

Moving to the new brand world

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It never ceases to surprise me how “hit and miss” the marketing industry really is. It is likely the slowest industry to innovate. At present, a subterranean change is coming into sight. The models we have espoused, especially those of the last two decades, are now challenged by an inevitable tsunami, the arrival of holistic branding. Some call it the experience economy. Constructs such as positioning, segmentation, share-of-mind, traditional research methods, to name a few, are the way of the past. These ideas stress the conscious minds of consumers—a shallow repository that overflows with marketing drivel. Excessive expense is required to keep these ephemeral memories afloat. What’s also flawed is that these messages are invariably difficult to house in the mind because they have no profound meaning to customers. The parade of features and benefits, leadership statements and familiar promises are fleeting at best. It is time for organizations to harness a truly organizing principle.

The brand is now providing focus for the whole organization under new constructs. The brand is not the mark, nor is the identity or the name—but how people feel about it/you. Brands exist only in the minds of people. They are concepts, emotions, values—a belief system. Accordingly, everything is a brand: a company, products, services, people, even cities, politicians and governments. Brands are also experiences. Neural systems, social anthropology, transparency and championing now blend in a new and plausible paradigm. The processes appear complex at first when cast against the simpler ideas of the past; but they are powerful and truthful about what actually motivates people to act. The race is on to deepen connections between people and “their” brands.

What makes people connect with a brand? (I keep referring to “people” and not “customers” so you can visualize a human being and not an economic entity.) Creating a deep connection with people is not achievable unless it is authentic. It is a holistic blend of inner and external transformations. The brand’s values must be defined—values that are relevant and resonate deeply to your customers. All employees and marketing partners must buy-in and champion these values. The values must reach as far as social responsibility and maybe even social causes—mirroring the values in its customers.

The brand must transcend its product or service definition—emotionally and spiritually. A narrative must be built around the brand, one that meets high human needs. Every touch point with your brand must extend its values and the brand story— fulfilling the brand promise or meeting an expectation. I prefer exceeding that expectation with experiences.

Once a brand has achieved a deep connection with people it has indomitable brand strength—the only goal any corporation should have. Yet the brand must not rest but rather evolve—just as people do. Brand owners (I mean the customers) need to be captivated continually. So be creative, experiment and innovate while remaining true to your values. Be a good brand parent. Above all abandon the processes that deliver so little to the bottom line and to its customers and make the conversion to the new brand world.