

Building Brand Evangelists Within Your Organisation

While organisations expend substantial amount of resources in building their brands, these efforts in most cases are lopsided towards the external audience, to the detriment of the internal.

A brand image, either corporate or product, also include everything an organisation does, especially what the organisation's employees believe, say and do.

Beyond the logo icon, colour, and other brand communication messages are the employees of the organisation who are the brand ambassadors.

Although it is nurtured and managed by marketing (and perhaps) external communication departments, the brand is represented by the entire organisation: from the receptionist at the front desk, to the telephone operator, who receive incoming calls, to the chief executive, who pilots the organisation's ship.

That is why a strong brand requires that everyone in the organisation have a complete understanding of, and ability to express the brand positioning and attributes. Employees should be made to know that they are not only part of history making but also that the brand can help realise their aspirations.

Below is six-step process towards achieving this:

1. Create awareness vertically and horizontally in the organisation

Most organisations' marketing department (and perhaps external communication) have a clear understanding of what its brands stand for and are quick to assume that only people with marketing functions require to be on the brand strategic team. However, for an organisation to successfully create an effective brand, its internal audience, who could be its brand ambassadors, need to buy-in into the brand communication programme.

There is need for a collaborative effort among the Marketing, Human Resources, Finance and Operations departments, in fact every facet of the organisation to set clear and measurable brand awareness objectives like "Raise the brand awareness this year by 5% among a certain target group."

The organisation could start building this awareness through existing communications vehicles and tools like new-employee orientations, Annual General Meetings (AGM), corporate letters and e-mails, training videos, corporate newsletters and magazines, the company intranet, posters, notice board, newsgroups and other internal communications vehicles to generate greater employee awareness.

Identify any communication gap between what ought to be and what is and fill such gaps. The purpose of communication is to achieve isomorphism: parity between what is sent by an encoder of a message and what is perceived by the receiver of the same message.

When employees are in constant contact with on-brand communications, they become aware of, and begin to absorb, the true essence of the brand and how it should be communicated.

2. Educate internal audience

Once they are aware of the brand information the next step is education. They need to understand the values and visual components that comprise the brand (colour, logo icon, name, type face, product packaging, brand endorser etc.), how it is communicated and what constitutes on-brand and off-brand qualities. They not only have to "talk the talk" but "walk the walk" of the brand. For instance, employees of GTB walk with an attitude: they know they are ambassadors of a great brand.

Employees can stay on-brand at all times by developing printed or web-based tools like a corporate identity standards manual, staff handbook, brand usage guidelines, and creative brand communications tools. Beyond these, organisations can schedule special Brand Day activities and organise brand presentations. Thank God Its Friday (TGIF) need not be empty, where staff wind-down, it can be a vital event in the life of an organisation to inculcate brand values. This is so because this is usually bottom-up: it is called for by the employees, organised by them and meant to benefit the staff, not the other way round.

3. Employee buy-in into the programme

The organisation should ensure that every opportunity be seized to make the connection between the brand and the employees, that managers understand how to develop brand objectives for their subordinates. It is essential that all managers have a complete understanding of the brand, and that they express the brand clearly and consistently. They should involve employees from every department and branch of the company to participate in Brand Day .soliciting feedback from them on the brand issues is important because their opinion

Building Brand Evangelists Within Your Organisation

in a brand audit is essential to a successful branding programme. The organisation can develop a brand event or periodic brand contests that recognise and reward innovative ways of communicating the brand message.

• Watch the seed grow!

By participating in brand contests and other activities to express the corporate brand, employees take more and more responsibility for the brand - they become invested in the brand. They start to proactively nurture the brand, supporting it in all their day-to-day activities. They remain on-brand in everything they do without even thinking of it consciously. Employees begin to find creative ways to promote the brand.

On the other hand, many company employees are shy to don the company's branded apparel, put on the bumper sticker on their personal cars, voluntarily attend company public event on their day off and cannot, based on attitude (without formal introduction) be linked to the corporate brand. They either do not trust the brand, seeing their future not embedded in it or no effort has been made to inculcate them into the branding programme. When the above scenario occurs the organisation should know that it is time for a change.

• Show progress report

Most people outside Marketing and External Communication departments see such programme as "Oga's Wahala", not understanding the implication of an internal buy-in of the branding programme. Hence, the organisation should communicate constantly result of previous internal brand communications efforts. For instance, "After six months of brand orientation most employees now are quick to see themselves as part of the marketing department and can go on to use their personal resources to bring business to the company.

• Recognition and reward for excellence

One of the best ways to reinforce positive brand actions is to reward them. Organisations should establish Brand Ambassador Award aimed at giving special recognition and reward to employees who live the brand. Organisations should reward employees who develop innovative ways to communicate the brand. Reward departments that have contributed to the growth of the organisation through designing innovative products or cutting-down on the distribution system or showing extra commitment in servicing the customer.

They have to understand that a strong brand commands premium price and so is trying harder at an assignment, which contributes to corporate success. Avis brand's success was not only because of its positioning: "Avis is only no 2 in rent-a-car, so why go with us? We try harder". It also applies to other organisational resources ("Walk the talk")- going the extra mile to satisfy the customer.

Finally, the organisational culture should live and breathe the brand for the benefit of the entire organisation. When employees are aligned behind the brand identity, organisation maximizes the strength of its brand. Hence, developing and implementing a strong internal brand communications plan will ensure that the brand is supported and nurtured throughout the company, and beyond.