

What is Your Brand Story?

How to Define One for Company Growth

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Often leaders believe the role of branding is something that the marketing department must manage. The blind reality is the senior management of an organization leads the reputation of the organization's brand. In fact, c-suite executives are chief brand officers in disguise.

Brand story telling, when done right is a powerful tool to drive the economic performance of your organization. John P. Mackey recognized this when he founded Whole Foods. He created the Whole Foods "Declaration of Interdependence" outlining his purpose, vision and values for all to see. These founding principles drive the retail experience we see in the marketplace today. This brand remains authentic to selling the highest quality organic and natural products. It started with a powerful brand story.

The best brand stories work from the inside out. We all recognize a highly motivated work force delivers better customer satisfaction, which in turn drives enhanced financial performance. Brand story telling can aid leaders in communicating long-term growth strategies and corporate direction in fun, inspiring ways. Inspiring language is key to igniting action.

It is a myth that role of brand stories belong to the marketing department or an outside agency. With or without any advertising or public relations, the brand story is the job of top management. Once clearly defined, it is critical to communicate the brand story from the board room to the front counter. It can differentiate your firm in a commodity driven category, unify the leadership team and motivate a work force that frankly, can get a job elsewhere.

Crafting a brand story works for established businesses as well as a start-up business. The leadership team needs time to define a brand story to unify the corporate direction. This is something you can not holistically outsource since the brand is made up of senior leadership. It's often common to hire an advertising or marketing agency to help promote the brand, but senior leaders are brand creators and protectors.

There are six components of World Class brands; no matter what the size of your organization. Use these to craft your compelling brand story.

1. Delights customers

These organizations that have great passion for exceeding and delighting customers have superior performance long-term. Apple Corporation delights their customers with products, services, retail experiences and even their detailed packaging with every product they design.

2. Hires and motivates great people

People are your greatest asset. Find the right people and do everything you can to keep them. Creating a desirable place to work drives a motivated work force. Last year Google earned top honors for being a great place to work. With only 6,500 jobs,

they received over 1,000,000 resumes from people seeking employment. How many resumes did you receive last year?

3. Flawlessly executes

Strategies are only as good as their ability to be executed in the marketplace. A well-crafted strategy with poor execution is not a good strategy. UPS is a leader in flawless execution. Route drivers are trained at their state-of-the-art facility to learn the UPS way, which creates a highly motivated work force to deliver on the UPS promise.

4. Remains authentic

Leadership must understand the core competency of the enterprise and do everything to protect this asset. Being true to the history and heritage of the brand is a key driver of growth. World Class brands never forget who they are or where they came from. That is why The Walt Disney Company will always stand for magical story telling. That is why consistently, no one in Hollywood tells a better story than Disney.

5. Gives back to the community

Consumers and employees join brands today, they do not just buy them. The Gen X and Gen Y consumers support brands that help the community, in a way that is rooted to the brand essence. Identify your mission and align your organization to commit to the community transparently. Consumers will see right through your strategy if it is an after thought. The Body Shop invented this notion and other brands strive to seek responsible giving in their business models.

6. Delivers economic return profitably

Shareholder return is the output of a great brand story. Your board of directors would agree that delivering return to your shareholders through sustainable growth is the goal.

These six drivers make up the DNA of a World Class Brand. As we know, every great brand story ultimately has a happy ending. Now is the time to get started on your brand story.

Shelley Rosen, a 25-year marketing veteran is the chief executive officer and founder of Airlift, Inc. Airlift is a woman-owned business with proven experience helping leaders craft brand stories for growth.

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