

CHAPTER TWO

The People Powered Brand

View from 30,000 feet

Companies often treat Brand Strategy separately from Corporate Strategy and Operational Strategy. The best companies know better. They integrate all three. Viewing company brand in a larger marketing context establishes a framework for the branding effort—a process of understanding the current state . . . envisioning a future state . . . and aligning the organization’s people.

Chris Speaks

As a warm-up to the detailed steps of the *People Powered Branding* process, Joe and I will take you through a big picture overview. We’ll cover the *why*, the *what* and the *how* behind our process. Once you see it laid out, we hope you’ll find our method makes sense from the standpoint of simplicity, logic and “do-ability.”

If you’re wondering when you can begin the actual brand building work, don’t worry. The chapters that follow will go deeper into the “how-to” steps. What’s important now is being clear about the path we’ll be taking you on—and for you to understand the rationale behind it because someone, at some point, will likely ask you to justify your decision to use the people-powered branding process. This chapter will help you respond. To get started, let’s have Joe introduce the supporting principles for our approach.

Joe Speaks

In the previous chapter, I told you I'd represent the "inside the company" view. Senior managers inside many B2B companies often view branding as a *Black Hole* where they throw money in and nothing seems to come out." I say this partly because that's how I once viewed branding—that is, before I understood its true business purpose. Let me put some context around this . . .

Over the years, I've seen senior leaders expend lots of effort on developing their Corporate Strategy. They describe in great detail where they want to take the company in the long term, often in 5-to-10-year horizons. They may include future-oriented decisions such as R&D focus, manufacturing and infrastructure plans, matters of finance, workforce and so on. Much of the work I did in my role as an executive leader dealt with Corporate Strategy.

Senior leaders and mid-level managers also invest lots of time building their Operational Strategy. These are the annual plans that dictate what the company will do, and set out to achieve, in the current year. Ideally, both long term Corporate Strategy and short term Operational Strategy



Strong brands are powered by linked and aligned strategies

Weak brands: result when Brand strategy is separated or ignored altogether.

Strong brands: develop when the three key strategies are linked.

point in the same direction. In other words, they should be aligned. And for many companies, they are. But where should the corporate brand and branding fit in?

For the best companies, Brand Strategy is also linked and aligned with Corporate and Operational strategies. I contend we don't see a lot of this in companies marketing considered purchase B2B brands. We do see, however, evidence of it among leading consumer brands.

Earlier I said B2B considered purchase marketers should not follow the consumer products branding *process*. But when it comes to successfully aligning Corporate, Operational and Brand Strategy, I wholeheartedly suggest you attempt to arrive at the same place as the top consumer brands.

To make my point, I'll use a familiar brand, Apple, as an example.

Apple customers will tell you there's something special and different about Apple products. They'll tell you it's not only what they do or how they look and feel, but also the ideas they represent and how they make the user feel that make them so "Apple-y."

So who's responsible for all that "Apple-y-ness?" When you study the company, you find it's nearly impossible to point to any one area or strategy.

Do the products look so cool, perform so well and make users feel so good because of the way they're designed? Manufactured? Packaged? Displayed in their stores? Depicted in their TV ads and websites? My answer is "yes" to all.

Digging deeper, who is responsible for how their devoted users feel about the products? Is it R&D? Manufacturing? Operations people? The brand people? Again, my answer to all is "yes."

Furthermore, which of Apple's strategies are employed to produce all of these "yes's?" All of them! Apple (at least to this point) is a model example of a company that closely aligns its Corporate Strategy, Operational Strategy, and Brand Strategy.

However, many companies—especially those marketing highly technical, B2B considered purchase products—consider the corporate brand a standalone tactical discipline, something apart from the company's big strategic issues and not a core function of the business. They view the

company brand and branding as a marginal promotional activity. Consequently, caretaking of the brand gets relegated to middle managers in communications, marketing, or even the sales department. For this type of company, the corporate brand is rarely seen as a vital business concern deserving of high level strategic thought, planning and resourcing. In the event corporate branding does make its way onto senior management's agenda, it's often only for budgetary reasons. In other words: how much is being asked for, or has already been spent? Seldom is the corporate brand examined in terms of business purposes served and results achieved. No wonder senior managers may think of branding as a Black Hole. Most of the time they only hear about how much the company branding effort costs!

That's not how I see the world, but many people do hold this view. So let's get to the core of this issue. Why does a corporate brand merit time, attention and investment from a company's senior level managers? Let's see how my colleague does answering this one.

Chris Speaks

Before I answer your question, Joe, I think it's important we get grounded in a few basic concepts. First is the larger framework into which brands fit. I'm talking here about Marketing. Next, I want to make sure we're all working from a common definition of "brand."

There are countless ways of defining Marketing: what it is, what it does, and how to do it. You've no doubt heard of the "4Ps" of Marketing: Product, Place, Price, Promotion. Over the past few years, Joe and I have been working on a different way of looking at marketing and have developed our own framework that condenses the discipline into four simple questions. We call this approach the "4Q Marketing Framework" and we use it daily. In our new model, marketing, which encompasses branding, involves answering these questions (the 4Qs):

1. What to do?
2. What to say?
3. How to say it? and
4. How to get it heard?

The accompanying diagram shows how these fit together:



Question #1 (What to do?) deals with Strategy.

This question speaks to all the choices you make on how to go to market. The issue it addresses is strategy. What is strategy? I particularly like this definition: deciding “where and how to compete.” Strategy also includes your positioning.

In his book *Ogilvy on Advertising*,¹ David Ogilvy described positioning (an idea created by Al Ries and Jack Trout in their book *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*²) as: “what the product does and who it is for.” Ogilvy worked mainly on consumer product brands, yet I believe his definition works well for company brands when modified slightly to say: “what *you* do and who *you* are for” (*you* being “the company”).

Question #2 (What to say?) addresses Messaging.

These are the ideas, values, and words you use to communicate what’s desirable and unique about your company. You’ll hear this referred to as your Value Proposition. Messaging also includes the “proof points” you use to back up and support what you say. In chapter five, we’ll describe

our method for creating and structuring messages that are people powered *and* aligned with your brand. Our process involves crafting concepts that you can deliver in three seconds and 30 seconds in all your marketing and personal communications.

Question #3 (How to say it?) speaks to Communications.

Here, you conceive the tangible forms for your messaging. Ad agencies have traditionally owned this space with their creativity and “big ideas” that give life and expression to brands. Answering this question also involves devising the tactical plan to carry the big ideas to your audiences in all forms. Words, pictures and media—in all forms: owned, earned and paid—come into play here.

Question #4 (How to get it heard?) consists of Implementation.

At this point, you set your branding into motion. You produce and deploy the creative work through the tactics from your plan. And, you align your people to the brand through Enrollment (more on this in chapter six). Many companies do the first part of implementation. They execute and deploy the tactics. However, few understand and have a process for effectively accomplishing the second piece—people alignment. Remember, to truly succeed in the marketplace, a “considered purchase” company must align the behaviors of its people to the brand. Joe has made a career out of getting people aligned to brands. The process he will teach you later in this book lets you benefit from his knowledge and experience of how to get this accomplished.

Now that we understand the Marketing framework, let’s move on to defining the concept of “brand.” Much has been discussed and written on this topic, but what’s most important is how *you* and *your company* define “brand” and “corporate brand.” Your answers will determine whether the corporate brand and branding should occupy a place of strategic importance in your organization . . . or not. To get your thought process started, let me share how we view things.

Some years ago, I ran across what I believe to be a very good definition of brand (which I have edited slightly). I like it because it very simply sums up what is often an overly complicated idea. According to Colin Bates, who operates a UK consultancy by the name of Building Brands, Ltd.:

“A brand is a collection of perceptions in the mind . . .”

I confess to removing the words “of the consumer” at the end of the above phrase from Colin’s original description. I did this in order to make the definition more relevant to B2B considered purchase markets because, as we know, these markets comprise many more people than just the end consumer.

Simon Knox and David Bickerton (Cranfield School of Management, UK) offer this useful definition of “corporate brand”—and include Joe’s concept of behaviors (using the King’s English):

“A corporate brand is the visual, verbal and behavioural expression of an organization’s unique business model.”³

And for a final perspective on brand, I’ll offer this definition for consideration—from my co-author Joe Bannon:

“Brand is what people think of your product or company *in absentia*” (when you are not there).

Joe’s definition takes a little different view, but his and the one from Colin both treat brand as an intangible—not as a thing. And while Knox and Bickerton include tangibles, it’s clear they describe the corporate brand as a fusion of many different and varied elements. This means brand is not a logo. Or a color. Or a name. Although any or all of these may contribute to our perceptions.

For our purposes, it’s important to understand that brand deals with what goes on in people’s minds—a summation of experiences, attitudes, opinions, feelings and thoughts—a blending together of the real with the perceived and imagined.

So now that we have a common understanding of what we mean by “brand,” it’s fair to ask: Is brand the stuff of serious business? Is how people

perceive a company of strategic importance? And is the corporate brand worthy of attention at the highest levels of an organization?

Before you answer, first consider what author and management guru Peter Drucker once said: “The purpose of a business is to create a customer.”

Earlier, Joe addressed the brand importance issue a little differently. He gave me the challenge of explaining why brands and branding merit time, attention and investment from a company’s senior level managers. Here’s my response: Because perceptions contribute to customer creation, corporate brands are central to the basic purpose of every business. And that makes brands worthy of attention at the highest levels of every organization. This goes for product and company brands alike. **WARNING:** If you believe otherwise, I’m afraid the rest of this book may disappoint you!

Still with me? Good. Now that we understand the definition and importance of “brand,” let’s turn our attention to *branding*.

Joe Speaks

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, a brand is what you have. It is the current state. *Branding* is what you do—the sum of all activities a business undertakes to affect brand perceptions. This means branding is future-state oriented—even in cases where the desired future state is *status quo*.

By now, you know this book focuses on corporate brands. The method works for product brands, too, yet in our minds, the corporate brand must take prominence over product brands for several reasons:

1. Corporate brand affects the entire enterprise: all its people, products, services, customers and stakeholders (shareholders, suppliers, business partners, government authorities, industry associations, neighboring businesses and neighboring residents of corporate facilities). On the other hand, most product brands mainly touch subsets. The corporate brand speaks to how you do things. It speaks to what people can expect from you. It speaks to the quality of every product and service you offer. In many cases, the corporate brand serves as a *de facto* guarantee that your product brands and

your people will do what they say they will do. What other asset can do this much for the enterprise?

2. In many companies, product brands receive hyper-emphasis. Most companies just seem to be better at product marketing than they are at expressing the virtues and values of the company. I see evidence of this every day. If your company is like most, you'll see people in sales, R&D, manufacturing, marketing, customer service, billing and every other department dealing with product brands on a daily basis. Yet the enduring company brand that all its people and customers have in common—the asset with the greatest number of touch points inside and outside the enterprise—is often the one most forgotten and least cared for. Does this make any sense?
3. Copying products has never been easier, and it's bound to get even easier. But can someone copy a company's brand, culture and essence? Nearly impossible. It makes sense that more and more companies realize the wisdom in differentiating and branding at the corporate level. It's a good long-term business proposition. I'm not telling you to give up trying to differentiate products and product brands. What I am saying is that corporate branding, when executed properly, creates lasting competitive advantage in the marketplace.
4. For some companies, the corporate brand may be their only brand. In other words, the company brand and what they sell are essentially one in the same. This goes for all types of service firms and suppliers of component materials and ingredients as well. Some companies in these categories sell branded products and services, but many do not. Think of professional service firms: IT providers/computer programmers, architects, accountants, engineering and law firms, and consultants in scores of industries. With service brands, no tangible goods change hands between buyer and seller. Therefore, their people's ability to communicate what the company stands for *through their behaviors* becomes all-important to the brand.

(Remember the 80–20 rule?) The same goes for services such as construction, fabrication, assembly, repair and refurbishment—as well as some raw ingredients and materials commodities (such as metals, chemicals and goods sold on a chemical, formulation, or standard spec basis vs. a proprietary brand name).

Al Ries, who gave birth to the concept of “positioning,” had this to say about the importance of corporate brands: “Every company should have a powerful company brand, but they don’t.”⁴

I agree with Al. All companies, especially those marketing B2B considered purchases, should have a powerful company brand. I just told you *why*. Now let’s look at the *what* and *how*.

Chris Speaks

At the highest level, in order to create a powerful company brand, at the very least, you must do these three things:

1. **Understand the current state of the brand**, inside and outside the company.
2. **Develop a “future state” brand**. Create a strategy, position and message that is consistent, credible, desirable, unique and “doable” (achievable) by your organization over a long time horizon—our Five Foundations.
3. **Get your people (and your marketing) on board**. Align what your people do and say (their behaviors) and your marketing with the “future state” brand you envision.

The people-powered branding method will help you accomplish this. It consists of five steps.

Later we’ll dive into the fine points. For now, let’s quickly view the whole process:

Step 1: Brand Discovery – *Understand current reality and what’s possible*. Building a people-powered brand begins by assessing where you’ve been, where you stand now and where you want

to go. Ultimately, your branding must work to narrow the gap between your current and desired states. Brand Discovery gives you the *understanding* and *insight* to drive brand strategy and implementation. It involves asking questions, both inside and outside your organization, about your company, your products, your industry, your competitors and your customers. The goal: to identify issues, trends, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities within your company and the marketplace. My guess is you've done some work like this in the past. However, our method uses a fundamentally different, *people powered* process, designed specifically for considered purchase B2B brands. You'll learn Step 1 in the next chapter.

Step 2: Brand Envisioning – *Prototype the desired brand.* This phase merges reality, vision, strategy and creativity to design the brand you wish you would be. The input from Step 1 directs the output of Step 2: a set of core foundational elements upon which to build a more meaningful, durable and appealing corporate brand. The foundation—a Brand Structure—answers these questions and several others:

- Where and how will we compete?
- What do we do?
- Who are we for?
- What do we offer that people value?
- How should we behave?

Step 3: Brand Expression – *Build the message: what to say, how to say it.* No more vexing dilemma exists than what to say about the company. Joe and I have seen the lack of a simple, clear and compelling message sink more brands than even the worst of strategies. What's even more damaging is when your people say one thing and your marketing says something entirely different. In the thousands of hours of in-field research we've conducted, Joe and I see and hear this all the time, and the brand damage it causes runs from comedy to tragedy. In this phase, we'll explain the right way to

develop and test the message and the “big idea” creative work. We’ll teach you a little known process for ensuring consistent message delivery. (It goes under the moniker of 3-30 / 3-30.)

Step 4: Brand Mobilization – *Align your people; deliver the brand.*

I think of the first three steps of our branding process as the work of discovering, gathering and storing energy. Brand Mobilization *unleashes* this power. In this step, we introduce a people-powered approach for planning your marketing tactics and media. It will improve your reach, frequency, message consistency, and impact across all your delivery vehicles in all forms of media. And remember, if you market B2B considered purchase brands, your people are a highly important brand message delivery medium. Brand Mobilization also delivers your brand messages to target audiences outside the company through creation of marketing tools and tactics to be used in all sales and media channels. It employs media vehicles you’re familiar with, but includes many more you may not have considered. One part of Step 4 is perhaps the most important of our entire process: enrolling your people. Enrollment engages the hearts, minds and commitments of your people and aligns that force behind your brand. In the end, Brand Mobilization extracts more value from the time, money and effort you put behind your brand.

Step 5: Brand Stewardship – *Keep the brand on course.* As Joe constantly reminds our clients, corporate branding is not a “one and done” exercise. Rather it is a “begun and never done.” Not to get too existential here, but entropy (inevitable decline and degeneration) is the natural order of things. And that’s what will happen to your brand unless you plan for a different fate from the very start. Next to missing the enrollment piece, Brand Stewardship is the second biggest “miss” we see companies make. And we understand why. After spending a whole lot of time and money on your branding effort in Steps 1 to 4, it can be tempting to direct your people, time and money to other priorities.

However, even the most expensive machines, structures and technologies require regular upkeep, maintenance and upgrades, which are usually planned and budgeted for *from the start*. That same kind of smart planning should go toward your brand. Keeping your people aligned to the brand should be priority number one, and the initial enrollment in Step 4 is just the start. In addition, managing the brand can sometimes require keeping things consistent (by fighting against frivolous change). At other times, thoughtful decisions and adjustments to some of your brand components will be required due to changes in your people, your marketplace or your competitors. In Step 5, we'll show you how to measure results, stay in touch with the state of the brand and keep the brand on track for the long term, all by setting up and managing a simple process.

So there you have it: the process behind building *The People Powered Brand*. If you're like me, you're ready to get started. So let's move on to the first step . . .

Chapter 2 Summary

Brand strategy is integral to business strategy

- To their disadvantage, companies often fail to integrate Brand Strategy with Corporate Strategy and Operational Strategy.
 - Brand deals with perceptions, and perceptions contribute to the most important work of a business: creating customers.
 - Developing a powerful B2B company brand requires understanding its current state, developing a future state and getting people inside the company and in the marketplace on board.
-