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Your Internal Culture

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Your Internal Culture:

THE 'MAKE OR BREAK' FACTOR IN BRANDS

It's often said that people are the heart of a business. Truly they are, but you are more likely to see it represented in the form of glib statements in annual reports than to see evidence of it in practice. In a modern age when brands are often the differentiating factor which determines market success and business value this is really surprising. Because sooner or later it is the attitudes and behaviour of your staff, not your nice logo or catchy advertisements, that will make or break your brand.

So your employees and those who represent you are critical elements of your brand strategy. They can make your brand really resonate and add considerable value to your business if you go about it the right way. When staff actions consistently reinforce the 'brand promise' from the sales team to the administration team, each opportunity builds the brand. If employees fail to act consistently with the brands they represent, other branding activities will suffer. A brand is not separate from the business; it is the way you do business. Full engagement by staff across the company is a winning formula.

In creating a brand, clear commitment to the brand development process and implementation by the CEO sets the framework for the brand journey. Senior managers leading by example and designated brand champions demonstrating how the brand translates into everyday working habits strengthen the framework. In developing a brand strategy, we suggest a steering committee with representatives from all sections of the company and, where appropriate, inclusion of influential stakeholders. This team does not create the brand, it provides inputs and debate and importantly, acts as 'ambassadors and emissaries' to other staff.

Implementing a new brand strategy invariably creates a need for change in the company. This should be welcomed as an opportunity to go deeper than logos and presentation elements and effect real change throughout the company. In a time of change you have to communicate very effectively and the best form of communication is leadership by example. Staff need role models and will be more likely to adopt brand values if management and supervisors 'live' the brand themselves.

In Asia, where senior management is frequently travelling to off-shore bases, it's always an opportunity to raise issues that impact on the brand, in addition to other operational issues. This high level of mobility makes it even more important to delegate brand management and brand champion roles both at home and offshore to keep consistency in the customer experience. This is true whether you are in the B2B or consumer business.

At BRR, we work hard to find relevant and creative ways to present the brand to our client's staff. Communication needs to be relevant, and stimulating. It can be with workshops, intranet, staff newsletters, emails, message-conveying games and any other innovation that works for a particular environment. Don't expect understanding, engagement, or change with one lengthy presentation, however well thought through or engaging the presentation is. We all have different ways of absorbing information. Rather, try short frequent engagement to create an understanding and focus on the issues.

For BRR, an integral part of developing the brand strategy is to establish a value chain for clients. The value chain represents the key contact points throughout a company's operation where the customer experience of the brand can be positively or negatively impacted. Clearly, the cumulative effect of even minor attitudinal and behavioural improvements at these brand contact points provides a considerable lift in brand equity.

Initiatives around branding have the ability to become highly effective change mechanisms, if approached in the right way.

Staff often sees their output only in terms of what they and their immediate colleagues produce. Only a very small percentage of staff actually sees the results of their efforts in terms of a solution for a customer. So the production, sales and administration can have differing views of the world. And they can often be worlds apart. BRR has encouraged companies to talk in terms of the value chain where each defined linkage within the company consistently adds value to the customer's experience. In this way, staff can start to appreciate their important role in the overall process and develop a more holistic and brand-friendly outlook.

It is the insights generated by staff using this approach which help to act as catalysts for behaviour change. The focus is on solutions not problems, with teams and individuals coming to their own answers and focusing on the insights.

Linking people's performance and evaluations into the brand further aligns the brand implementation with the business goals. Recognition and rewards must be relevant. It is also important to integrate these with other company programmes such as the 'People Developer Singapore' standard that gives organisations a systematic process to review human resource practices, staff development and training effectiveness.

The reality is that if your employees understand the brand promise and how to play their part in realising that promise and they are properly recognised for their efforts, everyone wins.