

MARCH 2019

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DENISE LEE YOHN
WILL SHOW YOU HOW
DURING HER KEYNOTE
PRESENTATION AT
IHRSA 2019





Brand champion: Denise Lee Yohn

Denise Lee Yohn

This leading brand expert will explain how to take your brand 'from good to great' during her IHRSA 2019 keynote presentation

By Craig R. Waters

CBI: The title of your keynote address is "The Fusion Formula: Brand + Culture = Results." Let's start with the first factor in that equation: *brand*. How do you define "brand" ... or, rather, "brand identity"?

DENISE LEE YOHN: In this context, I use "brand," or "brand identity," to refer to the way that your organization/product/service is understood and perceived externally.

CBI: And the second: *culture*. How do you define corporate culture?

DLY: Culture is the way the people in your organization behave, as well as the attitudes and beliefs that inform them—basically, "the way we do things around here."

CBI: What, in brief, is the connection—the relationship, the dynamic—between the two?

DLY: Your brand and culture should be mutually reinforcing and inextricably linked. When you fully integrate and align the two, you create incredible power for your organization.

CBI: The subtitle of your book *Fusion* suggests that by integrating—perfectly aligning—brand and culture, companies can achieve greatness. How so?

DLY: Fusing your brand and culture produces a number of results that can lead to greatness. You're able to win the war for customers, or members, because you gain their trust. You pass the test of authenticity that so many people apply to the companies they do business with these days. You've demonstrated that you really are what you say you are.

You also can win the escalating war for talent by attracting and retaining employees who believe in your vision, and will go the extra mile to help achieve it. You become more efficient as an organization and improve your outcomes, because everyone is focused on the same goal; people aren't wasting time or money trying to figure out the right thing to do.

CBI: You've worked with and report on some of the world's best-known corporate brands. An example, if you would, of a firm that's done a great job of wedding brand and culture.

DLY: Amazon provides an excellent example. Amazon has a single, unifying drive behind its internal culture and its external brand. Its distinctive organizational culture fosters a performance-driven environment that fires up employees, inspiring them to innovate to provide an outstanding, continuously improving customer experience. Its brand identity is based on delivering a disruptively innovative customer experience. →

Highlights

- » Brand + Culture
- » Brand aspirations
- » "A Culture of Yes"
- » Integrating CX and EX

Denise Lee Yohn is an author, speaker, consultant, and the go-to expert on brand leadership for national media outlets, including *Forbes*, *Entrepreneur*, *Fast Company*, the *Harvard Business Review* blog, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and CNBC and FOX Business TV. She's the author of several books, including *What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principles That Separate the Best from the Rest*, and, her latest, *Fusion: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies*. Yohn has served as lead strategist for advertising agencies for Unilever, Land Rover, and Burger King, and headed Sony Electronic's first-ever brand office, serving as its vice president and general manager of brand and strategy. She's headed her own independent consulting firm since 2004, which employs the brand tagline of "Helping you achieve brand leadership." Yohn has been an enthusiastic member of 24 Hour Fitness for more than 20 years. —I

CBI: Expand on that notion a bit more, if you would.

DLY: Everyone at Amazon is focused on one thing: excellence on behalf of the customer. No one needs to expend extra energy figuring out what to do, or how to behave, to achieve what the company wants its brand to stand for in the world. Customers have rewarded the organization's single determination with their esteem, loyalty, and, more importantly, their dollars. And employees have recognized Amazon's distinct culture by making it one of the most desirable companies to work for.

CBI: Given the fact that you once danced with a professional ballet company, have climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, and have served on the board of San Diego Sports Innovators (SDSI)—we suspect you belong to a club. Your thoughts on its brand and culture

DLY: You're right—I'm a gym rat, aka fitness enthusiast, and a former certified aerobics instructor too! I've been a member of 24 Hour Fitness for nearly 20 years now. In addition to the great value it offers, I appreciate its wide range of offerings—classes,

and technologies that they can incorporate into their business.

So, yes, SDSI, or an organization like it, could be very relevant to some IHRSA members.

Anyone who's interested in learning more should reach out to me, and I can connect them with the organization.

CBI: You stress the importance of a company having a *distinct*—as opposed to an *ideal*—culture. Please elaborate.

DLY: Beyond a certain baseline, there really is no universal definition of a "good" or "ideal" culture. Every organization is different, so its culture should be too. It doesn't matter if your company culture is friendly or competitive, nurturing or analytical. It should cultivate the attitudes and behaviors that enable your people to produce the specific results you're looking for.

Your culture must be as distinct as your brand. And, in fact, the right culture for you is the one that is integrated and aligned with your brand. That way, everything that everyone does delivers on your brand.

I've developed an online tool that can help you determine the kind of core values and culture you should be cultivating in order to successfully support your brand identity or desired brand identity. You can access it for free at deniseleeyohn.com/fusion.

CBI: You also emphasize the importance of "engaging" employees and customers, and of "managing" their respective experiences, in the same way. What do you mean?

DLY: Engaging employees and customers is about developing and delivering meaningful interactions with them, and, ultimately, creating valuable relationships with them. Customer experience (CX) is the "new marketing." Thanks to the power of online reviews and the importance of customer loyalty, CX influences brand perceptions and brand performance just as much as marketing used to. So businesses must deliberately

"A company's purpose is its *why*. ... Having a meaningful purpose, or being a 'purpose-driven' company, is critical in today's cluttered, ultracompetitive, choice-overloaded world."

CBI: Let's talk about health clubs. Is there a club brand that, in your opinion, is doing a good job of practicing what you preach? Tell us a bit about it.

DLY: I'm not sure if you'd consider SoulCycle a "health club," but, given that their business model is similar to that of many IHRSA members, I'm hoping it makes sense to talk about them. I understand that the internal culture at SoulCycle is as inspiring, empowering, and hard working as their brand is known to be. When I interviewed CEO Melanie Whelan a few years back, she described how one of SoulCycle's core values is "A Culture of Yes"—which means that everyone in the company is committed to saying "yes" to riders, and doing whatever it takes to satisfy their desires.

That "yes" mindset is part of what people know and love about that brand.

So SoulCycle has a healthy, vital culture; a strong and valuable brand; and tight integration and alignment between the two.

equipment, services, etc.—and its convenience. Not only has there always been a location convenient to my home, wherever I've lived, but it's also great to be able to go to other locations when I'm traveling, and at all hours of the day and night.

CBI: A word or two, if you would, about San Diego Sports Innovators—a unique and interesting organization. Might the concept have value for club operators?

DLY: SDSI is a nonprofit that's focused on the sport and active lifestyle industries. It offers mentoring and accelerator programs to start-ups and entrepreneurs, and industry-leading content and a sense of community to business leaders. SDSI is where a start-up in the industry—for a club, product, platform, etc.—can obtain the resources and mentoring they need to get their business off the ground. It's also where established club operators can learn about innovative products, services,

design and manage CX to make it personal, emotional, and on-brand.

It's just as important to design and manage employee experience (EX), which is the sum of all the interactions an employee has with your organization—from the first moment they consider working for you, and throughout all the experiences, steps, and stages of their employment.

CBI: So, CX and EX—two factors, it seems, in a critical corporation equation. What do you do to generate—your word—fusion?

DLY: To produce the most powerful experiences for customers and employees, you need to directly and explicitly integrate your EX with your CX. When people have an experience, as employees, that's clearly and distinctively on-brand, they're more likely to deliver that sort of experience for customers. As they recognize the benefits of the brand

themselves, they not only acquire the motivation to deliver them to customers, but also the understanding of what it takes to do so. And, if they notice a gap between their actions, or capabilities, and what it takes to deliver excellent CX, they often develop an interest in closing that gap—they can accomplish that by learning new skills, and by working with others to find new ways to do so.

Ultimately, they feel more ownership for delivering on your company's brand promise.

So, what should you do? You should align EX and CX with the same values

and priorities; create opportunities for all employees to interact directly with customers; and provide employees with the insights and tools to evaluate how they and their teams are performing with respect to CX.

CBI: To “fuse” brand and culture, you've suggested, “Start by clearly identifying and articulating your brand aspirations—what you want your company to stand for in the world.” Amplify on that, if you would. →

AN 'ATOMIC' ATTRACTION

Denise Lee Yohn, an author and one of the world's leading brand experts, will speak on “The Fusion Formula: Brand + Culture = Results” on Saturday, March 16, from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., during IHRSA's 38th Annual International Convention & Trade Show in San Diego. Her appearance is generously sponsored by Gympass. For more information, or to register for the event, log on to ihrsa.org/convention. —I



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CBI Interview

DLY: A company's purpose is its *why*—why it does what it does, why it exists. Having a meaningful purpose, or being a “purpose-driven” company, is critical in today's cluttered, ultracompetitive, choice-overloaded world. Every business must have a clear reason for being. You need to play an invaluable, irreplaceable role in people's lives, and you must live out that purpose convincingly, or your customers can easily be lured away by any one of your more deliberate competitors. Likewise, many employees—especially millennials, who compose the largest group of workers today—want to work for companies that have a strong sense of purpose beyond making money.

So—bottom line—you need to identify and articulate an overarching statement of your purpose, essence, or core idea.

CBI: Who gets to do that—identify and articulate the company's brand aspirations?

DLY: Usually, it involves a process of discovery—uncovering the original reason that the founder started the business, or examining the mission that currently motivates the people in the organization. Customers, employees, and other stakeholders, such as investors, should inform the process, but the top leaders should spearhead it. They're also the ones who, ultimately, should lock them in, because they best understand their strategic intent and their vision for the business.

CBI: Countless business experts have observed that “You can't manage what you can't measure.” How do you measure brand?

DLY: Brand value can be measured by price elasticity, customer equity, financial valuation, and other external metrics. Well-designed employee surveys that track how thoroughly employees are engaged can provide

a sense of performance with respect to culture. Assessments—conducted by those inside and outside the organization—are the best way to measure the fusion of brand and culture.

CBI: You've noted the value of being able to describe your brand in a single, simple phrase. What phrase personifies Denise Lee Yohn's “brand”?

DLY: “Helping you achieve brand leadership.”

CBI: Finally, given that you're quite familiar with the San Diego area, what local attraction do you think IHRSA 2019 attendees shouldn't miss out on?

DLY: Do restaurants count as an attraction? Then, if so, get yourself to a taco shop such as Lucha Libre, City Tacos, or El Zarape! —I

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