

A NEW APPROACH TO TRAINING YOUR “BRAND” TO BUILD SATISFIED CUSTOMERS

For so long now, marketing communication theories and practices have supported strongly the concept that creating strong brands adds value to the company's asset sheet. This is particularly true for large corporations and multinational companies that are "faceless" and have a large workforce, as recognising a product because of its brand association, is the way companies stay in business.

However, with smaller companies where personal contact is made with customers, especially in service industries, the strongest brand element that should receive a good portion of the advertising budget is the employee.

How can an employee be considered a “Brand” or be a brand builder? If we take the simple definition of a brand, which is normally quoted as "the personality that identifies a product, service or company", this fits in perfectly with the premise that employees (and their individual personalities), should be considered as an important marketing communications tool as well.

Therefore, employees should be considered as part of a company's brand, and I pose the following:

If a company has a workforce made up of long term employees that are committed and dedicated to the company, and its products and services, customers will subconsciously feel an attachment to these employees. This is true especially when they see and work with the same employees over and over again, closely and over many years, thus brand awareness and brand reliability, have been created by the employee. New customers will most likely be generated by word of mouth by existing customers and their satisfaction with the company and its reliability.

If companies with long term employees, who show genuine care for their customers and provide not only service, but a friendly, reliable and trustworthy approach, then consumer and customer "brand recall", is created by the employee.

The two scenarios above are only a few of the analogies that can be considered in correlation to the traditional approaches we see in most marketing literature.

If companies spend more time and money developing their employees by considering them as part of brand building strategies, it would add more value to their generic products and services and give them the edge on their competitors. We've seen in many management books that labour turnover is costly, but what about the harm or damage to the "brand" and the company itself?

Branding is not just about logos, symbols and signs, it's also about companies investing in developing their strongest brand - people who will keep customers coming back and happy!

But in times of economic crisis, is training an investment or expense? I liken today's economy, and what is currently happening with many companies, to an old tree that, after many years of care and bountiful fruit production, has started to wither and become weak. When first planted, it is nurtured and provided with the care, protection and sustenance it needs to grow and yield fruit. Whilst the tree produces fruit, the investment is considered worthwhile. Over the years, it becomes neglected and it doesn't receive as much care as in the past, as it is taken for granted that it will continue to produce and survive on its own with minimal attention.

However, its endurance also depends on many conditions, which either help it to flourish and grow, or threaten its existence. Companies, like trees, need to be constantly nurtured. Once set up, they need to constantly grow and develop, and together with the management and the workforce, supported and cultivated so that they can withstand the forces of time and external threats that could cause its demise.

The current economic environment is not a healthy one and business owners and their employees will need to take some time-out to consider how they could put a bit more love and care into it, by investing time, money and effort in training, so that when the economy starts to slowly come out of the recession, companies will be armed with the right tools to revive their full potential.

For businesses and their brands to continue to be successful, they have to be managed correctly by trained and qualified personnel. The future of businesses, especially in today's harsh economic climate, depends on satisfied customers.