

# cadence

## occasional paper

### Achieving Brand Potential

#### Who has more impact - Marketing or Human Resources?

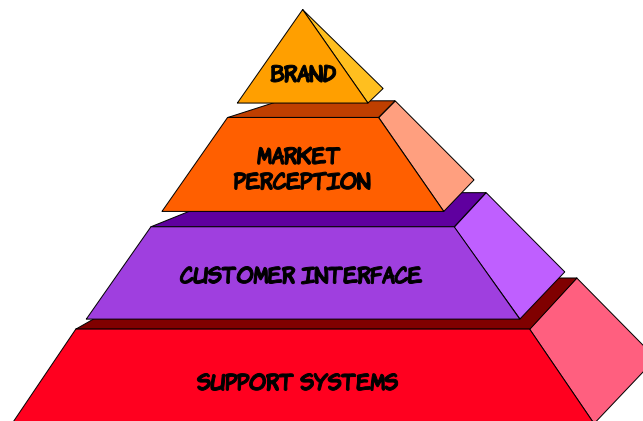
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A brand is "the sum of all the information about a product, a service or a company that is communicated by a name or related identifiers such as logo or other visual cues"<sup>1</sup>.

The attributes of a brand exists in the eye of the beholder and reflects an accumulation of both the communications that the person has received concerning the product, service or company and the experiences that he or she has had with it<sup>2</sup>.

In other words, our perception of a brand includes:

- what we see in the market through advertising and public relations,
- what we experience through our win interactions with the company, and
- what we hear from others.



The full potential of the organisation's brand is realised when every interaction with a customer, whether in person, electronic or on paper, demonstrates the brand values and clearly delivers the 'brand promise'.

Achieving this consistent delivery of the 'brand promise' will gain, for an organisation, strategic advantage because this is the most difficult aspect of any business to replicate.

Look how long it has took for companies to catch up with McDonalds. Over the years McDonalds have generously shared what happens 'under the golden arches'. We have known how they organise their advertising, promotions, loyalty programs, recruitment, training etc. In addition ex-McDonald employees have taken their knowledge to new companies.

This has led to many companies trying to copy the formula and thereby proving just how difficult replication is. 2002 is the first financial loss for McDonalds in 48 years. And the problem is not necessarily due to their direct competitors, such as Wendy's and Burger King, but an increasing move to healthier food.

The important lesson is that ALL the systems have to work together and be aligned with the brand position. What's more, much of this relies on people - the reason why Human Resources can have as much impact on whether an organisation achieves it's brand potential as the Marketing Department.

In reality these principles also apply to not-for-profit and public sector environments although the way they are expressed will be different. The values in these organisations is generally expressed around the Vision and Mission - the need for consistency to the consumer is however equally important.

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<sup>1 2</sup> Lippincott & Margulies

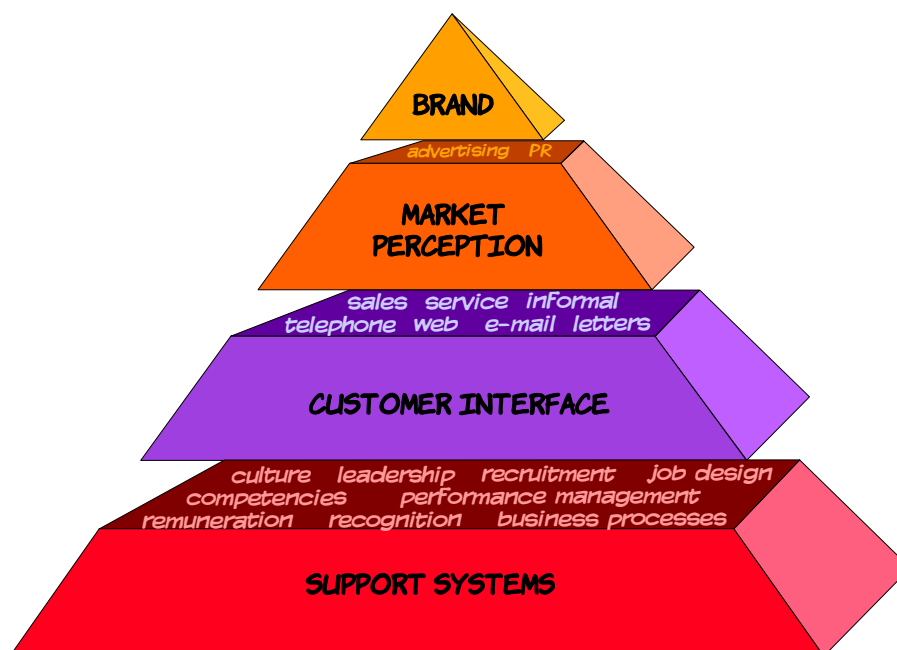
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### So how can this be achieved?

The basis of the brand promise is communication. This is seen in the media of image, advertising and web design but it extends at the simplest level to the way the phones are answered, to every interaction with a customer - including casual contact with employees in the pub and in restaurants.

Human Resource processes and training need to be aligned with the promise. This does not just apply to the materials produced by HR and Training. Although it is useful for materials to have a consistent 'look and feel' with the brand, it is far more important that the strategic decisions, policy guidelines and processes are consistent. Training also plays an important role in maintaining the consistency and reinforcing the 'brand promise'.



There are many examples of where the relationship breaks down and each of us will have experienced it. To assist in illustrating the point of how the systems work together I have two experiences - the first in a 5-star hotel and the second, a retail operation.

The hotel advertises itself as a 'great choice for the business or leisure traveller who appreciates personalised attention in a contemporary environment'. Their website is headed up 'stay with us and stay connected with the world'.

My biggest challenge during the stay was waiting times - 50 minutes to get an Internet connection in the room; 20 minutes for the breakfast chef; and let's not talk about trying to get someone to pour me a coffee ... how many business travellers do you know that have time to wait? And surely staying connected means - I don't need your permission!

In many companies, this experience would be seen as a training problem. But in reality it was much more than training. The 'poor' switchboard operator who spoke to me four times whilst I waited for my Internet connection (I was trying to check my mail so I could go out) could not have been more professional - it was the system and process that she was tied to, that was inconsistent with the 'brand promise'. The waitresses as individuals were also helpful and attentive but there just weren't enough of them for peak periods. The breakfast chef had too much to do and one of them couldn't cope with the basic requests without any additional responsibilities - he was not capable of being on his own

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In contrast to this, my stationery supplier advertising says 'it couldn't be easier' and they are right. I visit one of their shops reasonably frequently and several staff have taken the time to learn my name - the others recognise me as a regular customer.

Their computer system is a bit cumbersome so they have introduced a new process to make it simpler for their customers - I don't have to remember anything other than my name, they sort out the rest. They don't have space to have everything in stock but their ordering system is simple, quick and reliable. What's more if I can't pop in to collect things - they deliver free of charge. There is always a friendly face happy to carry boxes to the car and on the rare occasion that there is a problem with something - they don't make me feel a nuisance as they fix it.

To me, they have everything working together:

- staff with the right attitude and skills (good recruitment, training and leadership)
- enough of them to allow a little time to be attentive (good planning)
- systems that don't inconvenience the customer (computer and manual)
- great back up ordering systems and delivery (stock control)

In other words they have the 'right' people with the 'right' - skills, tools, information, processes and rewards and it is allowing them to fully realise the potential of their brand. The Marketing Department does not achieve this on their own.

We recommend to HR and HRD people that they can assist their companies achieve brand potential by:

- Using the strategic planning process to identify processes and practices that are inconsistent with the brand promise and identifying options to address these issues.
- Assisting senior management to spend time with customers and / or the people who work with customers. Remember this is a critical point where the brand can be come 'unstuck' - the real 'moments of truth'.
- Ensuring recruitment builds the 'persona' of the brand into the person specifications and ensures the skills of people match the needs (current and future).
- Designing induction programmes that help new employees understand how to behave consistently with the brand.
- Building reward and recognition programmes that are associated with desired performance - for example if you want good problem solving in your call centre don't reward people for how quickly they can process the calls.
- Providing targeted training that ensures staff have the appropriate skills for the job.
- Monitoring internal communication and leadership behaviour to ensure consistency with the brand.
- Designing training courses and choosing a trainers who not only understand the business but can also live the values
- Listening and learning from staff.

### **When the company re-brands ...**

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Human Resources and Training also have an important role to play when the company re-brands. It is interesting to note that the two case studies quoted above are companies that have re-branded within the last 12-18 months. We do not have the details of how these exercises were handled, but we have worked closely with organisations to understand what is needed at this time.

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Our experience is that often when a company re-brands the Human Resources and Training staff are the last to be involved in the process. In reality, if the company wants to realise the potential of the investment as quickly as possible, to reinforce the change in the customer's mind, they need to involve the people side of the business much earlier.

In many organisations the planning for a re-brand involves the Marketing staff and senior management behind closed doors. The first involvement for most staff will be 'town hall' type meetings and the 'sales pitch' on the new image and brand values. Expectations (for change) are usually 'rolled out' by senior management and staff possibly get to rewrite their objectives for the coming year.

But employees are not customers and this approach undermines the contribution they make to an organisation. They may intellectualise the content (of the change) and wear the t-shirt but this approach is highly unlikely to lead to a major attitude change, to changes in behaviour, nor to a deep understanding of what it means to represent the brand in every interaction with a customer.

Our belief is that at the highest level company's need to treat re-branding as any other major change initiatives. They need to take time to define the behaviours, systems and processes that will support the brand they are building.

As with other market forces they also need to look internally at what currently supports and / or works in opposition to achieving the standards required eg.

- How is behaviour measured?
- How are people rewarded?
- Are the systems congruent with the direction?
- Do people have the skills?
- Are they the right people for the future? and lastly
- Can we deliver on the brand promise at all?

Only then can they develop a plan to build an 'aligned' organisation and find meaningful ways to involve staff in the process of designing and building the future. Involving people in this process will lead to quicker more effective behaviour change.

What we don't know is what process for change were used by our 5-star hotel and stationery supplier. We do know is the 5-star hotel is trying to move from being a 4+ and I'm not convinced that they have changed the processes in such a way that is consistent with the new 'brand promise'. They are lucky, the hotel is in a good location and I'll probably stay there again ... I wonder if everyone else will.

And the stationery supplier - I wish I could say that we worked with them. Unfortunately not, but I certainly would like to and will be happy to keep my custom with them.

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