ABSTRACT

In the past, the management of an organization’s brand has usually been the sole domain of the organization’s marketing team. However, with the evolution of the Internet and people’s need for instant information, there is a greater call for public relations professionals to become more directly involved with an organization’s brand management. Simply put, your brand is your promise to your customer. It tells them what they can expect from your products and services, and it differentiates your offering from your competitors’. Your brand is derived from who you are, who you want to be and who people perceive you to be. To succeed in branding you must understand the needs and wants of your customers and prospects. You do this by integrating your brand strategies through your company at every point of public contact. Your brand resides within the hearts and minds of customers, clients, and prospects. It is the sum total of their experiences and perceptions, some of which you can influence, and some that you cannot. This paper finds the strategies through which Branding goes beyond Marketing.

Keywords: Branding; Strategies; Marketing; Brand Management

INTRODUCTION

Brands and Branding are by no means a new phenomenon. Brands serve several valuable functions. They serve as markers for the offerings of a firm. For customers, brands can simplify choice and reduce the risk. The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a ‘name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers.

It makes sense to understand that branding is not about getting your target market to choose you over the competition, but it is about getting your prospects to see you as the only one that provides a solution to their problem.

The objectives that a good brand will achieve include:

- Delivers the message clearly
- Confirms your credibility
- Connects your target prospects emotionally
- Motivates the buyer
- Concretes User Loyalty

Branding is one of the most important aspects of any business, large or small, retail or B2B. An effective brand strategy gives you a major edge in increasingly competitive markets. But what exactly does "branding" mean? How does it affect a small business like yours?
Simply put, your brand is your promise to your customer. It tells them what they can expect from your products and services, and it differentiates your offering from your competitors’. Your brand is derived from who you are, who you want to be and who people perceive you to be.

Are you the innovative maverick in your industry? Or the experienced, reliable one? Is your product the high-cost, high-quality option, or the low-cost, high-value option? You can't be both, and you can't be all things to all people. Who you are should be based to some extent on who your target customers want and need you to be. Essentially, brand is more than simply a corporate logo; it is anything people can associate an organization with, whether it is a paid advertisement or an article found in a newspaper. This is where brand management becomes important and PR professionals must be vigilant.

It is not enough for public relations professionals to simply communicate news to the media; they must somehow communicate the persona of their organization. For example, Google, the company that runs the best-known and most-used search engine on the Web, has a very distinctive brand. Most Internet users could visually identify its logo. However, Google’s branding efforts do not stop there. The company has worked hard to combat Internet users’ doubts about the quality of Web search results. Most of the main stream search engines sell advertising in order to make money and many people have accused these companies of skewing search results for money – giving certain web sites a higher ranking in exchange for purchasing paid advertising.

However, Google is well-known for the clear division it places between its search results and its advertising business. The visual separation on Google’s Web site is an example: search results are prevalent on the left and occupy at the very least 90 per cent of the page, while advertising occupies very little space and is not intrusive to the user. Most importantly, the search results are generated from the intelligence of Google’s product and are not influenced by purchasing advertising.

Google makes this very clear each and every time it speaks to the media. When a spokesperson does an interview or the company issues a press release regarding its search engine, it is quick to point out the division. In fact, it says it is part of its corporate philosophy – hence, it has become part of its brand. Google is known for its technical innovation and the quality of its search results, and not as a company that is just interested in money.

Furthermore, to ensure the organization’s branding is being effectively communicated to the media, it also must be properly managed. If the brand or persona of the organization is not being properly communicated, problems can be identified through analysis of the media coverage and the necessary adjustments can be made by the PR team to get the proper message out.

By tracking key messages, taglines, or buzzwords in the media coverage, the public relations team can measure how well its organization is communicating. It could be there are stop words the PR team wants to avoid using to prevent confusion and miscommunication. These too can be measured. Media coverage can also be measured against other performance indicators such as sales and stock prices. This could be a good indicator to measure how well a brand is being perceived in the media and with an organization’s key publics.

To most companies, brand is just as important as the products they create and services they provide, and it must be properly managed. Public relations professionals have a key role to play in shaping and maintaining an organization’s brand – this responsibility cannot be left solely to the organization’s marketing team. Not only is the PR team responsible for communicating the brand, but it also must be vigilant through media analysis. The foundation of your brand is your logo. Your website, packaging and promotional materials--all of which should integrate your logo--communicate your brand.

**OBJECTIVE**

1. To determine the impact of corporate image on customer purchases and firm’s value & profitability
2. To evaluate the contribution of marketing factors towards brand building
3. To determine the role of branding in acquiring & retaining the customers

Brand Strategy & Equity

Your brand strategy is how, what, where, when and to whom you plan on communicating and delivering on your brand messages. Where you advertise is part of your brand strategy. Your distribution channels are also part of your brand strategy. And what you communicate visually and verbally are part of your brand strategy, too.

Consistent, strategic branding leads to a strong brand equity, which means the added value brought to your company's products or services that allows you to charge more for your brand than what identical, unbranded products command. The most obvious example of this is Coke vs. a generic soda. Because Coca-Cola has built powerful brand equity, it can charge more for its product—and customers will pay that higher price.

The added value intrinsic to brand equity frequently comes in the form of perceived quality or emotional attachment. For example, Nike associates its products with star athletes, hoping customers will transfer their emotional attachment from the athlete to the product. For Nike, it's not just the shoe's features that sell the shoe.

Defining Your Brand

Defining your brand is like a journey of business self-discovery. It can be difficult, time-consuming and uncomfortable. It requires, at the very least, that you answer the questions below:

- What is your company's mission?
- What are the benefits and features of your products or services?
- What do your customers and prospects already think of your company?
- What qualities do you want them to associate with your company?

To succeed in branding you must understand the needs and wants of your customers and prospects. You do this by integrating your brand strategies through your company at every point of public contact. Your brand resides within the hearts and minds of customers, clients, and prospects. It is the sum total of their experiences and perceptions, some of which you can influence, and some that you cannot.

A strong brand is invaluable as the battle for customers intensifies day by day. It's important to spend time investing in researching, defining, and building your brand. After your entire brand is the source of a promise to your consumer. It's a foundational piece in your marketing communication and one you do not want to be without.

Imagine you are about to embark on a trip of a lifetime. You’ve received brochures for a luxury resort. The rooms are lavish; the grounds impeccable. Photos of the restaurant’s signature dishes look delectable. You’re sold. You go to the hotel. The room is musty and a tad dirty. The food is barely passable. Service is spotty at best. When you complain to management, you’re met with indifference, or worse, silence.

Branding goes well beyond marketing. It will not be successful without ensuring that all aspects of your business reflect and support your intended brand. One of your most valuable assets—your people—must be well-trained in articulating and delivering on your brand. This step is particularly important for service organizations that don’t have concrete products. Their offerings are soft assets like knowledge, experience and people.

When employees don’t deliver the brand, it can be the kiss of death for a business. Don’t believe me? Visit a hotel review web site like TripAdvisor.com. Peruse travelers’ comments and you’ll likely come
across more than a few who cite poor customer service for their negative hotel reviews. Conversely, employees who represent the brand flawlessly and consistently can propel a business to stardom.

**Brand: The Sum of All Its Parts**

Despite what many believe, brand isn’t about your logo, tagline and glossy brochure. Instead, a strong brand integrates multiple components, all of them necessary, including customer interactions, employee communications, corporate philosophy and advertising/marketing efforts. Your brand extends to your employees, customers, the media and even the general public as the above story illustrates. If these components don’t consistently reinforce your brand, customers will become dissatisfied. The negative impact of their perception, should they voice their opinions to other potential customers or even the media, could have a ripple effect on your business. This can erode your brand equity and create misperceptions about your company in the market, that in turn could lead prospective customers, employees and investors to pass on your organization.

On the other hand, brand consistency throughout all levels of the organization helps drive an organization to grow and prosper. Strong brands can drive an increase in sales. The company is better suited to attract and retain the best employees. Vendors can see value in your brand and look to establish partnerships with your business, while investors will see the business and your brand equity as a valuable commodity.

**Branding Through Your Employees**

Your employees are one of the most critical touch points for your customer. Here are several steps to ensure that they are representing your brand in the best light possible.

**Develop A Company Philosophy**

A thoughtfully planned philosophy that guides how your company operates is the first step to reinforcing your brand among your workforce. The prestigious Taj group of Hotel is an excellent example. They have created the following five “Gold Standards” for their business operations that reinforce the brand and detail an employee’s role in delivering on this brand:

1. A vision to revolutionize hospitality by creating a luxury setting for guests and a credo that states the company’s commitment to the genuine care and comfort of its guests.
2. A motto that exemplifies the level of service for its guests: We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen.
3. Three Steps of Service:
   - A warm and sincere greeting that uses the guest name, if and when possible
   - Anticipation and compliance with guest needs
   - A fond farewell that uses a guest’s name, if and when possible
4. “20 Basics” that outline the responsibilities and expectations for how the company delivers on its service (including #13—Never Lose a Guest)
5. The Employee Promise

**Maintain Brand Consistency**

This step is essential to building a strong brand. However, it is often one of the first steps to unravel. You must establish consistency throughout all aspects of your organization. But setting the standards is not enough. You must constantly evaluate your actions. Establish checkpoints for each aspect of the business that interacts with customers and the general public. Ensure that each employee is empowered to identify and address inconsistencies in your brand. Fail to deliver on brand with one customer, and he or she might forget. Fail to do so for another, and he or she might not be so forgiving. It only takes a scant few to dispel the brand you are touting.
Practice What You Preach
The best way to lead is by example. If your brand projects your organization as one which supports its employees and then reneges on that promise, your brand (and sales) will suffer. Case in point: Wal-Mart. The company says, “We believe that one of the keys to our success is our people and how we treat them.” However, the retail chain has been the subject of unfair employee wage practice lawsuits. Moreover, though they say they value their target customer (the hard working middle class) their actions aren’t necessarily consistent with the rhetoric.

Implement Brand Guidelines
For all to follow. We’re not merely talking about logo or corporate identity guidelines, but actual brand guidelines that In order to ensure brand consistency, your organization must establish a framework or set of brand guidelines communicate the company’s brand positioning statement, key messages, core values, brand attributes, measures of success and processes for handling customer issues or feedback. Federal Express was an early pioneer in this idea. The international shipper utilizes an Internet-based program which outlines the company’s brand guidelines. This detailed approach provides guidance on everything from the graphic standards for use of the company logo to how cultural differences affect brand (particularly important for global companies). Establishing brand guidelines leaves no room for misinterpretation and helps maintain consistency throughout all levels of the organization.

Understand and Address Cultural Differences
With advancements in technology, communications and the Internet, we are truly becoming a global economy. Considering cultural differences when building a brand is more important than ever, particularly if your business has international reach. Words and phrases in America might not translate to the same meaning in another country. What customers value and perceive as positive in the United States may be perceived radically different elsewhere. In the past, the United States was the model that all others wanted to emulate. That isn’t necessarily the case today. Therefore, it is incumbent on corporations to ensure that their brands can transcend these cultural differences, if they are to have a greater geographical reach.

Brand extends well beyond your marketing efforts. Your brand is only as good as the people behind it...and the people in front of your customer. Take the time to effectively build a corporate culture that mirrors your brand. Train your employees to represent that brand. Evaluate your consistency in delivering your brand across all aspects of your business. In doing so, you will strengthen your brand equity and position your company for greater success.

CONCLUSION
Branding has clearly become an important priority for all types of organization. This study proposed to explore the customer based brand equity on services. Most important task is to establish consistency throughout all aspects of organization and then constantly evaluating the actions. Most valuable assets- People-must is well trained in articulating and delivering the brand. It is suggested that a better understanding of the nature and relevance of brand equity and brand orientation in B2B can be achieved if future research takes the causality in the brand management chain into more careful consideration.

REFERENCES


7. V S Ramaswami, S Namakumari, Marketing management (2013)