

WALKING THE TALK: INTERNAL BRANDING

A successful internal branding program requires a strong strategy that drives the brand through operating principles in every area of the organization. Since HR collaborates with all levels of staff, it has the capacity to co-ordinate practices, manage feedback and measure the success of internal branding initiatives.

Key challenges identified in internal branding research include: interdepartmental co-ordination

to the rest of the organization's understanding of how the brand is best demonstrated.

Internal branding is a continuous process that requires regularly finding new ways to bring the brand promise to life. HR can develop programs for employee training and motivation to ensure brand behaviours are clear, relevant and fresh. While the overall brand strategy remains strong, the behaviours that employees exhibit to bring it to the customer experience will be fine-tuned

through training support and frequent assessment.

Successful internal branding guides all employees on how to translate the company's brand values into physical behaviours. HR can permeate brand behaviours into all activities from recruitment to ongoing employee training. The brand can be demonstrated

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through communication and leadership; training to consistently bring the brand promise to life; and measurement and recognition to keep the momentum going. Reviewing and adhering to best practices is essentially how HR can operate as the guide to internal branding.

The strategic development and implementation of internal branding should be initiated at the senior level, where reach and influence encompasses all functions; but HR is equipped to provide consistent standards and guidelines to each department throughout the development of an internal branding strategy. This is helpful in getting feedback and distilling a sense of ownership of the brand. While executive-level buy-in is essential, ensuring middle management's commitment can be challenging. This is where HR becomes the appropriate communication hub and overseer of internal branding programs.

Regular meetings with key decision-makers—with HR reporting feedback and opportunities to improve—help streamline processes. Cross-functional ownership involving all stakeholders helps to secure commitment and assists the organization in defining the brand promise and how to turn this concept into strategies and then into actions. Evidence of leadership practising the brand behaviours—“walking the talk”—is crucial

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through recruitment messaging that portrays the brand in terms of desired behaviours. This will help HR assess and select recruits based on how the brand is initially perceived. New employees will already have a feeling of what it means to be a part of the organization and the expectations regarding the brand promise.

Once internal branding gains support from the executive level, HR can establish recognition programs that reward brand behaviours to keep the momentum going and establish clear objectives as to next steps. Such programs can keep the excitement level up, leading to heightened commitment as well as ownership and pride in the brand. Employee loyalty is often characterized by respect and trust, which are factors that can also characterize an organization's relationship with its customers. The connection between employee performance and customer satisfaction can be used as the basis for developing HR programs for employee recognition. These programs would bring about cross-functional collaboration with HR getting involved in customer experience, marketing research and measurements of employee performance.

Employees want to see how their work adds to the success of the company, which can be one of the outcomes of a recognition program founded on the concepts of internal branding. The effects of such actions on the organization's success can also be measured and tracked.

Researching what works for other organizations is smart, but don't be afraid to develop new programs and innovative methods of measurement. Sustaining internal branding means continued employee connection and motivation to live the brand. **HR**

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