

# Your Brand. From the Inside Out.

by Andrew Wood, Director of Marketing, Mintz & Hoke Communications Group

Your most potent brand communicators are your employees. They are your brand's ultimate ambassadors; they're the people who actually bring your brand to life. But do they understand and embrace your carefully crafted brand strategy and help bring it to life? Or, do they unknowingly lay waste to all that hard work and considerable investment?

Ensuring that your customers are exposed to a consistently reinforced brand message means going beyond a meticulously researched, flawlessly executed external marketing communications plan.

It means ensuring your brand vision and your brand message is understood and embraced by your employees. Day in and day out.

Oftentimes brand managers want to know why their colleagues aren't nearly as excited about the new campaign as they are. How often do you hear the refrain "we should probably do something internally to get everyone behind it"? It might very well be too late. Your employees don't consider themselves an afterthought. Stop excluding them, rather include them as an integral part of your branding program – **Think branding inside out.**

A new brand identity, repositioning effort or new campaign must be embraced by all your employees, allowing the big driving idea behind it to become an intrinsic part of the way they approach their jobs. Understanding what is planned for their brand and why certain words and visuals have been chosen to represent it helps employees better recognize their role in making a customer's brand experience consistent and memorable.

## Smart brands look inside and out.

In today's world, delivering outstanding customer service is often the competitive advantage. Organizations cannot survive unless their employees understand and are engaged in delivering the brand promise day by day to every customer.

Power brands such as Disney, Starbucks and Ritz-Carlton have long based their competitiveness on delivering a memorable customer experience. Long ago, they recognized the need to make the brand vision an integral part of the company's day-to-day mode of operation.



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**If it works for them, it  
can work for you.**

Accordingly, they focus as much effort on communicating internally as they do externally. Their employees' vital role as brand ambassadors is continuously emphasized through internal training programs.

But this isn't just for the famous – it is equally important to corporations, business-to-business and industrial brands. Companies with brands that need to foster long-term relationships, provide a perceived 'value-add' to get beyond potential commodity status or who sell their products through a complex sales channel. For example, independent agents, brokers, producers or distributors – all of whom would benefit from being able to give a concise and consistent summary of your brands reason for being.

### **Employees need be true brand believers.**

Many companies may think they understand the power of branding and may even translate it to the balance sheet, but they seem to either ignore or remain in the dark about this large and vital piece of brand management. Consider for a minute the power of having all your employees as actively engaged ambassadors for your brand.

It seems obvious when discussed academically, but in the heat of battle companies frequently overlook an important fact. Unless employees talk and act consistently with your brand's message, all your external branding activity might suffer irrevocable damage.

### **A forethought not an afterthought.**

Involve your employees in your initial discovery phase – conduct research internally in addition to your external research. Gauge their perceptions of what the brand means to them. Let them express their thoughts on their brand's personality and its voice to the world.

It's a small investment for massive potential returns or, at minimum, the very best insurance policy you can get for your brand.

Most everyone does research with the external audience; many go beyond and even do it with distribution partners. But how many ensure their strategy is consistent with their employees' perspective and that it will be understood and supported?

If you try and impose a brand culture that won't fit, then it's destined to failure. If you expect to change behavior without asking if it's a good idea, it dies on the vine.

Leveraging employee input in the brand-building process as part of your internal introduction to a new campaign or brand identity is smart business. So when it's time to launch, management can legitimately claim that the new brand is in part the product of their employees' insights and involvement. It's a simple but powerful message to send internally.

**“68% of customers defect because of the attitude or indifference of a company employee.”**

*– Journal of Marketing*

When manufacturer Pratt & Whitney wanted to communicate the new direction of its commercial jet engine business, it chose to feature actual employees, ensuring the campaign accurately reflected Pratt's culture. The "Voices of Change" campaign was first launched internally using special events and multiple tactics to integrate messages throughout the company.

Intranet and CD-ROM introduced and explained campaign.

Calendar helps reinforce messages.

Employee brochure.

## Your employees are a core audience.

At a minimum, the external launch of your new brand program should be simultaneous with the internal communications program. Don't make employees think it's an afterthought – or worse, propaganda to bolster a shaky external reception. Make them part owners in the success of the program. They'll become true brand believers.

This sharing of ownership opens employees' minds to all the other information you want them to receive, and the conclusions you want them to embrace. For example, the need to know why a compelling and consistent brand identity is a powerful competitive weapon that translates into quantifiable financial returns for everybody. Why discipline in managing the brand is as important as managing day-to-day customer service. How the brand expresses and reinforces the company's values. How it differentiates the organization within an intense competitive environment.

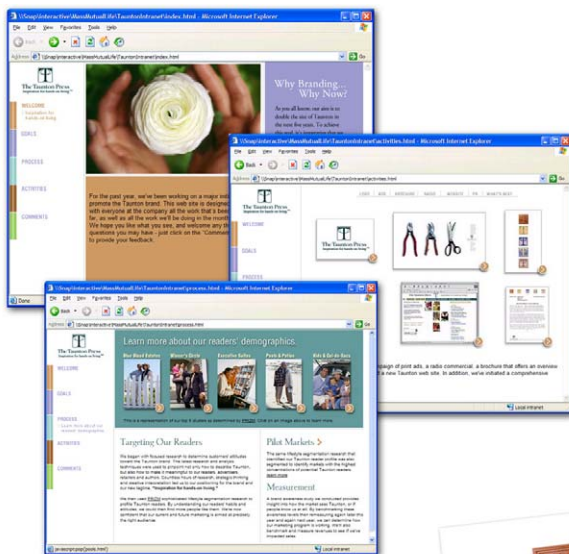
When employees understand the reasoning behind the investment of time, money and psychic energy, they'll see the logic, and how it lines up with their self-interest and how it translates to their ability to do well in their jobs. The end result is that they'll feel part of a successful organization.

It's worth remembering that everyone in your organization regardless of their position is a brand salesperson that represents your brand – they can be a brand evangelist or they can unwittingly become brand assassins.

## Making it personal.

Many companies have a multitude of internal communications tools already in place. They communicate everything from sales data to the results of the company softball game. But this might not be the best way to introduce your new brand campaign. You don't launch a new campaign every day – doesn't it deserve just a little more? Don't your employees deserve a little more?

Technology provides us many efficient and affordable ways to make messages more personal. You have every single one of your internal audience's name and home address and a unique opportunity to personalize a message, making it that bit more special, increasing the chances of it being embraced and taken to heart. It suggests that you care about both your brand and your employees and acknowledges their role as the ultimate brand ambassadors.



Taunton Press publishers needed to explain to employees why it was investing in a corporate branding campaign rather than support its successful individual magazine titles. An employee intranet reflected the same level of creativity and sophistication that had been poured into the external brand campaign.

An intranet explained every step of the brand positioning and creative development process, generating enthusiasm and support rather than misunderstanding and discontent.

Internal brochure featured revitalized brand identity and unified Taunton brand "T."



On the other hand, if localized media can efficiently reach your employee base, consider investing in a little collective, local community goodwill and run part of the campaign in local media or a trade publication where employees know their peers and neighbors will see it.

Fast forward to the day your new campaign launches itself onto the world.

You've done everything you can do to ensure its success. You've managed all the risks, you've done all the research, and you're feeling particularly confident because as every one of your employees arrives at work today, they know what's different about today. They know their role, what's expected of them, and how they can make a difference.

**They know because you've managed your brand from the inside out.**

When MassMutual Financial Group life insurance division wanted to revitalize its brand's position, an internal program called "Life Academy" was created to educate and motivate employees and career agents. The program's theme creatively combined Hasbro's famous "Game of Life" with an inspirational Hollywood theme to generate employee participation.



Internet program sign-up module.



Direct mail invitations, posters and e-mail announced program.

Mintz & Hoke is a full service, marketing communications group that develops and implements integrated programs that nurture, defend, motivate and glorify brands throughout distribution channels and at every stage of the selling cycle. We call our approach business-to-channel communications – it's all about helping clients make the complex sale happen. Mintz & Hoke Communications Group, *help clients win.*

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