

## ***Engaging your people to deliver your brand***

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Quite simply a brand is a promise that will come true at the point of delivery. For the vast majority of organisations this touch point is when the customer encounters the organisation's staff. One encounter and the whole brand is judged.

Organisations recognise and accept that the behaviour of their employees will impact upon their customers' experience of their brand. How do you ensure your workforce is 'on brand' – how do you engage your people to deliver your brand? In the past much emphasis was placed on effective internal communications to deliver key messages about brand, brand values and brand promises. Champions were trained and brand books were designed. However, for most organisations these activities usually conducted in isolation were largely a waste of money.

Research undertaken in this area has consistently shown that employees prefer to hear about changes via face-to-face communication from their line managers. New research from Prosci confirms this showing that 31 per cent prefer changes to be communicated to them directly by their supervisor or line manager.<sup>1</sup>

However, while it is implicit that effective internal communications is important in facilitating change in behaviour, more and more organisations now recognise that training their own people is equally important. It's not simply about imposing new behaviours on staff. Through training you can actively involve staff, thereby engaging them at the outset, and demonstrate **how** they need to behave and **how** they need to change in order to deliver the brand on a daily basis. In our experience in both the public and private sectors, organisations as diverse as the National Blood Service and South West Trains have benefited from this participative approach. With the National Blood Service we are designing and delivering highly participative training for senior directors aimed at enhancing their role in supporting internal communication across the organisation. With South West Trains we are currently undertaking research amongst managers and front line staff and the results will be used to develop and implement a participative process to engage all employees.

American journalist, Sydney J Harris put it succinctly: "Information is giving out - Communication is getting through". 'Getting through' to employees is about much more than top down communication, an intranet site, a slide pack, brand guidelines or a new glossy newsletter. Organisations talk about their people being their brand, but often any brand engagement programme is done superficially. There are a number of elements that need to be present for brand engagement to be effective. It can't be an initiative done by just one department – it needs to be a partnership across all parts of the organisation to be effective and meaningful. It has to be embedded in an organisation's processes such as recruitment, induction, reward and

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<sup>1</sup> Prosci, Best Practices in Managing Change report, 2003

recognition and performance management. It needs to be demonstrably driven from the top of an organisation – people need role models and you can't ask staff to behave in a way that is not mirrored at senior levels of the organisation. And these behaviours need to be mirrored by managers at all levels. Above all, though it **must** involve every employee.

In any organisation undergoing change people's emotions can range from hostility and opposition to emotional connection. These varying degrees of reaction are demonstrated on the classic change curve. At the outset, when new changes are introduced, people demonstrate complacency and satisfaction with the status quo, then denial and rejection culminating in resistance and anger. The path to engagement starts by gaining people's acceptance and curiosity after which they are enthused by the changes and finally are committed to and excited by them. People react to change in different ways and at different times. Not everyone will be experiencing the same feelings to the different change stages at the same time. Therefore, training will need to be tailored and focused to meet people's needs at any given time.

Brand engagement is essentially about getting people to change their behaviour. However, too often it has been portrayed to many employees as yet another thing they need to deliver on. Consequently, it is viewed as yet 'another initiative' and often that is exactly what it is. Often it's been driven by a department that they have had little contact with in the past such as the marketing department. Often other departments will have different programmes running alongside, yet independent, of each other. All this activity causes confusion and cynicism in the minds of employees. The complexity has often been increased because the language has often been new and alien to what individuals actually do – it's not perceived to be relevant to what they do. Whilst brand became the 'new religion' for many marketers the language that accompanied it often put many non-believers off before they could become convinced of the commercial benefits.

However, if your brand can be your central organising force for organisational activity it can also be used to help shape and determine the internal communication and development priorities internally. In today's business environment organisations realise the importance of training their people and brand engagement exercises are a fundamental tool in delivering key messages.

In my view there are three things to get right in any brand training exercise:

**Relevance:** Many communicators fall into the trap when communicating change of telling people what is changing and expecting changed behaviour and alignment to follow. What needs to happen is to consider carefully what this means for the individual and what they need to do differently in their every day job for the communication to be relevant and meaningful. This means understanding the time pressures, the shift patterns and people's emotional relationship with the company – the 'what's in it for me?' Brand is not a term that everyone is familiar or comfortable with. Many think brand is the same as Marketing, hence not relevant to 'me'. Successful training outlines how 'I' or 'we' can deliver the brand.

**Practical:** Again training must focus on what is pragmatic. How can people do this one step at a time? The training needs to focus on those things, however small, that will make a difference.

**Engaging:** Any good training needs to capture people's hearts and minds. People must want to do this and it should make them feel good. To achieve this you need to build on strengths using techniques that emphasise the positive aspects of the organisation. What do people like about the organisation? What is the company doing right? What makes them feel valued? If you make people feel good about the job they do they will want to do a great job and embrace change.

One well known retailer recently asked us to support its change communications planning as it wanted to communicate a new set of business priorities to over 60,000 people across the UK. When we probed what exactly the company wanted to share with its people the response was: "a new vision, organisational values, brand values, mission, unique fundamental strengths, ways of working and business critical strategies". Whilst elements of all of these were important for staff a lack of communication strategy meant that the retailer's communicators were considering separate communication programmes on each of the corporate initiatives. Streamlining and more importantly planning the internal communication, whilst difficult at the outset, avoided a drop in staff's performance.

Brand engagement exercises always run the risk of trying to deliver too many messages and 'learning' to staff, resulting in confusion and a dip in performance while staff struggle to understand what is really required. What are some of the things an organisation should look to avoid?

'The Emperor's new clothes' was how one client's employee described the announcement of a new brand and its impact on his job in a well-known service organisation. Likewise the decision by the Royal Mail to drop the name Consignia, British Airway's tailfin disaster and the disappearance of *Monday*, PwC's consulting arm are only the most memorable of recent brand disasters that have not only failed to deliver material benefit to their organisations but have actually caused widespread confusion and derision amongst their respective workforces.

In our experience many brand training programmes fall between internal PR exercises that are not grounded in real people doing real jobs or complex change management programmes which seem distant from reality. Our view is that successful brand engagement programmes are a combination of internal marketing, internal communication, development of new ways of working and skills training. Most brand engagement programmes focus on the first and last stages and consequently fail to deliver. A brand engagement programme needs to allow space for people to understand what's different and to discover what this means for them. 'Making meaning of change' is a critical stage of any buy-in. As it's hard to incorporate into training design it frequently gets left out.

From our experience there are a number of things that an organisation should look to avoid when planning a brand engagement exercise:

**All spin and no substance:** a sense that this is being sold to me and really you don't care what I think

**A fad, all spin and no business rationale:** the latest programme dreamt up by head office

**Driven by one function e.g. the 'HR initiative':** to be successful, it must be company-wide and be led visibly from the top

**'Sheep dip' approach:** everyone trots through it...expensive and wasteful

**'One size fits all':** e.g. not everyone responds to role play so provide different ways to learn such as online, reading, workshops, coaching etc.

**'A One hit wonder':** you do it and then it's gone and you're onto the next thing. The training must be echoed in other parts of the business and in other communications.

Finally, the process of creating and maintaining a brand culture in the work environment is a difficult and delicate process. Engagement is about encouraging people to behave in certain ways, which may be different from how they have behaved in the past.

Successful training and change communication must understand who are the 'front-line' and why they work for their organisation. People will have a range of motivators for coming to work and these must be understood and incorporated into the training programme. Working on one of the first major brand engagement programmes for a major children's charity it became clear that one of the biggest obstacles to the roll-out of the charity's new brand positioning was its 360,000 staff and volunteers. Many of these mistakenly believed that their 'old brand' proposition (although not reflecting accurately what the organisation was currently doing) was more emotive and successful at raising money for the organisation so employees and volunteers actively hindered the changes. To address this behaviour a series of events were held around the country attended by both staff and volunteers at which it was actively shown how the charity had changed and how the brand had progressed. This helped people understand the reasons why changes had taken place, how they needed to change and what they needed to do to deliver the new 'brand' externally.

Brand training is not rocket science but it is about the application of good sense in a way in which adds meaning to the organisation, the customers and the employees. Good sense also means that the brand engagement has a positive lasting impact for all the organisation's stakeholders.

Separate Boxes

### **Case Study One Rolling out a new brand to staff**

Compass Group, one of the world's largest foodservice employers with around 400,000 people in almost 100 countries approached us to support the roll-out of a new brand position. With brands including Upper Crust, Harry Ramsden's, Moto and franchised brands such as Burger King and Pizza Hut, the task was to give meaning to an overarching position that would have relevance to any of the Group's staff whatever they did, wherever they were based.

Working with the brand consultancy and the respective HR and Marketing Directors we were involved in the development of the: *Great People, Great Service, Great Results* and developed an internal programme called the Great! Programme. The programme involved employee research, internal communication aimed at a variety of key audiences from senior managers to front line staff and front line training. A key focus of the project was securing behaviour change that would positively impact on the customer.

Our work involved creating an internal brand theme, working with senior managers on key messages and developing materials for communicators to encourage their teams to reflect the new positioning in their day to day activities. We also developed a communication programme for the leadership conference attended by over 500 of the senior leaders from the Compass Group held in Vienna, Austria. The project is now used extensively by Compass Group in their external communications to the City and other key audiences.

### **Case Study Two INVESCO CE**

INVESCO Continental Europe is part of AMVESCAP, one of the largest global investment management houses.

Over four years ago, INVESCO CE started on a journey to create a pan-European business, aiming to offer clients a more integrated service and also to build on its reputation for success and strength in local markets. Dramatic changes in the markets since have convinced the company that its direction was the right one, and more recently its ambitions have focused into a vision of working as 'one company' and becoming the definitive asset management company in Europe.

At the end of 2002 Jean-Baptiste de Franssu, the CEO of INVESCO CE, announced his intention to put in place a new matrix organisation to accelerate the process of integration. As an interim step, a three-hub construct was adopted as a pragmatic way of achieving the one company aim.

We were asked by Jean-Baptiste to put in place a change management programme that would not only help to introduce the changes, but also give their people across Europe an active role in taking the changes forward.

Key elements of the project included consultation with all INVESCO CE leaders to establish baseline measures of their perceptions of the changes and their role in supporting implementation. Workshops were then run for Partners and each of the function management groups to enable participants to debate the proposed changes within their work teams.

This first phase of the change management project concluded with an All Staff event held in Frankfurt and attended by Charles Brady, Chairman of AMVESCAP. The aim was to go beyond merely explaining the changes; to give people the opportunity to make a real contribution to implementation planning. Presentations were kept to a minimum during the day and a series of techniques used including exercises, workshops and interactive voting to ensure that there was maximum opportunity for participation and feedback.

Post-event research demonstrated that employees across INVESCO CE believe that the approach has been effective in garnering their support and engagement. Going forward, support has been provided to ensure that rather than a one-off activity, the changes will be embedded within the new organisation.

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