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Guest
commentary



Leadership helps build your brand strategy

An organization's brand reflects the organization emotionally and culturally. A brand is more than a logo or tagline. It is integrated on all fronts. It is a relationship that organizations have with everyone they touch — employees, customers, suppliers, end users, etc. — these are the brand's touchpoints.

Technology enables customers to quickly access all organizational touchpoints — including employees. This is something many companies miss as employees are critical to building emotional brand connections with customers. If employees do not understand the brand or misinterpret its meaning, customers will not make a connection with your organization.

Building a brand requires strong leadership to effectively create a vision and align it with the brand's mission. It takes the right messages and positioning to engage employees. It takes training to ensure employees understand the brand and are able to speak in one clear brand "voice."

And it takes a detailed marketing communications plan to effectively reach and attract target audiences, build a sustainable brand-customer relationship, and ultimately maximize profitability.

There are six steps for defining your brand strategy:

■ **Identify customers:** Evaluate current customers, prospective customers and lost customers. If there is a budgetary need to prioritize these, current customers should be first, prospective customers second and, finally, lost customers.

■ **Understand needs and perceptions:** Conduct qualitative and quantitative research with employees and customers, focusing on behaviors and attitudes. Use Voice of the Customer and Voice of the Employee processes, which identify, measure and implement customer- and employee-focused marketing communications.

■ **Develop brand positioning and messages:** After conducting research, define the brand's market proposition. The brand positioning is the foundation for planning and creating a consistent dialogue with all touchpoints.

■ **Create a plan:** The marketing communications plan is a roadmap for achieving business objectives. Without this, organizations merely understand customers' needs; they don't have a focus or the proper tactics to communicate.

■ **Align the organization:** The plan and brand positioning must include employee communications and be shared with employees so they understand it. The plan helps leaders manage internal communications and increase employee engagement. Engaged employees are more productive and provide better service to customers, resulting in higher customer loyalty.

■ **Measure the impact:** Continuously analyze customer and employee perceptions to determine if needs change and to clearly measure increased productivity and success.

While branding can be difficult to measure, it's not impossible. Analyses that probe both tangible and intangible brand attributes and ask touchpoints to rank each attribute against competitors can provide a key linkage between employees and customer loyalty — and brand understanding.

Implementing a clear brand strategy can help gain the recognition of customers and employees. The more an organization is able to sustain a consistent brand strategy and messages across touchpoints, the more likely it will be valued.

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