

# Brands inside-out: Why employee brand engagement is so important

Billions are spent each year on branding and yet an essential part is often neglected – delivering the brand through employees. Time and again research studies show that what most influences how customers and external stakeholders think and feel about a company is their interactions with it. Brands are not just a logo, a lick of paint or an advertising campaign, they are the very DNA of a company and every touchpoint between the customer and the company needs to reinforce what the brand stands for.

Organisations with great corporate brands do five things well:

1. They have a clear brand, vision and values
2. Have employees who enthusiastically deliver what the brand promises
3. Make sure that all activities are aligned to the brand including recruitment, induction, training, communication, reward and recognition, processes and culture
4. Leaders and managers ‘live the brand’ through their behaviour – it’s not just rhetoric
5. They measure brand awareness, understanding and delivery, internally and externally.

The starting point for the organisation is with the customer: what experience do you want them to have at each stage in the journey? Customer journey mapping is useful in identifying what the experience is like and what the company can do to make sure the experience is the right one. Once the customer experience at each stage is defined, you can then set out the desired brand behaviours – what can the employee do to make sure the experience is right?

Think about an interaction in a shop, over the telephone to a call centre, checking in at an airport, arriving at head office reception: what is the difference between an employee who gets the task done and does the bare minimum and an employee who understands the DNA of the brand and makes the most of the opportunity to ensure the customer has the good experience that the brand promises? Behaviour is absolutely key. Every day, in every interaction employees have a choice as to how they behave. Are you making sure your employees are both able and willing to support your brand.

With one global airline that was refreshing its brand, we [Scarlett Associates] worked with every function to explore what the brand promise meant, what behaviours would support and what would undermine the customer’s experience. Functions consulted their staff so that when the brand launched, they had been involved in thinking

through what the customer experience should be like and what behaviours from them would support it.

With another airline we shadowed cabin crew through a couple of days to identify what the airline was doing to help them deliver the promised passenger experience and what was preventing them. The latter threw up all sorts of opportunities for the airline to improve the employee experience so that they could enhance the customer experience: improving the tone of communication between leaders and cabin crew, brightening up the cabin crew check-in area, checking that computers in this area were working properly, providing free refreshments.

With a theatre company, we designed and facilitated workshops with employees to think about the kind of audience each show would attract (families, tourists, baby boomers etc.) and therefore what kind of experience those customers would want from ushers, bartenders, the box office.

With a government agency, we ran a series of workshops to help employees identify the difference they could make to the customer experience and to help them to see the benefits to the customer, the organisation and to them personally.

Your employees are the core of your brand effectiveness. They need to:

- Understand the brand
- Know what behaviours from them will support the brand
- Feel motivated to choose the right behaviour.

You can't just tell employees what to do – to gain their support they need to be involved and reach their own insights about how they can contribute. This isn't rocket science but it does need careful planning, clear goals, hard work, creativity and the support of leaders.

The organisation must support employees: recruitment, training, reward and recognition, the physical environment – every aspect of your company must inspire, encourage and recognise the desired behaviours. Marketing, Human Resources, Learning & Development, Operations – every function needs to play its part and be aligned. Leaders and managers must understand their role and act as role models.

Endpoint help organisations bring their brand to life across vehicles, uniforms, branded environments and through employees. Working alongside brand engagement specialists we help companies ascertain the key brand touchpoints along the customer journey, and the behaviour employees must demonstrate at each to deliver the brand. We also identify the kind of support employees will need to do this.

Ultimately, strong brands are all about clarity: clarity about their essence, clarity about how to apply them and how to deliver them.

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