

Build your brand from within

Internal branding is the key to employee and customer loyalty.

INTERNAL branding is, without doubt, one of today's "hot" business topics.

Employers globally have long looked to internal branding programmes as a crucial cost-effective way to motivate employees to optimise performance and sales.

Experts agree it is vital to ensure that employees exemplify the brand promise to the customer.

A unique brand can keep customers loyal to a product or service, instead of defecting to the lowest bidder.

The key for customer loyalty in many cases is strengthening employee loyalty and understanding of the brand.

The one channel that continues to be the most difficult to communicate values through is the channel with values of its own — people, "the forgotten channel".

I believe that companies that overlook internal branding are doing themselves a critical disservice. It can be the missing link between perception and reality, promise and delivery, effective marketing and positive outcomes.

Yet internal branding does not receive nearly the time, resources or attention that external efforts do.

Most companies will expend a great deal of effort on their external marketing. This often includes collecting reams of research in an effort to develop intimate portraits of their target audiences.

They will spend big bucks to gain insights into the lifestyles, attitudes, perceptions, needs and wants that inform their prospects' purchase decisions. Then they will spend even bigger bucks to leverage that knowledge into external marketing programmes to attract an ever-larger number of customers.

There is just one problem.

After all that effort, most companies effec-

tively file away all that wonderful information somewhere in the vault of the marketing department and employees are left in the dark on customer and brand expectations and how they can connect with them.

Companies also fail to collect research on their employees.

The critical failure to understand customers and employees and to align them is the primary cause for the failure to deliver the brand promise consistently and effectively in many organisations.

Align staff to the brand

The following strategies are things you can do in your organisation so that your people are aligned to the brand:

1 Support from above

The "feel" of a brand is often a subconscious impression of its culture. Not surprisingly, organisational culture development starts at the top.

Internal lobbying, evidence-based persuasion and open communication with the board or C-level executives are the first steps to gaining genuine acceptance and ultimately integrated brand ownership from any organisation.

Everyone must walk the talk. But more importantly, leaders must be the first to lead the way.

2 A well-defined brand DNA that is translated into action

Brand DNA models are not just a "funky" tool introduced by your brand agency to justify expenditure.

They also serve the very important purpose of illustrating elements of your brand, which can be in turn interpreted and applied to employee values and behaviours.



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Research your brand inside out first and then develop a brand DNA that highlights your vision, mission and values clearly and distinctly to your customers and employees.

Then get your employees to know it and live it consistently.

3 Train your internal team to deliver the promise

You must make sure that your employees are delivering on your brand promise.

Your relationship with your customer is based upon trust and you achieve trust by delivering on your promises.

So it is very important that you have internal brand training programmes in place to enable your staff to understand and live the brand.

Some of the training programmes include brand leadership workshops, "Live the brand" workshops, branded customer experience workshops and so on.

These workshops all have one key purpose: To get your employees to be aligned, motivated and committed to delivering the brand as well as addressing specific roles and responsibilities in the organisation.

4 Reinforce and repeatedly explain brand values

Use your internal communication and brand training to reinforce and explain the values and behaviours that reflect your brand promise.

Continuously do this until your brand become second nature to your employees.

The foundations for any internal branding initiative must therefore start with a personal understanding of the brand and

the importance of the role they have to play in its evolution.

5 Reward employees for reinforcing your brand

Knowledge and awareness are important, but action is golden.

At least once a week or month, ask your employees to find at least one way to better reflect the value of your brand in their daily customer interactions.

Be sure to reward employees when they come up with good ideas and then implement them.

Nurture staff commitment

When you think about how meaningful brands have become to people, it makes sense to consider not only products and advertising, but also the people who make and advertise the products.

After all, if a brand does not mean anything to the brand's employees, then these employees will have trouble translating the brand's emotional and social value to the customer.

You need to install the blueprint of the brand experience inside the minds of your employees.

A total internal brand engagement programme helps in building and developing a sense of commitment in the minds of the employees towards the organisation.

Not only will loyalty increase, but employees will also perform better and this will impact your brand and bottom line.

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