



Identity: Overcoming the Roadblocks to Building Strong Brands

Increasingly, senior executives are making brand strategy a boardroom priority, recognizing the critical link between brand and business strategy. These companies view their brands as strategic assets – as the platform for defining, creating and delivering a differentiated customer experience.

A Coca Cola executive recently remarked that its brands are so powerful they are becoming the strategy that drives corporate vision. In effect, the brand becomes the *face* of the company's business strategy.

For every successful brand-driven organization (think Southwest, Disney, and Starbucks,) other companies encounter significant "roadblocks" in building strong brands. Here are the most common barriers and the characteristics that separate brand-driven organizations:

Roadblocks to Building Strong Brands

- 1. Confusing brand building with marketing communication.** Some companies equate the brand solely with its visual elements or means of communication (e.g., logo, name, advertising, website, etc.).

Brand-driven organizations recognize the brand is much larger than "mar-com". They use their brands to direct operations by identifying, prioritizing and optimizing high-impact brand touch points. This involves identifying all touch points in the pre-sale, purchase and post-sale experience, prioritizing them in impact and importance and, then, continually measuring and improving the customer experience.
- 2. Viewing brand development as another "project" to be accomplished.** Companies seeking strong brands often appoint a "brand team" to establish a brand program. These programs often fail, though, as they tend to be viewed as a discrete task or a creative execution solution.

In brand-driven companies, brand development is more than a project – it's a way of doing business. These organizations embody brand values in their approach to business, from senior executives to front-line employees. In this way, a brand is something that is built, nurtured and grown over time – lived by the organization, its customers and stakeholders each and every day.
- 3. Overlooking long-term brand building efforts for short term concerns.** Faced with short-term business pressures, many companies set aside or reduce their brand building efforts, relying instead on

promotional efforts to boost sales. Or, they might launch a new advertising campaign without fully leveraging the current one. Unfortunately, in looking for the "silver bullet" solution, long-term brand health often suffers.

One common characteristic of brand-driven organizations is the *discipline* they exhibit in managing for brand consistency over time. Certainly, short term pressures will exist, but addressing them within the context of an overall brand strategy is necessary for increasing brand equity.

- 4. Not knowing where to begin.** Brand management discipline has advanced considerably in recent years, and it can be overwhelming to consider the process of building a strong brand.

A brand audit is an important first step, which can provide the necessary internal and external inputs across all brand-related activities of the business. Brand strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are uncovered, and a corrective action plan is developed, to improve the brand over time.

- 5. Lacking the resources or patience to fully realize the brand's potential.** Every organization has limited resources. Successful brand-driven companies, though, are astute at using their resources efficiently and effectively. Some brand-driven growth best practices:
 - **Focus resources on selective targets** – those customers who will have the biggest impact on growth, versus trying to be all things to all people
 - **Develop a "driving idea" that integrates all marketing activities**, creating leverage across product development, marketing, and sales. The Shell Answer Man and Pillsbury Bake Off are classic examples of driving ideas.
 - **Extend existing brands vs. expanding a portfolio with new brands.** Virgin has leveraged its brand into diverse businesses, relying on its brand equity as the common thread.
 - **Set attainable goals and ensure a champion to carry the message** and address natural internal impatience for immediate brand traction. Visible executive leadership is an imperative to building strong brands.

For more information on Building Strong Brands, please contact [Tim Koelzer](#) at EquiBrand