

## **Your Brand Strategy Should be Your Business Strategy**

### **If You Want Your Company to Reach its True Potential**

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If you think yelling out your product's attributes long enough and loud enough will convince people to buy, save your voice. If you think that a logo and some image ads are all you need to build your brand, you're missing the boat.

Today's most successful companies regard brand as the driver for every process in their business. And for good reason. Corporate leaders recognize that a brand carries as much asset equity as personnel, proprietary formulations or capital.

#### More than communications

Many companies look at branding simply as communications – the ability to forge an emotional connection between product and customer through words and images.

But to unleash the true power of your business, the process has to go much broader and deeper than that. Brand isn't just your communications strategy; it's your business strategy. It should drive each department and they all should act synergistically, communicating consistent messages so that all systems, processes and policies reinforce the brand. Not just marketing and customer service, but areas like:

- New product development
- Pricing/profitability
- Distribution channels
- Human resource hiring, training and retention programs
- Customer service policies and procedures
- Six Sigma and other TQM programs
- Research and development
- Corporate acquisitions

#### A brand success story

One bank we know of, for example, has repeatedly met Wall Street's expectations, received numerous "best company" awards, and been named to a "best places to work" list for several years.

This company is a success by every business metric, even through it doesn't have exceptional products or cutting edge technology. Its secret is that it offers solid, competitive products and superior customer service.

The bank was able to achieve this because its brand strategy is also its business strategy. Not only is every product and service a brand "proof point," the bank's brand permeates its entire culture.

Many companies promise quality products and reliable service, but they're not able to deliver them. Because of early product successes, they may have developed a loyal customer base. But unless these companies start to consistently deliver on their brand promise, even their most dedicated customers will eventually leave in frustration for more dependable suppliers. These companies have not succeeded in driving their brand throughout their organization to make it a reality.

Brand culture requires discipline

Permeating your entire culture with your brand is not easy. It requires discipline, day-to-day perseverance, and constant communication. And that focus must come from the top. It's admittedly a challenge to bring some functions into the fold, because they don't traditionally see themselves as brand promoters. But it's worth the challenge because the result will be a well-integrated company with a unified message to all its audiences.

Every benefit has its risk. In business, there's a risk to being a company with a single focus. The market can turn on a dime. A competitor could introduce a new product that outperforms yours – temporarily. But if your brand strategy is also your business strategy, you'll already have your market research, product development and marketing groups working together to pre-empt such a situation. Then your competitor's move will be only a mild setback or a non-event.

Brand integration through coordinated business and communications strategies ensures:

- Brand promises are delivered without exception
- There is a consistent brand experience
- There is a formidable barrier to competition
- There are built-in processes to anticipate and react to change
- There are built-in processes to identify and benefit from appropriate opportunities
- There is a common basis for decision-making around the company and around the world

When your brand strategy is your business strategy, you can build brand influence in the marketplace. You'll know you've arrived at that point when your competitors begin to imitate you and your customers tell you they've had an excellent experience in dealing with every part of your business. And when that happens, you'll gain referrals, loyalty, increased revenue, a great brand, and an even greater company.