


Creative B2B Branding (no, really)

Scot McKee

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

3 The customer's always right (external perceptions)

- ▶ Your customers are your brand
- ▶ How and why you need to listen to them
- ▶ Making your brand attractive in business

To look inwards, it helps to look outwards

We don't (I hope) spend an awful lot of time in our personal lives circulating amongst friends, family, colleagues and indeed relative strangers, asking at every available opportunity whether or not the other party to the conversation thinks we're an idiot. And that, for the avoidance of doubt, is a good thing.

In business, however, it is a terribly bad thing. Because your business – your brand – is built and maintained if not exclusively, then certainly in large part, on your corporate reputation. In other words, whether or not customers think you're a numpty. So when trying to build upon and enhance the reputation of your brand, it makes all kinds of sense to gather opinions from all the audiences for the brand that you consider important to its current and future wellbeing.

It's staggering how many businesses build their brand without any form of consultation whatsoever. 'Sir' dictates how it's all going to be and, for the most part, that's how it is. The likelihood is that such insular brands will have grown organically and will continue to operate on an incremental growth and development scale until it reaches a tipping point. At that stage, Sir simply can't control

everything anymore and the brand is allowed to develop a little faster. Sales will have reached a plateau because there are only so many sales a salesperson can make. Sales people pushing sales messages is a one-to-one process. At some point, in order to maintain momentum, the brand will require one-to-many relationships in order to continue growing. The brand will effectively be required to 'pull' the audience closer without the initial need for salespeople to instigate the conversation by 'pushing' the message at them.

One-to-many communication is the marketing function and, possibly for the first time, sales-focused organizations will start to seek a marketing solution. The difficulty arises when they realize that without the individual, personal touch of the salesperson, they only have a product. There's no personality, no character, no warm cuddly feelings about the brand because the brand doesn't exist – just a name, a badge and a product. Unfortunately, the company's competitors will also have a name, a badge and a product that broadly does the same thing.

But even if the strictures of organic control are still in effect within growing organizations seeking brand improvement, there will still hopefully have been some form of brand consultation – even if it's just Sir saying to his wife, 'You there, Wife, we've got a new logo. What d'you think? I like the blue one.' If we're to build a more creative and robust business brand for the future, however, we need to be able to rely on more than the questionable preferences of the chairman's wife.

Accepting the challenge of building a creative business brand requires an acceptance of the need for a brand strategy. The requirement is not for a new logo, or a sales brochure or a tactical campaign of any description. The requirement is not to respond to the whim of Sir, or his wife. The necessary mandate is to launch a creative brand strategy suited to all. Building such a strategy without the help of others is, however, akin to our builder in Chapter 1 building a house on his own. It can be done, but why would you do that? Others, better qualified than you, can help. The brand that you are asked to develop the strategy for isn't, and will never be, 'your' brand. The perceptions and feelings that others have for the brand can be managed, but rarely manipulated or made-up and they certainly can't be owned. The brand isn't fictitious. While the story is made up, it's not a made-up story. The brand story will be told

Chapter extract

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