



## Motivate Staff With Messages That Target Them

### Internal Campaigns Are as Important as Your External Ones

By Denise Lee Yohn

*Published:* April 14, 2008

Company leaders by now have learned the value of engaging their employees with their brands. They've come to realize their internal stakeholders are just as important a constituency as external ones when launching a new business or breathing new life into an old one because they play critical brand-delivery roles. So companies now include internal audiences in their roll-out and repositioning plans.

But not all companies do this correctly. Leaders may try to use one campaign to reach internal and external audiences. While this approach sometimes works (think IBM's e-business effort), most of the time it doesn't. The same strategy, medium and message that motivate employees do not necessarily motivate customers -- and vice versa.

CEOs and CMOs must recognize that their audiences often have different histories and outlooks and must be engaged in different ways.

Under Armour would have done well to recognize that one size does not fit all when it comes to brand engagement. The company's Super Bowl ad failed to engage its target audience. The brand's mission is "to make all athletes better," and its products are billed as "performance trainers." However, people who consider themselves athletes serious enough to call exercise "performance" represent only a fraction of the Super Bowl audience.

So the media missed the target -- and so did the message. Serious athletes are motivated by competition and winning; they're not out to change the world, as Under Armour's ad suggests. They consider their bodies finely tuned instruments, not the lemming-like "prototypes" featured in the spot.

#### **Focus internally**

It appears the company confused an internal strategy with an external one. The process of creating the ad seemed to ignite employees' passions. To ignite consumers' passions, however, Under Armour should have employed an approach that clearly differentiated the brand. Instead of saying it is revolutionary, it should just have been revolutionary. Employees might respond to rallying cries; consumers tend to reject them.

McDonald's, on the other hand, is a company that got it right. In 2003, McDonald's newly installed leadership faced the daunting task of resurrecting the business from slumping sales and the brand from boredom and bad will. Executives recognized success would depend as much on their ability to engage their more than 450,000 employees as it would on prompting reconsideration among billions of customers.

They pursued complementary but distinctly different approaches to reach the two groups. For consumers, they launched the "I'm Lovin' It" campaign, bowing high-energy commercials that depicted "how people live, what they love about life and what they love about McDonald's." To employees, they distributed a booklet filled with quotations from company founder Ray Kroc. The book laid out the "standards for how we will run McDonald's today, tomorrow and forever."

McDonald's leaders knew a feel-good TV campaign would not be enough to inspire and refocus employees. Likewise, McDonald's had learned from a failed nostalgic campaign that externally communicating a look back would only reinforce consumers' perceptions of the brand as stodgy. Both approaches were emotional appeals, but they tapped their audiences individually. McDonald's has been on a roll ever since.

Indeed, internal stakeholders who are informed and inspired by the brand provide the fuel for a successful launch or repositioning.

Leaders shouldn't allow efficiency, laziness or hubris to lead them to think a single campaign is sufficient to reach different target groups with different priorities and perspectives. When pursuing brand engagement, it comes down to the most basic tenet of marketing -- know thy audience.



**Denise Lee Yohn** is a consultant who has helped marketers including Sony, Nautica and Road Runner operationalize their brands.