


Creative B2B Branding (no, really)

Scot McKee

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

4 Up close and personal (gathering internal support)

- ▶ Balancing your wants with the needs of others
- ▶ Securing internal support for something that will probably hurt
- ▶ Learning that in B2B, brands belong to everyone else first and you last

Dancing round the handbags

External audiences are disparate. They are widespread mixes of individuals brought together by a common interest in the brand. They can be nurtured and supported and communicated to and with. As a result, over time, a relationship between the brand and the external audience develops. There might be little in the way of direct day-to-day contact with an external audience and so the brand experience is delivered for the most part at arm's length. Internal audiences, by contrast, are ever present and hunt in packs.

The internal audience loiters around the reception area, near the water cooler, by the coffee machine, in meeting rooms. You can be certain that the internal audience is talking about the brand. Actually, they talk about little else. The working day is spent predominantly discussing the activities, opportunities and potential of the business. People shape and reshape their opinions of and about the business with each business interaction of the day. In other words, by forming and informing perceptions of the company on a daily basis, they're building the brand. Or at least we'd like them to. That brand building isn't restricted to office hours. An internal audience will continue to

develop and form the brand during their coffee breaks, at lunch and in the bar after work. They'll even meet each other at the weekends and continue the conversation. They're there every single day and they're the people expected to deliver the brand. In many respects, that's no bad thing. In almost every aspect, the internal audience is the brand. These are the brand ambassadors. That makes them quite important.

Have you noticed how difficult it can be to join a conversation or group sometimes? At parties, or functions, or conferences – any kind of group gathering – small circles of people will join together in conversation. Literally circles. They'll form a defensive circle, backs facing outwards like the pioneering wagon-trains of the Wild West, and shut the rest of the world out while they talk to each other. You can see this action daily in American football huddles, or girls dancing round a pile of handbags in a club. The group is formed of people who know each other and the rest of the world is excluded. It's difficult to join the group once it's formed.

At a party, guests will group into circles of people who know each other. Those who know the host, but no one else, need to be introduced or they are left to skirt around the outside edges. From a sociological perspective, the behaviour of the outsider in these circumstances is relevant to how we build a brand with the support of the internal audience.

To breach the defences of the circle, the party outsider has a few choices but there are two that are the most popular. First, the frontal assault. You will have seen or experienced this. The outsider will brazenly walk directly up to the circle, front-on, and without introduction, start talking – by asking a question or forcing an unsolicited comment on the group's conversation. It can be an effective approach, but if you can recall a specific occasion, it's probably when you were thinking, 'What a knob!' The circle will instantly tighten, the group will try to repel the attack and only very reluctantly will the outsider be allowed to join the conversation. A more likely outcome in these circumstances is that the circle will disperse with everyone finding an urgent need to visit the bar or bathroom or anywhere else, leaving the outsider boring the pants off whoever drew the short straw.

The second approach is considerably more successful and people with any appreciation of group culture take this route instinctively

Chapter extract

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