organization is focused on supporting it.

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