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White Paper

Aligning Employees with Brand Values



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“Brands are only sustainable when the things they stand for are consistently brought to life by employees for the customer.”

The most enlightened organizations now consider employees as a core audience of their brand marketing campaigns. With research by the *Journal of Marketing* indicating that 68% of customer defections are caused by perceived staff indifference (only 14% defect because of product issues), this is hardly surprising.

To date, it has been easy to get caught up in the language of brands as if they are somehow separate from the organizations they represent. But brands are only sustainable when the things they stand for are consistently brought to life by employees for the customer. The truth is that investing in external brand awareness is a false economy if the customer experiences something different from the communicated message.

In the war for customer loyalty, the companies that are in front are those that are constantly nurturing a business culture that expresses their brand values every day through a workforce that understands the brand, its value, and their role in delivering that value.

Success Factors

Take a look at the following success factors. Think about your own organization and where you stand today relative to these points.

Bringing the brand to life inside the organization requires more than just integrated marketing.

It's great to expose employees to the campaign elements, but this alone is simply a brand awareness exercise – not brand alignment. Sustained commitment to an organization and a brand requires something more fundamental in which employees:

- Have a clear understanding of what the corporate brand stands for, where it is going, and what the employee's own individual contribution towards its success should be.
- Experience a sense of involvement in change and ownership of efforts to improve things.
- Have genuine confidence in their leaders.
- Feel supported by the processes which define their roles, develop their careers and assess their performance.

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Engagement with the brand cannot be conscripted – it can only be volunteered.

- The challenge is to shift the employee's experience of the internal branding effort from a pre-packaged, off-the-shelf solution to a learning opportunity. Use every opportunity you can to educate employees about the brand and expected behaviors.
- This helps employees see how their contribution supports the organization and their own ambitions.

Brand consistent leadership behavior is crucial.

- Company management and team leaders must demonstrate a care for the brand and create an environment where others can make it come alive everyday.
- You cannot assume that leadership understands the brand and what they need to do to perpetuate the right environment. Find out where they stand and, better yet, how they are perceived.

An engaged organization is one that communicates (talking, listening and learning).

- Organizations that are good at communicating internally find it easier to engage in the brand and its proper delivery to customers. Immediate supervisors are an important group because set the mood for the working day through establishment of channels of communication and strong feedback loops. They also have to set a good example to follow.

You must differentiate the brand and its values.

- The key to differentiation lies not in what we simply TELL people but HOW the employees bring the brand experience to life and reinforce it through consistent behaviors.

A key to success is the alliance between Marketing Communications and HR.

- HR is always well connected and usually highly respected. Marketing Communications has expertise in messaging and its delivery. The goal should be to exploit this alliance because of the natural management link between these two functions.

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What Will It Take

Obviously, alignment is much more than a marketing communications project that results in a set of posters on the wall and coffee mugs for employees. It involves a clear four-step journey:

- 1. Ensure that the management team understands the benefits of such a program and is willing to invest in the effort required to make it successful.**
 - You will need to determine a budget for this program – be realistic in what it will take to develop an on-going effort. This should not be a one-shot deal.
- 2. Measure the degree to which employees understand the brand values and whether or not they perceive the organization delivers these on a daily basis.**
 - Requires some form of employee survey to gauge the change effort required.
- 3. Communicate a compelling story to employees which explains the importance of the brand and its delivery to customers.**
 - Requires a clear articulation of the brand value proposition for each target audience and definition of its identity elements.
- 4. Help people to experience the brand story and understand the role they can play in making it happen.**
 - The key is making sure employees know what it means to live the brand and what customers expect from them on a daily basis.
- 5. Reinforce the brand expression through the processes the company uses to manage the business.**
 - Make sure processes and procedures help employees deliver the brand experience.

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Specific Tactics Required

The following represent the best ways to engage employees in your brand and motivate them to help create a dynamic experience at every customer touchpoint. At the center of the program are interactive training sessions that immerse employees in the business, as well as brand expression strategies required to elicit customer loyalty (i.e. helps them understand how to “live the brand”). Sample tactics include:

1. **Employee Research** – an employee survey can help you get a handle on current employee attitudes relative to the brand and how well they understand the intent of published company values.
2. **Program Theme** – involves creation of a program theme that helps galvanize employee participation.
3. **Leadership Training** – sessions designed to enroll company management in their required program role.
4. **Employee Training Program** – involves crafting of a series of employee work sessions designed to educate and solicit involvement in creating the ideal customer experience. Goals would be to:
 - Make sure employees recognize the brand as a valuable asset.
 - Understand how individual behaviors influence and impact the brand.
 - Articulate the brand strategy and its origins.
 - Link brand understanding to individual and corporate goals.
 - Marry brand understanding to internal and external customer touch points.
5. **Training Program Materials** – the following might be produced to help facilitate training sessions:
 - Pre-training invitations
 - Training session presentations
 - Collateral materials
 - Brand “anthem” video – produced for internal and external audiences (with editing)
 - Other meeting materials ■

To learn more, contact:

Brian Odell

President

(401) 732-1886

bodell@catalystb2b.com

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