

BRAND AS BUSINESS

Close the Gap Between What

BY DENISE LEE YOHN

Today's pressure cookerlike business environment favors firms with focused execution. For example, both McDonalds and Chipotle achieved increased earnings per share after splitting into two separate businesses to increase each one's focus.

Few would argue the importance of focus. Yet how to focus is a subject of much debate. How, exactly, do you design your firm for maximum impact?

You could choose to focus on technology, sales, distribution, marketing, or even the flavor-of-the-month philosophy and reinvent your organization as “customer driven.” But because each of those options focuses only on a particular aspect of the business system, they all will fail to provide the results you seek. You need to look elsewhere.

A brand is a company's most foundational asset—therefore, it should be the focus point for your organization.

THE GAP BETWEEN WHAT YOU SAY AND WHAT YOU DO

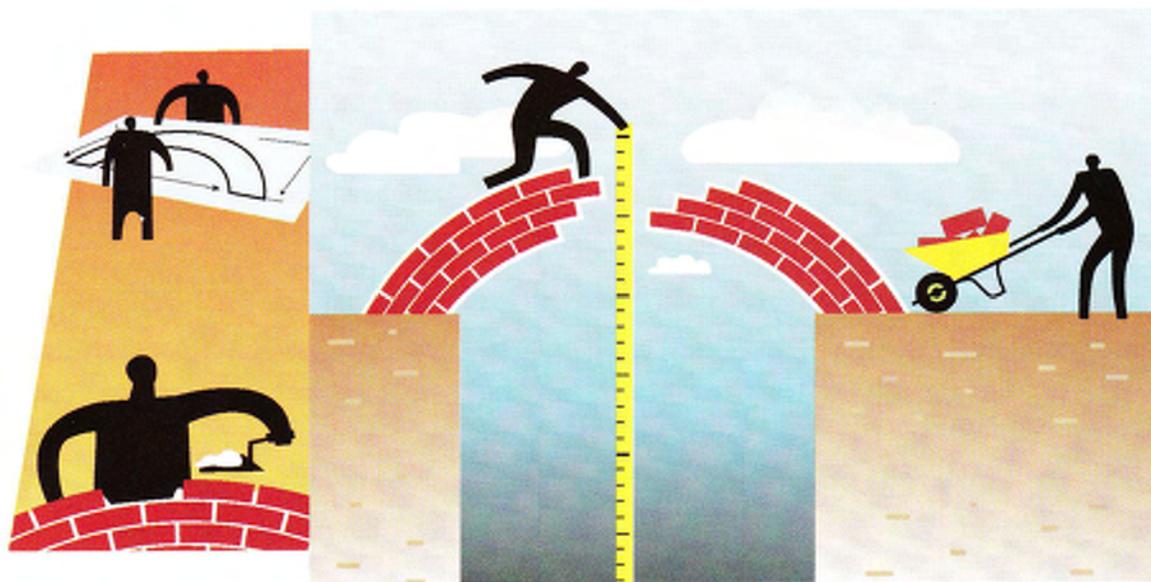
The fact is that most companies don't put their brand in the driver's seat of their organization. Company leaders seeking to maximize their brand impact often turn first to the “usual suspects”—the company name, logo, or advertising. But these are only expressions of the brand.

Companies that want to leverage the full value of their brand must express and operationalize it; that is, the brand should drive the organization, guiding every single business task.

When you fail to be brand-driven, your marketing rings hollow. Even the most creative advertising doesn't produce results because of the disconnect between the aspirational vision of what you say you are and the stark reality of what you really do.

Moreover, companies that don't develop their brands beyond symbols and ads fall short of their potential. Like a sugary snack that might produce a boost of energy but never fully satisfies, a salient brand might drive short-term results—but unless it's also substantive, you

You Say and What You Do



miss out on the opportunity to create something of enduring value that stands for something truly meaningful.

So there's a gap undermining today's businesses—the gap between what you say when it comes to brand and what you do; between the expressive value of the brand and its full business value.

THE “BRAND AS BUSINESS” APPROACH

There is another way. It involves the deliberate and systematic management of the business around thinking of the brand as the business. It transforms your brand from a symbol of your business into a driver of it.

“Brand as business” is a management approach for company leaders and executive teams to practice and implement throughout their organizations. It's the way to guide and power a business. It is not something to be delegated to or driven by marketing directors. Nor is it a one-time program or discrete initiative. And it's definitely not some high-falutin' philosophy that sounds great but doesn't change anything.

“Brand as business” is a way of doing business.

“BRAND AS BUSINESS” GENERATES SHARED INSIGHTS

The first step of the “brand as business” approach is applying brand thinking to the generation of insights about the business—its strengths, its challenges, and its opportunities. This approach to generating insights is really about sensing changes through the lens of the brand and using the brand to be prepared for them.

An organization might be faced with increased competition, adjusting to new market

segments, or needing to ensure consistent service as the business expands. Sales teams, regional offices, finance departments, and marketers may all attempt to address these challenges in their own way. Brand thinking enables an organization to share a single vision that unites these disparate perspectives.

Tools for generating brand-based insights include:

- ▶ **Brand diagnostics**—diagnostic evaluations of your brand’s current performance through three lenses:
 - Context—general and industry-specific trends, current and potential competitors
 - Company—assets, resources, organization, and culture
 - Customers—current and potential sources of business and their purchase drivers
- ▶ **Competitive landscape maps**—visual depictions of possible frames of reference (what you compete with), current and future positions of key competitors, and your brand’s optimal competitive position

By employing a brand perspective and brand-based tools, companies can generate insights that resonate throughout the organization.

“BRAND AS BUSINESS” DRIVES SUPERIOR PLANNING DECISIONS

The second step in operationalizing the brand is applying brand thinking to your portfolio of activities as you plan areas of focus. Planning is about making choices—which activities are you going to do and which are you not going to do?

Planning the “brand as business” way facilitates choices that are consistent with the values and attributes that you hope to embody as an organization and to deliver to customers and produces actionable plans that make sense to internal stakeholders and breaks down what they need to do into digestible chunks.

Tools for focusing and aligning planning include:

- ▶ **Brand architectures**—strategies for organizing, prioritizing, and managing the brands in your brand portfolio
- ▶ **Customer experience architectures**—frameworks for unifying the optimal brand experiences for different customer segments across different channels or touch points, and outlining the role of each and what each entails

Traditional strategic planning approaches hold their participants hostage with set time frames, linear processes, and limited and disparate perspectives generated by each business unit. The “brand as business” approach—flexible, outcome-oriented, and driven by a unifying, big picture—provides a superior means to make planning decisions.

“BRAND AS BUSINESS” GUIDES AND FACILITATES EXECUTION

The third step in bringing brand to the center of the company is to truly embed brand discipline in the execution of business activities through tools and processes that facilitate brand execution.

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Brand execution entails both horizontal engagement, in which all internal stakeholders share a common understanding of the brand, and vertical engagement, in which all members are fully engaged using their:

- ▶ *heads*—they’re knowledgeable about what the brand stands for and how it is positioned
- ▶ *hearts*—they’re inspired by the brand and motivated to change what they do and how they do it in order to operationalize the brand
- ▶ *hands and feet*—they’re equipped with and empowered by tools to use to interpret and reinforce the brand appropriately

Tools for facilitating execution include:

- ▶ **Brand toolboxes**—collections of tools that inform, inspire, and instruct internal stakeholders—for example, decision trees that guide people through key decisions so that the outcomes support the brand; and interactive experiences that train employees how to bring the brand to life for customers
- ▶ **Brand touch point wheels**—visual representations of every touch point between your brand and the outside world and how different groups of internal stakeholders impact them

The overall goal of “brand as business” execution is to weave the brand perspective into business execution and to bring an operational ethic to brand development efforts.

EVERYONE IS A BRAND OPERATOR—INCLUDING YOU

It might be easy to interpret the “brand as business” approach as one that leads companies to focus more on marketing, allocating bigger budgets to marketing departments and creating bigger jobs for marketing directors. But that’s not the point at all.

“Brand as business” doesn’t shine the spotlight on brand managers. It challenges everyone in the organization to shift their thinking about their responsibilities— from their traditional job description to their role as operators of the brand who develop, nurture, and activate the brand in their daily decision making and actions.

“Brand as business” is a call to everyone—including you. *MW*

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