



²⁵ Source: Kate Watts, Chime Communications

Brand marketing and your internal audience

Howard De Souza, the Seven Partnership

One area that is not thought about very often and is the most critical part of the customer journey is the brand experience, and the most important people are those that deliver it – the employees. What they think, feel, say and do influences consumer consumption of the brand. Their job is to inform people, and if they do a good job, they influence the financial performance of the organisation. And this is not just about sales. If customers have a good brand experience they will move into the category of repeat purchasers, and eventually to the top of the pyramid where they become your ambassadors and advocates. The most difficult thing in all of this is quality assurance and control. How do we impose it? People make decisions for rational and emotional reasons. They come to work to feed the kids and put a roof over their heads – but some will come for emotional reasons as well. And these emotionally engaged people are the ones that want to do the job well because they want to, not because they're paid to.

The concept of six sigma was developed 20-30 years ago as a quality improvement methodology, the issue being that there was a lot of wastage. The key principle of the methodology was that value is created on the factory floor, with a focus on reducing defects, manufacturing within specific tolerances, delivering on time and producing to specific budgets. Our factory floor is our people. I talked about employees being engaged, but recent research has found that only 30 per cent of employees are 'very engaged'. This is the group that love coming to work – who meet their friends there and who understand the corporate purpose and values, which they like and sell. This clearly impacts productivity, profitability, attendance and retention. More worryingly, while 50 per cent are neutral, 20 per cent are 'not engaged' i.e. do not care about their work. This means 2 out of 10 employees have the capacity to damage or undermine the brand experience.

When thinking about the brand experience, therefore, it is important that you don't believe your own spin. While companies regularly quote being the leader in their field, or one of the best places to work, remember that this is only based on those people that returned their evaluation forms: your performance should be judged in terms of the average performance, not the performance you deliver in the best case or the worst case scenario.

So, the job of the marketer, is to translate what is being said externally to the people who have to deliver internally, translating the brand promise into a favourable brand experience. This leads us to a classic schism between brand marketing and the brand deliverers. Brand marketing is perceived as being all about the outward-facing – building a relationship for the organisation and product with the 'stakeholders'. However, the internal communications with the brand deliverers are often left to the HR department. But the HR department is not the department with the skills to translate the vision to people on the

factory floor. The vision that needs to be communicated talks about the future and how the brand deliverers will be involved: it makes the vision relevant for them. This is not a job for an HR department focused on payrolls.

We may also have a democratic schism. Imagine an internal audit that asks employees all the right questions:

- Who are we?
- Where do we want to go?
- What sort of organisation do we want to be?
- Why should people buy into us?

The problem is that this is asking the questions of the wrong audience: if you want to design a car you don't just talk to the wheel designers; you have to go to somebody with the vision. And this is the leader. I'm not pooh poohing democracy altogether, because it is essential to have buy-in, but the vision and the essence of the brand has to come from the top and it is the leader that has to translate this for the rest of the organisation. Few organisations invest time in the little people.

One Japanese company had a 20 year plan. They made small bulldozers and they wanted to take on Caterpillar and beat them. It took twenty years but now Komatsu is there. They knew what they wanted to achieve and they set the goal. Similarly 30-40 years ago Honda wanted to be like General Motors. They wanted to sell good cars and to be in as many markets as possible and they now do that. It is the leader's responsibility to state the purpose and what the organisation stands for. They then achieve the buy in by asking:

- Do you understand?
- Do you agree?
- Do you know what you need to do?
- Does it make sense?
- Do you know what is expected of you?

And this is where the delivery schism can occur. Because the important things are the little things. We all love winning awards (and this depends on our attributes such as creative excellence or production excellence), but the thing that builds the business is the experience – how the phone is answered, how the person greets you when you walk in; how clean the toilets are, etc, etc.

So, rule one can be summarised as follows. Have a clear vision of:

- Who you are;
- Where you come from;
- What you want to be;
- How you will get there;
- What is expected of each person/function;
- How you will know you've arrived;
- How you reward positive participation;
- How you will recognise apathy and/or negative participation.

The last point is critical in all of this, coming back to those 2 out of 10 employees that are not engaged. Once you have identified it, of course, you need to address it – starting by taking people aside and being constructive, but eventually by having to take the hard way.

Rule two is to be honest about your:

- People;

- Ambitions;
- Team's motivation;
- Timeframe;
- Environment.

Rule three is critical. The journey to the promised land is filled with small steps:

- Plan a migration not telekinesis;
- Benchmark your starting point;
- Segment the journey for each 'audience' (e.g. admin, accounts, front of house);
- Ensure the vision is consistent, while journeys might differ.

In the example of one client, a new CEO arrived with a vision. However, the employees learned that every three years a new CEO arrived with a vision and having been there for 18-20 years they were pretty familiar with the cycle. So they did not deliver the new plans because they knew that in another 24 months they'd be overhauled and there would be another new person. Hence the need for a gradual process.

In ensuring that the vision is consistent, you need to be in control of the communications. Otherwise the essence of what you want to achieve gets distorted, distilled and diminished, like in a game of Chinese whispers.

Rule four is to empower the front-line deliverers. Commercial organisations talk about Key Performance Indicators but all this does is ensure the rational of what people do, rather than rewarding the emotional. Instead, reward the Vision-sharers. Ensure that people are asking what they can or have to do to deliver the brand promise. When Philips re-branded they issued everyone with a little credit card saying, 'Let's make things better'. This empowered the little people to ask whether decisions were making things better.

Rule five is to share successes with everyone. This means the first team and the boot room – when Chelsea won the Premiership, before they received the trophy, every single person involved, including the boot room, physios etc and their families, were given a few seconds in the limelight, coming out to the applause of the fans and there is no doubt that the manager has succeeded in building a strong sense of community. Share all your reviews and audience comments, with a commentary if they are negative explaining why and how things will be improved. Share the good news and bad news of the organisation, including an annual review: if you have set your goals, review your achievements and if you have not reached your targets then explain what you will do to improve things. And make the names on the letterhead – sponsors, patrons etc – real. What can they do to help the people who deliver feel good about themselves?

One final thought: the most critical element of a customer's journey is the 'close', not the sell.