

Why are so many “Internal Brand” programmes such crap?

Contributor - Mark Di Somma

Bang the tambourine, the internal branding programme is here! And everyone knows what they can expect. Another forest-killing tirade on why “we” need to get with the programme and work “together” to achieve our “potential” ...

One could count the number of ballsy, powerful, well thought through internal branding programmes with very few fingers. And the reason sadly is because most people who profess to understand branding really don't get how to instigate, install and upgrade a branded culture at all. Four reasons:

1. **The best internal branding programmes** offer far more than just change education or an explanation for why there's a new identity. They actually re-calibrate how the organization understands itself, and correspondingly how it is prepared to work holistically. In other words, they make their presence and influence felt across every strata of an organization. They challenge the way processes are run. They influence the way operations are understood. They instill powerful and singular messages into sales. Their influence on how HR is run and done is enormous. No, it's not instant. And no, it's not business re-engineering or whatever buzzword is in this week. It's about alignment and consistency around the singular and powerful thought that drives the organization's strategy. Everywhere. That takes time, investment, patience and vision.
2. **It's not something that people within organizations just “get”.** So many internal branding communications are all rah-rah, and then tat-tah. They tell people what's happening and why, but they don't give them the time or the tools or the support to adjust. They don't allow them to transition. Inspiration is a powerful thing. It's an absolute must with a successful branding programme. But it's not enough in itself. There's only so much “opportunity” and “focus” one can take before the hard questions start. And with a programme like this, you need to ask and answer the hard questions ... with training, presentations, dialogue, new skills, performance management/KPIs, realigned team dynamics. In other words, great internal programmes are about lining your ducks, not playing Dr. Doolittle.
3. **The biggest mistake companies make** is to think that changing the culture is just a marketing exercise or an HR matter. These functions are critical to the success of every programme – and often the initiative for a programme starts here — but buy-in and participation needs to extend far further for the programme to really work. (1) tells you why.
4. **Most internal branding programmes broadcast,** they don't engage. They lay out rules and tell people what is going to happen, instead of presenting the case for why things need to change and how each person can be involved. People want to contribute not just to conform. Strong internal branding programme work because they arouse curiosity, pique interest and invite participation. Bad programmes simply tell people what is going to happen and when.

Leadership and purpose are crucial. When one looks at how and where these programmes can veer, it's easy to see why so many go off the rails:

- I. They can be all business – in which case, they make sense and work hard to the bottom line, but lack engagement on most other levels.
- II. They can be all research – in which case, they deliver the numbers and the reasons for change, but the solutions tend to be brand-by-numbers as well.
- III. They can be all inspiration and communication – in which case, they're hype and hope and nice booklets, but bugger all else.

The programmes that really work mix it all – understanding through investigation, inspiration, motivation, education – in an alchemy that is specific to the chemistry of that company at that time, in that situation, with the challenges it faces from now on. They speak to the business, talk to the numbers and inspire the individuals. And that's because they have a different perspective from the ones that fail. The programmes that gel are creative business initiatives – now there's a scary combination of ideas! They start from, and report to, this concept – wholehearted transition to a more competitive, enduring and singular business endpoint.

9 tips for achieving significant branded culture change in 90 days

- Be very clear why you want to change.
- Be very clear about how competitive you need to become.
- Pick the brightest and most influential people in the business to champion the project.
- Check and re-check your commitment before starting.
- Resource like you mean it!
- Kill a stupid tradition early to show you mean business.
- Get quick wins on the board to show that this works.
- Use a smart and experienced advisor who will challenge you away from self-indulgence and work with you to avoid the traps
- Tell your people what's going on and why.

Three must-read books

Smith & Wheeler – *Managing the Customer Experience*

Stewart & Barlow – *Branded Customer Service*

Davis & Dunn – *Building the Brand-driven Business*

Four more articles by Mark Di Somma that may be of interest

Singing in your rain – why your people need a cause, not a job

Reporting to process – why there's no such thing as customer service anymore!

Brand Attention Disorder – why every brand needs a copy strategy

Sick of working – 11 sure signs of a disillusioned culture www.audacity.co.nz

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