



Back to list



Prev.

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An interview with Kissinger Group's Sondra Kiss and Senior Consultant Denise Lee Yohn.

In this issue of Be Nimble we talk with Kissinger Group Principal Sondra Kiss and Senior Consultant Denise Lee Yohn about their presentation at the ACMP Convention in Orlando a few weeks ago.



KG: The title of your presentation was: "Branding and Marketing a Change Initiative, Secrets from Madison Avenue." How do Madison Avenue branding practices relate to change management?

DLY: When I researched a range of brands for my book, *What Great Brands Do*, I found that great brands like Apple, Starbucks, Amazon, and Zappos conceive of their brands as strategic platforms. Like a political platform, a brand platform outlines what the brand stands for, what it is trying to accomplish, how it compares to other options, what makes it different and relevant. They use their brands as management tools to fuel, align, and guide everything their organizations do. As a model for implementing a change initiative, this approach makes a lot of sense.

SK: We all have an example of a print ad or commercial that we saw many years ago that we still remember in great detail today. How many commercials and messages have you been exposed to since? So, why do you still remember that one? The answer is simple. It appealed to your heart and so it stayed with you. Great brands impress and influence us by telling stories that appeal to our hearts as well as our minds. Change management practitioners are in the influence business too and this idea is critical to the success of change initiatives.

KG: OK, so I have my Strategic Brand Platform. What's next?

DLY: Once you have a clearly articulated brand platform, the engagement program produces focus and unity throughout the organization by achieving two kinds of alignment. There's vertical alignment – meaning, within each person, there is alignment between what they know, what they feel, and what they do. The engagement program informs people about what the change entails, so people understand it in their heads. It also inspires people to make changes themselves and support changes in others by speaking to their hearts. And it provides instructions and gives them tools so people can change their behaviors.

The engagement program also facilitates horizontal alignment across different stakeholder groups. It engages internal stakeholders from executives to managers to employees, and external stakeholders since it's usually just as important that groups like your vendors and distributors are enrolled in the change as well.

KG: What are the elements of a successful engagement campaign?

DLY: There are many answers to that question, but I can give you a few examples.

At Sony we created an Intranet site where people could go to learn about the brand, access tools, and participate in digital conversations. The online experience was designed to help people discover the content they needed and to go as deep as they wanted to learn



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content they needed and to go as deeply as they wanted to learn about different subjects. We held contests in which employees submitted examples of ways they had operationalized the Sony brand in their work.

When HP introduced its Invent platform in the mid-90's, it created some special artifacts to engage people with the cultural change it was seeking, including a 3-volume collection of books – one that explained the change, one that included instruction and inspiration for making changes in people's daily decision-making, and one that included ways to share the change with outsiders.

KG: What role does company leadership take in all of this?

SK: When I first starting working with consultants, I realized that the top consultants all asked the same questions before agreeing to work on an initiative; "Who is the executive sponsor for the program?" A strong and visible executive sponsor will articulate the reason for change, help navigate an organization's political minefield, ensure that the right resources are available and generally carry the flag for the initiative. This is a critical element for branding your change initiative – without persistent executive sponsorship, the brand will never take hold.

Another important leadership role in this process is that of the ambassador. These are key influencers who will provide active support, driving positive word of mouth about the initiative and facilitating the engagement rollout.

KG: So let's break it down for our readers, what are the specific steps when putting these ideas into action?

SK: There a five primary steps and organizations need to determine the appropriate level of investment and effort for each. First, engage leadership and secure sponsorship. Next, identify and articulate the brand platform, develop the communications/engagement plan, and enroll ambassadors for the program. Finally, roll-out the communications and engagement plan to the organization, monitor its progress and course-correct as necessary.

KG: Any final thoughts?

DLY: As consultants and service providers, external or inside an organization, our challenge and opportunity is to make change really happen. That's why Chinese proverb really applies:

"Tell me, I'll forget.
Show me, I'll remember.
Involve me, I'll understand."