

Great Brands Aren't Display Cakes, They're Real To The Core

Today Idea Sandbox is Stop #3 for the virtual book tour featuring Denise Lee Yohn's book: [*What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principles that Separate the Best from the Rest.*](#)

Before I jump into the questions I had for Denise... I want to summarize my take on the philosophy of the book...



You've seen wedding cakes on display in the window of a bakery. Beautifully decorated, delicious-looking cakes.

The baker doesn't bake display cakes each day... they decorate hollow, plastic forms. These display cakes are an advertisement for the real thing.

Serve one of these at the wedding and the father-of-the-bride will be very disappointed.

Too often, brands simply focus on the frosting and decorating... their branding... the outside appearance... a promise.

When customers cut in – past that advertising frosting, and experience the company's products, services and experience – it is very disappointing to discover hollow plastic... That is, not delivering what was promised on the outside.

Too often that's what branding does... wonderful frosting on the outside without the same attention to what's being offered all through the inside. Great brands make sure they don't just look tasty on the outside, but delicious throughout every slice.

Everyone throughout the company should understand a company's values, mission, goals and have the tools to deliver them in every aspect of their job. Branding is implemented by all employees, not just in your ads.

Your brand isn't your frosting... it is your entire business. As Denise writes, "Your brand can't just be a promise it must be a promise delivered."

So, I did have the opportunity to ask Denise a few questions about the book...

Discussion with Denise

Idea Sandbox: Why is what you call a "brand-as-business approach" especially important in today's environment?

Denise: Today's consumers are very savvy and they're equipped with tools that enable them to see beneath a veneer that a company puts up, so image and reality must be closely aligned.

Also in practically every sector, competition is intensifying and so companies must differentiate themselves in substantive ways and deliver real value to customers.

Finally most business models no longer allow for discretionary spending, and shareholders don't tolerate it, so advertising budgets are getting squeezed — but expectations for brand awareness and preference remain. The solution to all of these pressures is an integral brand strategy.

Idea Sandbox: How can a company measure whether or not their brand-building efforts are working? We all want to believe what we do works... but how can we be sure?

Denise: Brand tracking research and social listening are good indicators of changes in external perceptions. You also should measure internal changes. Survey employees to see if they understand the brand platform and how it should impact their daily decisions and behaviors. Ask employees, executives, and external stakeholders to assess their groups and the organization as a whole on the adoption of the brand-as-business approach. Track your progress over time.

Idea Sandbox: Here's a question I haven't read anyone ask you yet. What prompted you to write this book?

Denise: Great brands – long-lasting, valuable brands like Apple, Starbucks, and IBM – are admired by many people in the business world and yet little is understood about how to develop one. I wanted to share the insights about brand-building that I had developed by researching and working on some of the worlds' greatest brands. And, to enable business leaders to build great brands for themselves.

Well, Denise we're glad you *did* write this book. Not only do you outline seven brand building principles, but you also provide detail on how to make them happen in our own brands.

Thanks for your time Denise and for answering our questions!

To gain more insight on Denise's book, check out the rest of the tour...

- Monday – [Jackie Huba](#)
- Yesterday – [Phil Gerbyshak](#)
- Tomorrow – [John Moore](#), [Brand Autopsy](#), and
- Friday - [Jay Ehret](#), [The Marketing Spot](#)