

# more on branding



BY TRISH BROCK

Before a discussion can begin about living your brand authentically, there are some assumptions that must be stated:

- A logo is not a brand.
- Name recognition does not necessarily mean good branding.
- Dealers want to find and keep top talent – much like their goals for acquiring customers.
- Dealers want their employees to be engaged and enthusiastic in their jobs.
- Dealers want to be better than and different from their competitors.
- The culture of the dealer has broad implications both internally and externally.
- Management can not tell people what to believe.
- Most people want and will try to find meaning in their working lives.

These are fairly safe assumptions. But what, you may ask, do they have to do with creating a brand? Brand development, as noted in a previous article, is often focused on external communication and promotion. Once developed, the “brand” is then introduced and directed in a top down fashion. Often statements of superiority and uniqueness reside in branding statements and employees are then instructed and expected to carry out the message. It is therefore not surprising that many still struggle with their brand identity? After all, whose identity is it anyway?

## REALITY CHECK

The first endeavor should be to

evaluate your “mindspace” in your market. Dealers should strive to understand things such as the quality of existing relationships, direction of the organization and its relevance to the market, strengths and weakness, how they compare to the competition as well as how the values of the organization are aligned with the needs of the market and how well they are communicated.

In other words, a dealer should have a clear understanding of how they are perceived in the market. (see article The Reality of Perceptions, OFDA Dec. 07/Jan. 08) Without the input of external research there is a risk of creating a brand idea that has great power internally, but is irrelevant when expressed externally. In order to have a brand that resonates with the market, the dealer should acquire insight into how others see and experience it first. The results and how they compare with internally held beliefs will be instrumental in defining branding direction.

## “HOW TO” BUILD YOUR BRAND

There are many different ways to construct a meaningful brand. Authenticity of and commitment to the brand idea are the critical elements. Involving the entire dealer or at the least creating a team representing each area of discipline within the dealer is also critical. This is

the component that functions as the underpinning for authenticity.

It is helpful to think as our customers do: is this organization effective, how is it different from other dealers, and do I feel good about this organization? Mirroring this decision making process helps give structure to a potentially unwieldy branding process. Nicholas Ind, a Scandinavian marketing consultant for many international companies reviews multiple formats in his book “Living the Brand.” Here is one simple guideline that will aid in the development.

- ☀ **Who we are and what we do every day (is this organization effective?)**
  - Example: Dealer X is a full service commercial furniture dealer which has successfully serviced hundreds of major companies.
  - Comparative (how we’re different)
  - Example: Dealer X is a regional dealer with offices in 3 locations to best serve corporate clients with multiple branch offices consistently. Our focus is in providing environmentally sustainable products to our market. And in addition to representing XYZ leading manufacturers, we respond to service calls within 24 hours and boast that 98% of installations are “punch free.”
  - Emotional (what motivates us).
  - This element defines the values the organization lives by and therefore should convey. It should also help define attitudes



**The organizational goals and strategies are often set by the owners and then pulled along with them.**

and behaviors, and describe how the dealer would like others to see it. Determine 3-5 descriptors that the dealer group feels best define them. (See article Create Your Brand, OFDA April/May 06) Examples of a few descriptors are: effective, challenging, integrity, fun, progressive, etc.

This exercise will help reveal the core characteristics of the brand. It will allow you to use the determined descriptors to guide and reinforce who you are and why you are different. It will challenge the dealer to clearly define what the organization stands for, internally as well as externally.

## BRANDING AUTHENTICALLY

Once the brand structure has been determined and the descriptors chosen, the real work begins. Using the words selected to define the emotions and values of the people within the dealer allow the words to have a collective meaning. Consensus has been established and expectations are being built into the organization that everyone collectively can identify with, not just upper management.

Selecting descriptors is not enough. The words must have meaning, guiding behaviors, decision making processes and external market experiences. The words must be articulated so their meaning can be applied to daily life. They need to be precise and then carefully explained:

- What does the word really mean to them? Define how it works and how people will know when it's happening (or not). This must apply for each employee including the receptionist,

installers, and designers as well as for sales people.

- Does the organization always act within the definition of the word? If the answer is not always, then find an alternative word that is more accurate. The word must be true to the organization, or it is not authentic.
- What are examples of how this word applies to this dealer? And be specific.

## LIVING THE BRAND


Embedding these words into the culture of the organization is essential to the success of the brand. Bringing them to life allows every member of the dealer to fully understand and embrace their importance. When doing so, they are not using a script that has been created, but rather becoming representatives of a set of values to which they already subscribe.

Here are some ideas on how to embed the values into the dealer, and to sustain them well into the future:

- ☀ **Stories have enormous power. They help develop a credible connection, they make the values real and reinforce their validity. Tell stories at sales meetings, to customers, company meetings, in your internal communications and when coaching staff.**
- Share stories about the dealer that demonstrate the word(s) in action, particularly by the leadership.
- Have leaders share experiences when the values as defined by the company guided decisions, some of which may have

been difficult.

- Have staff share their experiences about "living" these values in a work (or even non-work) situation.
- The leadership of the dealer must make a conscious commitment to model the behaviors representing the agreed upon values. Actively supporting the values and demonstrating their importance broadcast expectations to the entire organization.
- Look for training opportunities to reinforce the values. There are seminars, videos, speakers etc. that address integrity, effectiveness, fun (some of the sample descriptors above) that infuse added perspectives into your culture.
- Develop hypothetical but typical situations and role-play how to best solve problems using the values of the organization.
- Collaborate – build teams to problem solve using the values as guidelines. This builds engagement and helps solidify values.
- Build your words into every facet of your organization and hold the entire organization accountable for giving these values meaning.
- Incorporate values and associated behaviors into job descriptions, expectations and recruitment efforts.
- Reinforce these values in employees handbooks and orientation for new employees.
- Incorporate them into evaluations and performance reviews to underscore their importance.
- Check in with your clients on a regular basis and allow them to tell you if you are in fact living your brand.

The more participative the process is, the greater the chance for people to embrace the brand as their own. This will generate greater understanding and commitment to living it. It will also result a more consistent delivery of your brand into the market, one that becomes intuitive for the organization. The benefits are countless. And please notice that nowhere in this article on branding did we discuss logos or tag lines! 

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