

Demystifying the Brand Building Process

The seven simple principles every company needs to know.

By Maria Minsker - Posted Apr 1, 2014

Branding just isn't what it used to be. Once a combination of taglines, logos, and advertisements, a good brand is no longer a constellation of siloed entities—it's a carefully constructed, holistic image that permeates every facet of a company's image. What does it take to build a successful brand? Denise Lee Yohn, author of *What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principles That Separate the Best from the Rest*, shared her insights on creating an outstanding brand from the inside out with Associate Editor Maria Minsker.

CRM: In your book, you focus on the idea of brand-as-business. What does this mean and what makes this management approach unique?

Denise Lee Yohn: Brand-as-business is a management approach that, simply put, means there's no difference between your brand and your business. Often what I find is that people tend to think of a brand as a logo, a name, or a tagline, but those are merely expressions of your brand. Your brand is the set of fundamental values and attributes that define the unique value that you create for customers and the way you engage everyone involved with your business. As a result, your brand is not something separate from your business—it is your business. When you adopt a brand-as-business management approach, you are building both your brand and your business at the same time.

CRM: This idea of brand-as-business comes together through your seven brand-building principles. Can you highlight a few?

Lee Yohn: The first principle, "great brands start inside," means that great brands start brand-building by cultivating a strong corporate culture inside their organization. In other words, culture is really what determines whether your brand is going to be embraced by employees and stakeholders. Another principle, which can sound surprising, is that "great brands never have to give back." This idea came from my observation that corporate social responsibility [CSR] is becoming a very popular notion in business circles. Most companies engage in specific activities in order to give back to their community, like a fundraiser for some green

group. But when you look at the great brands like Starbucks, Patagonia, and Ikea, what they're doing is not CSR, it's CSV: creating shared value. They're creating value for everyone that's involved with their business, not only for their customers. They're designing their supply chains, developing products, and engaging their workforce in ways that are more sustainable, and make a more meaningful impact on our world than any other traditional give-back program would.

CRM: Your fifth principle, "great brands sweat the small stuff," is all about crafting customer experience. Why is "the small stuff" so important?

Lee Yohn: Great brands know that every interaction that customers have with them will either build their brand image or diminish it. As a result, every interaction matters. The small things that an organization does through a combination of little touch points have a far greater impact on customers than big advertising campaigns or marketing programs. And it makes sense—your individual personal interaction is going to shape your opinion of a brand much more than reading a print ad will. So brands need to make sure that they're executing on every one of these touch points and that that execution is on brand.

CRM: Can you give an example of a brand that embodies some of these seven principles?

Lee Yohn: One principle I mention is "great brands avoid selling products," and Patagonia, an outdoor apparel retailer, is a great example of this. Patagonia certainly has very high-quality materials and technology in their products, but they're always seeking to relate that technology or that innovation in a very human form. If you look at its catalog, 75 percent of it consists of stories and pictures of people and it's like, "Oh by the way, this person just happens to be wearing this jacket and Patagonia gear." I think that's a very powerful way to hold people's attention and get them excited about the brand, and ultimately convert them to purchase. Ultimately, Patagonia exemplifies the power of seeking an emotional connection over just selling products.

CRM: Many of the tips in *What Great Brands Do* are geared toward B2C brands—how do they extend to the B2B space?

Lee Yohn: While there are dimensions that I would attribute more to B2C than B2B, these can apply across the board. In B2B environments, you might be selling a service or a technology, but ultimately, your people are your brand. They're the embodiment of your brand and are what your customers are buying. Because of that, it makes these principles that much more critical. This piece of software that you're selling, it's serving a purpose; but with technology in general, it's much easier for people to compete with you if you're only selling a thing as opposed to developing a culture. It's the culture that makes other businesses want to do business with you, so it definitely has an application.
