

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Brand-Driven Leadership: Aligning Your Business to Succeed in a Challenging Marketplace

By Alice E. Wendt, Wendt Partners

As a business leader, you face unprecedented challenges in the marketplace: customers are confused, competition is fierce, markets are saturated and today's innovation becomes tomorrow's commodity. And the uncertain economy presents a triple threat—it undermines customer confidence, increases the risk of new investments and makes it easier for lower-cost producers to undercut your position. In addition, challenges within your organization also exist—often driven by divisions that make enterprise-wide change difficult to implement.

This raises an essential question: How do you respond effectively to the challenges of the marketplace and your organization without losing focus?

The answer is brand.

Leaders who commit to brand-driven leadership experience greater alignment, more innovation and stronger loyalty from employees and customers.

What is brand?

Brand is a set of conclusions that stakeholders reach about your organization based upon their impressions, experiences and understandings. This means that brand is something that you can design and influence, but not control.

In short, your objective is to define your brand and then deliver your promise. Focusing on both the definition of your brand, and the steps necessary to deliver on your brand promise, will ensure that you achieve results.

Internal strategies

You can begin by addressing five internal strategies that set the stage for brand success:

1. Define your vision. In a market saturated with companies touting the same messages of quality and value, your business can only achieve a breakthrough if you create a unique and compelling vision.

2. Craft your brand promise. The key to a successful brand promise is its specifics: what customers you intend to serve, how you intend to serve them and what experience they will have as a result of that encounter.

3. Align systems and processes.

How many times have you encountered a business that claims to offer an easy customer experience, yet any time you ask a question of the company's employees they claim ignorance, tell you they'll have to "look into it" or say that the information you need is in a different system? Alignment means eliminating these gaps on a daily basis.

4. Focus on learning. Empowered and educated employees are the cornerstones of a successful and efficient enterprise. The key is to go beyond training and focus on employee development, mentoring and support.

5. Commit to culture. The standard bearer for your business culture is you. Successful brand leaders are those who manage actively by moving around their business, talking with customers and employees, and staying connected.

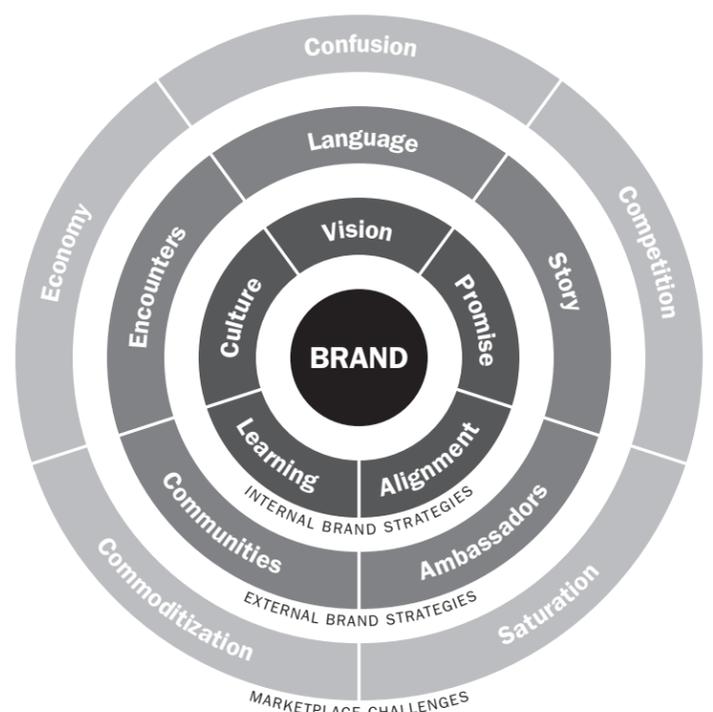
External strategies

With the five internal strategies established, it's time to look at five external strategies that can take your brand strategy forward:

1. Develop the language before the look. In order to design a corporate logo or marketing resource that reflects your brand, define that brand in words—what it represents, what it evokes and what it stands for.

2. Start with the story. What makes your business come alive in the marketplace best? The experiences of those whose lives are better because of it—your customers, employees and partners—described in vivid and powerful narratives and images.

Brand-Driven Leadership Model



3. Develop brand ambassadors. If stories are the backbone of a compelling brand, then the people behind the stories make the best storytellers. Developing and supporting these employees, customers and partners can supercharge not only your marketing efforts, but also your recruitment and retention efforts.

4. Focus on communities, not campaigns.

The evolution of social media only reinforces a point that has always been true—building a community around your business will always lead to lasting results and greater overall impact.

5. Choreograph brand encounters. The gold standard of brand-driven leadership is how well your company delivers powerful and reliable encounters to its customers. The components of the brand encounter include everything around the customer—environmental design, marketing communications, product packaging, order forms, phone scripts, Web site self-service tools and much more. Focus on the details and your customers will take notice.

The brand-driven leadership model focuses the energy of the brand promise on the organization as a whole, as well as on the details of specific product or service. An adaptable organization that simultaneously masters and maintains the core of its brand is a company that has successfully implemented brand-driven leadership. ■

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