



No one wants to work in a boring company, particularly the millennials

Employee communication key to brand building

- It is the game changer as it must address the 'heart' of the organisation – its people
- Brands and organisations need to take up the challenge to compete in the globalised economy



Guest
writer

by
Andy See

DIFFERENT people have different interpretations of what brand building means. Sadly, many equate advertising campaigns or logo changes to branding exercises, even though they only scrape the surface of a holistic brand building exercise.

Instead, brands must be built enterprise-wide and most importantly, inside out. Companies that fail to deliver on their brand promises will inevitably face the eventual erosion of trust among stakeholders.

As such, employee communication is, in fact, the true game changer.

It is the key ingredient for great brands and organisations because effective branding strategies must address the "heart" of the organisation – its people.

Employee communication can make or break a brand. Just like in

an orchestra, the CEO, acting as the conductor, gives direction and invokes life in the corporation's actions.

CEOs need to ensure that employee communication and external communication initiatives are seamlessly synchronised to reach the optimum level of positive impact on stakeholders.

Here are five simple yet important elements to achieve this:

Listen!

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears ..."

It's been more than 500 years since Shakespeare penned those lines for Mark Anthony to marshal opinions from various stakeholders at Julius Caesar's wake.

The need for today's leaders to listen to their stakeholders has not diminished. If you don't listen to your employees, there is no way you can communicate effectively with them.

As an example, listening exercises to gauge employee perspectives are hardly carried out, especially prior to embarking on an important business plan or the launch of a new product or service.

Most of the time, companies and brands focus their entire energy on undertaking consumer research, only to forget that great products can only sell if their sales teams believe in it!

Share the dream

Sharing facts and figures alone will not move your people. What drives them to give their best is your dreams for the organisation or brand.

Just like in the movie *The Greatest Showman*, Charity Barnum sings: "However big, however small. Let me be part of it all. Share your dreams with me. You may be right, you may be wrong. But say that you'll bring me along ... A million dreams is all it's gonna take."

Employees want their leaders to take them along in pursuit of their dreams. Passionate people build their careers to make dreams come true!

Tony Fernandes and his partners founded Air Asia on his dream of "Now, everyone can fly". This dream, which eventually became the company's tagline, has inspired every crew member to make it the World's Best Low-Cost Airline for the ninth time in a row at last year's Skytrax World Airline Awards.

Be open and honest

Tell it as it is, especially when it comes to employee communication. There will always be good and bad news, so communicating clearly and honestly goes a long way to winning employees' trust.

A case in point is in any streamlining or downsizing initiative during a merger or integration exercise.

It is critical that employees are first to receive news from the management, and more importantly, ensure they understand the rationale as well as the ensuing impact or processes.

Planning and timeliness

Many organisations tend to only focus on prioritising communications with external stakeholders,

particularly customers. This is a grave mistake.

While customer testimonies are critical, your employees are your best mouthpieces. They should be the first to know, and winning their hearts requires effort – just like any marketing strategy, employee communication needs to be planned, with timing being of the essence.

We have also seen how some of our clients are so successful in getting the internal team all excited when they make it a point to tell them first about the launch of a new product or service.

When the product eventually hits the market, the excitement spills over onto customers very quickly as well. This builds the right momentum and sales eventually comes in.

Have fun!

No one wants to work in a boring company, particularly the millennials. The tone and manner of how we communicate with our people, especially the younger talent pool who now make up the bulk of the workforce, has to change to be less formal and most all, fun too.

As a recent example of a former client, the CEO decided to make the post-merger office move to a single premise as a fun experience.

He initiated a "Move Day" where everyone packed their stuff and marched a few kilometres across busy streets to the new premises. It was such a fun activity for the staff instead of "just another office move".

There is no quick solution. Be it for external communication or internal employee communication, CEOs and senior management must consciously and conscientiously convey the organisation's key messages consistently, even though they may sound like a broken record.

Very few have carried out employee communications exceptionally well. Nonetheless, brands and organisations need to take up the challenge if they hope to compete in today's globalised economy. **FocusM**

Andy See is the founder and managing director of Perspective Strategies.