

INTERNAL

Internal Branding Tips:

- Keep the message simple. Don't overwhelm people with too many messages. Strive for one big, pure, simple idea. Be consistent. Be impassioned.
- Develop a strong brand strategy that drives the brand through operational principles throughout the organization. Involve key stakeholders in the process to ensure cross-functional ownership.
- Ensure that the brand promise is embedded in every single touchpoint – even the seemingly smallest things such as emails and voice messages for volunteers.
- Don't just talk about what the brand stands for; **be** what it stands for. Get people to understand that by living the brand, they will differentiate.
- When aiming for internal understanding, don't be vague and don't use 'marketing speak'. Speak to specific day-to-day experiences of employees and volunteers. Be real and genuine. People can spot fakes.
- Help people understand exactly how their role contributes to the brand success. Recognize and reward 'on-brand' behaviours with recognition programs.
- Don't give up – persistence will pay-off!

INTERNAL BRANDING: The Next Trend

How to engage employees and volunteers as partners in your brand.

By Patricia McQuillan

Today's leading organizations know that the brand is not just about advertising. Strong brands reflect an organization's culture, providing a brand promise that goes beyond the logo to permeate the entire organization. This makes internal branding a particularly powerful tool for not-for-profit (NFP) organizations, who must find ways to motivate and maintain volunteer loyalty without the advantage of salaried compensation. Internal branding can motivate employees and provide a single unified rallying cry for disparate and often geographically-distanced volunteers. In effect, the brand becomes the purpose, the passion, and the inspiration for the organization.

Internal branding best practices

In order to take full advantage of internal branding, start with a strong strategy that drives the brand through operating principles in every area of the organization.

It is important to get cross-functional feedback to the development of this strategy, and critically, a sense of ownership through all departments. This yields cross-functional benefits, providing consistent standards and guidelines, and ensures everyone understands the brand

and their role in delivering it. Everyone knows where they stand; your employees and volunteers alike will know how their contribution makes a difference. Establish recognition and reward programs to identify and reward on-brand behaviours throughout the organization.

In addition to diverse departments, many NFP organizations also have multiple client touch-points. Your internal branding strategy must ensure that the brand promise is delivered through each and every one. This means

embedding the brand throughout the service experience and in the seemingly smallest things. Embed the brand message in your voice-mail messages, your emails, your newsletters, your annual report, your website, and in one-on-one informal communications.

This is also important for employee and volunteer training. At a recent American Marketing Association (AMA) roundtable that I moderated, which included panelists from the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), we discussed how training people in service excellence can be a particularly difficult challenge for NFP's. Many employees and other stakeholders are PhD's or in other ways highly qualified; they don't appreciate the thought of needing training for anything. The ROM, Director Visitor Experience, explained how the ROM sought out-of-the-box ways to bring people together and focus on the brand promise of 'wonder and inspiration'. "We avoided clichéd marketing-speak and business scripts, including terms like 'training', and instead looked for the unconventional. We went to 2nd City Improv and developed a program that would give our people authentic understanding. It tore down



walls and brought people together. Even our CEO went through it.’

The AMA panelists discussed the importance of enrolling Human Resources (HR) as equal partners, to ensure the brand message is not just coming from the marketing department. The ROM set up cross-functional committees to get brand ownership in different departments and keep it exciting and alive. They also have special Museum Days, when they take employees ‘back-stage’ to make new discoveries and experience for themselves the brand promise. The CEO leads ‘hard-hat tours’ of the construction site for all employees. To make sure the message is understood one-on-one, regular Lunch ‘n Learn small group sessions are also hosted by senior management. The goal is to continually find new ways to bring the brand promise to life.

Engaging volunteers in the brand promise

Volunteers are essential to NFP organizations; they are the means through which the mission will be met. Nevertheless the challenges can be enormous, with volunteers often spread out across the country, often not even linked electronically. It is generally agreed that the ‘continual drip’ treatment is particularly critical when organizations rely on heavy volunteer support. Volunteers have a lot of other things on their plate, and your organization isn’t

always their top priority or top-of-mind. You need to find constant ways to say ‘Here’s the message...Did I give you the message?... Here’s the message again.’

Look at your volunteer touch-points and ensure the brand message runs throughout. Try to build new volunteer touch-points through online initiatives or through old fashioned telephone and mail communications.

To engage spread-out volunteer groups, take a tip from marketing leaders in the profit sector who know the importance of ongoing communications across geographically diverse sectors of the organization. At Fed Ex, a senior management team visits all work groups across Canada every six months, talking the brand face-to-face with every employee. Find ways to get senior managers out meeting volunteers; identify and coach volunteer champions to assist in the leadership role, bringing the brand promise to life.

Branded leadership

When identifying internal branding best practices, I cannot stress enough the importance of getting the leader out of the executive office. The leader must walk-the-walk and talk-the-talk. Small group meetings are often more effective than Town Halls, allowing one-on-one engagement and more authentic understanding of the brand. Meeting one-on-

one or in small groups also makes it easier to identify and encourage front-line champions, who are all-important among volunteer groups.

Although leaders don’t have to be flamboyant to make the brand promise come alive, they do need to be impassioned to be inspirational. They need to make a clear link between employee and volunteer behaviours and the success of the organization, helping them realize the importance of their role and how they contribute to the delivery of the brand promise. Sometimes one-on-one coaching of leaders is required.

Don’t overlook the importance of middle managers. Often they are the only visible demonstration of brand behaviours in everyday action. Help them recognize the importance of their role, and if necessary provide appropriate training.

Reward and recognize on-brand behaviours

In NFP organizations, it is particularly important to find new and out-of-the-box ‘non-monetary’ ways to reward and recognize employees and volunteers. Although certainly not an NFP, Starbucks has a particularly effective recognition program that can serve as a valuable model. Starbucks’ brand proposition is about impassioned employees and about having a passion to improve our world. Their Green Apron recognition program serves as both a brand behaviours guide and a non-monetary recognition program. Every employee – known as a ‘partner’ – receives a Green Apron book, which is a passport-like book that lays out company values and desired on-brand behaviours. The book also contains peer recognition cards, which are used by all from top management down to recognize the smallest behaviour on-the-spot.

Patrician McQuillan is President and founder of Brand Matters, specializing in successful brand building through the development and implementation of winning brand and business strategies. She may be reached at pmcquill@brand-matters.com.

