

**Designing OtherWare**

T A Balasubramanian on how programmers can develop software for users who are so unlike themselves

Page 78

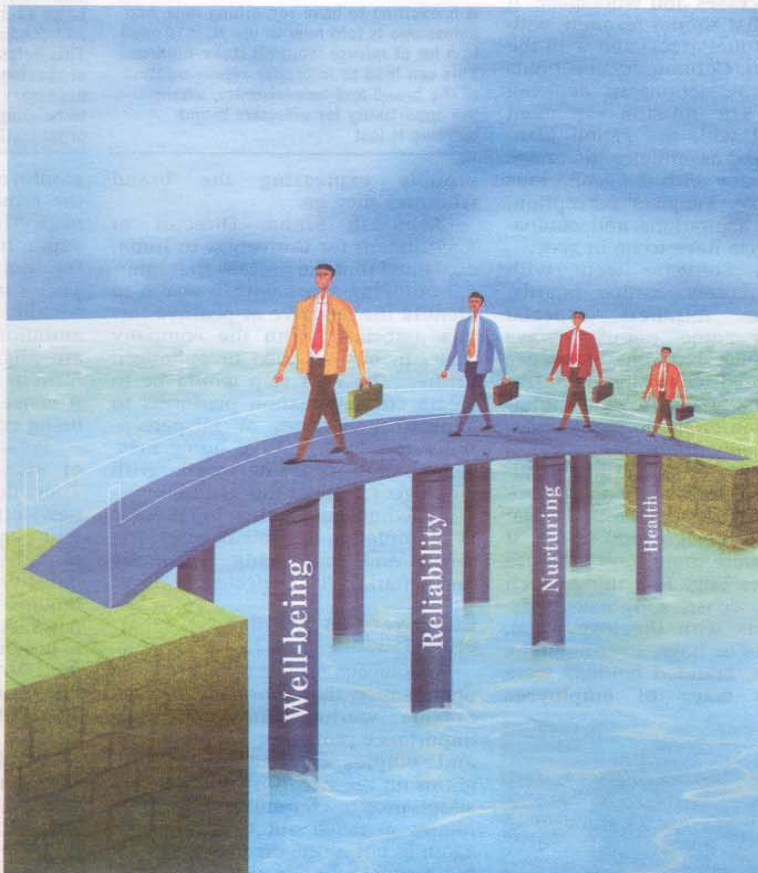
Technology
Life

FEATURE

Build your brand internally

Only if you feel happy from within, will you be able to spread it to others. The same is true in the corporate world—only if your internal brand is strong enough, will your external image shine and survive.

Renuka Vembu talks about internal branding tactics



the same direction'. It involves effectively informing, influencing and aligning key stakeholders and other audiences inside the organization. All internal communication ought to drive change and eventually produce business results."

Satish Venkatachalaiah, Senior VP, HR, Aztecsoft Limited, said, "Internal branding is essential for basically two purposes—to ensure that the corporate brand is absorbed and embodied by all employees who are our brand ambassadors, and to communicate the value proposition of internal services offered by support functions. The corporate brand and what it stands for is more easily recognized and digested by an internal audience that is exposed to the brand values on a daily basis."

Internal branding focuses on what should be done in-house so that it translates into the company's desired results outside. Brand in itself is a powerful word—evoking emotions plugged with a particular product. While massive efforts are undertaken to project the company's right image in front of the public, they stand meaningless if these are not concentrated towards the internal customers, viz. employees of the company. If employees are happy, it would transpire into better clientele.

Linking and aligning organizational values and mission with individual goals and interests leads to better employee satisfaction and thereby lesser attrition rates. This positivity is reflected in employee dealings with customers. When employees feel happy from within, it enhances their performance as also their pride and commitment towards the organization.

R Ramkumar, Director, Corporate Marketing, Research and Communications, Cognizant opined that internal branding serves the purpose of defining for its employees the attributes of an organization and setting mutual expectations. In today's networked world, inside-out perspectives are becoming substantial dictates in brand appeal, making

What lies in the company's genes must be spread across its workforce, so that it is embedded within every employee. It has to be built into the processes and the day-to-day working

Children often learn and exhibit what they are taught at home. The general perception is that their behavior is usually a reflection of parental upbringing. Similarly, the employees of a company are its brand ambassadors. They are a mirror of what the company stands for—its values, culture, ethics, working, etc. For employees to project this image in front of their customers, the company must instill and spread these values and echo the mission statement, time and again, everyday. What lies in the company's genes must be spread across its workforce, so that it is

embedded within every employee. It has to be built into the processes and the day-to-day working. It has to seep through their people's psyche, and they have to willingly understand, accept and exhibit the same. The internal brand survives only if it is duly propagated by the employees, and the external brand survives only if the internal brand is carried on strong shoulders.

In-house branding

Satish MN, VP, HR, Symphony Services, India, said, "Internal branding serves to keep an organization's people 'in the loop' and 'pulling in

► internal branding extremely critical. The style and systems in a company are critical expressions of internal brand fortifications. The 'what is said' and 'how things happen' are strongest expressions that companies focus on to build powerful internal brands, he asserted.

Internal branding is about trust, emotional connect and a personal touch that glues the employer and the employee together. Brand is identifying a company with its product, its people. The top management and the line managers have to embed this philosophy within the people, processes and workspace. It is a value that should resonate with every individual associated with the organization. Communication holds the key—oral, actions or depicted otherwise. The mission statement must blend with the action plan. Internal brand assimilates the image of the company with the aspirations of its people. People's perception, employee's aspirations and company's prospects have to be in sync.

Newgen Software went with posters, circulars, notice boards, newsletters, intranets, special events, as some popular ways through which branding messages are propagated within the organization. While Sify Technologies pointed out that an online formal companywide introduction of the brand, a brand identity kit that's downloadable from the intranet or the corporate website, contests around what the brand's design and what it stands for, were some ways to infuse the brand feeling. Fun things such as T-shirts, coasters, mouse pads, formal shirts with the logo, caps, laptop cases or bags, over-nighters, car stickers, branded helmets were the many ways of employees



Sudha Jagadish
COO, DAX NETWORKS

On the tangible front, when field commitments are not met, the company could lose millions in wasted expenditure and customer business lost. Employees would not feel rooted and leave, which costs a lot in recruitment and retraining and even more in disruption costs



Gargi Sharma
VP, CORPORATE MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS, GEOMETRIC

It is exciting to have something new, and unless one is told how to use it, it is open to a lot of misuse from all stakeholders. This can lead to improper representation of the brand and inconsistency, where the opportunity for effective brand building is lost

proudly expressing the brand wherever they go.

Ashutosh Sinha, Director of Recruitment for Convergys in India, explained that the process that internal branding starts with research to identify the negative or positive factors associated with the company that can be mitigated or enhanced further. The next step would be to create communication platforms to address any issues or misperceptions and further drive home messages that resonate well with employees. Once the communication mediums are active, the process is completed by measuring the result and comparing it to the benchmark levels expected.

Employees as brand ambassadors

Employees are the face of an organization that is projected to the outside world. With increasing importance pinned on their welfare, and employee engagement programs on the rise, it is imperative to adopt proper communication techniques to reach out to them. This again is not a one-off phenomenon, but a constant endeavor to keep the brand value intact. Internal blogs, connecting through intranet, inclusive meaningful feedbacks, collective policies and decision-making, fun@work—cultural activities, events, team activities, periodic group meetings, are some of the ways where employee views can be invited, collated and assessed.

For employees to emotionally feel connected to the company's ethics and values, it is of utmost significance that they connect with and relate to the experiences they go through at the workplace. Positive employee experiences and reinforcements determine the success of the



Meera Huddar
DIRECTOR, HR, SUPPORTSOFT

The internal branding of core values helps each of the employees to behave and conduct themselves in a certain way. This helps in creating an environment of sharing and belonging which is necessary to get each of the employees to be committed to the organizational goals

employee retention strategies and the growth of the company's business. The company has to fulfill its commitment that they promise at the time of the candidate's joining. This is important because of the personality-job-fit, so that individual ambitions and organizational goals are aligned for employees to perform to the best of their capabilities. A sense of pride thus blooms with being connected with the company.

Polaris aims to recreate its magic of 3E's—excite, energize, engage. They do this by coming up with newsletter, Spectrum—a monthly four-page newspaper which features thought-provoking white papers, industry trends, analyst views, technology white papers and, Polaris news. Also, are Toggle—the quarterly in-house magazine that brings out the DNA of Polaris, and Empower—the intranet portal, which showcases all significant company information.

Shaping policies

Reema Sarin, AVP, Marketing and Corporate Communication, AppLabs, stated, "The brand needs to be looked at as an integral component of the company's value system. Developing a brand is not just designing a new logo; you have to 'live and breathe the brand'. Brand is another word for 'reputation'. Reputation in doing what say you will do and doing it well. Meeting deadlines and promises across all markets and amongst current and prospective clients, industry partners and businesses." AppLabs corporate values, GLOBAL, has been developed around a core culture and philosophy demonstrated by its leadership team, identified in dialogue with its clients and staff.

■ Genuinely cares for all stakeholders

Internal branding focuses on what should be done in-house so that it translates into the company's desired results outside

For employees to emotionally feel connected to the company's ethics and values, it is of utmost significance that they connect with and relate to the experiences they go through at the workplace

- ◆ Approaches his/her work with a level-headed attitude
- Is Openly enthusiastic about work, colleagues, and the organization's capabilities and culture
- Approaches work and day-to-day business issues Boldly by taking the initiative and being ready to challenge
- Feels Accountable for own actions
- Continuously contributes to fostering a climate of Learning, both for themselves and throughout the organization

Ramkumar felt that all internal brand initiatives are propagations, validations or expressions of the company values. While propagations are the messaging to reinforce the identity of the company as articulated in its values, validations and expressions are practices and systems within the company that reinforce the identity expressions. All internal brand and communication interfaces need to connect and invoke a central brand proposition. Be it the leadership talk or the team engagements, the rewards culture or the recognition pattern, the business conduct or the internal communications—all need to have underlying brand uniformity, he echoed.

In e4e, they have regular internal mails going out to employees across all levels. Subjects vary from new business wins, to new recruits in the top management, internal job postings, or knowledge sharing and training programs. They also lay a lot of emphasis on recruiting and rewarding employees who symbolize their brand values and represent the brand promise effectively. They thus create the promise, operationalize the required behaviors, and develop training, performance management and reward programs to align employee behavior.

Sapient India endorses its brand through various poster campaigns with key messages around client value proposition, ethics, culture, diversity. All special campaigns are accompanied by teaser mailers, display stands, etc. Intranet is yet another medium of effectively educating and propagating employees to imbibe and exhibit the company's brand values.

Tejas Networks has rechristened its HR group as Team Tejas Cares. They co-create themes that have people buy-in. Once themes are developed, they communicate and amplify so that messages are continually heard. Formal and informal brand questionnaire help refine the messages continually.

Symphony Services lists some of the various strategies and methods of internal branding for companies to adopt:



- Developing and executing appropriate internal communication strategy around significant events or crises; e.g. leadership transitions, effectiveness of leadership at various levels, client wins, market changes, organizational re-structuring.
- Maintaining and executing employee referral programs to leverage employee's personal networks to attract talent to the organization.
- Organizational initiatives towards knowledge management, innovation, talent management, competency modeling, mentorship/buddy programs and effective career progression plans.
- Celebrations of milestones, successes and anniversaries.
- Timely and accurate communication of important news ensuring that employees hear of it internally first and later from varied external media.
- Optimizing two-way communication channels like feedback mechanisms, especially bottom up.
- Providing opportunity for learning and development.

Infogain has created some concepts like interesting wallpapers and screensavers which communicate their values, mission and vision. Their marketing department's creative team takes responsibility for creating these themes which gels with their management objectives.

Major concerns

Dexterity gave a breakdown on some of the issues confronting

internal branding.

- Inability on the part of top managements to fully comprehend the direct co-relation and powerful impact that internal branding has on the external branding efforts.
- Lack of clearly articulation and its functional benefits to employees.
- As there are no clear measurable, top managements rarely focus on this. No clear defined 'Owner' and 'Sponsor' for this at leadership levels.
- No linkage between policies and internal branding programs.
- Reward and recognition programs do not address outcomes in this area.
- No punitive measures in place where internal branding initiatives are violated.
- It is important for companies to first understand the gap that exists between its vision (what you want people to perceive) and its brand reality (what people actually think and feel).
- Employee satisfaction surveys, focus group discussions, exit interviews are some tools used to gain insight's into current culture and collective aspirations of people.

Sandeep Soni, ED and CEO, Spanco BPO, said, "One of the key issues associated with internal branding is to decide on the most effective tools and techniques that can promote company's brand values to its employees. With various campaigns like presentations, training sessions, manuals, rewards and recognition, it becomes difficult to

analyze which of these generate the highest ROI. These exercises need to be initiated after carefully analyzing the target audience, content, channels, frequency etc.”

Every new venture has its share of hurdles that need to be crossed. Management support, employee acceptance and the unpredictable outcome—the journey from conception to initiation to ensuring continual performance, it is the job of one-and-all associated with the company. Surajit Sen, National Sales Manager, NetApps, said, “Some of the key issues faced while building an internal brand are, how do you get management from different functions to act as brand champions when they are accountable for other corporate priorities. How do you identify techniques to ensure continued employee involvement in and support of brand initiatives? How do you convince geographically and functionally diverse groups to embrace the brand promise when we have little authority and can only use influencing skills?”

Gargi Sharma, VP, Corporate Marketing and Communications, Geometric, felt that the challenges in an internal branding exercise were:

- **Lack of communication:** Various activities go on in a large organization, and it is a challenge to ensure that this gets communicated effectively and in time to the employees to make them a part of the larger picture.
- **Over communication:** An overdose can easily lead to an early saturation in the minds of the employees, thus making communications ineffective due to apathy.
- **Lack of brand guidelines and brand champions:** It is very exciting to have something new,



Satish MN

VP, HR, SYMPHONY SERVICES, INDIA

Internal branding serves to keep an organization's people 'in the loop' and 'pulling in the same direction'. It involves effectively informing, influencing and aligning key stakeholders and other audiences inside the organization. All internal communication ought to drive change and eventually produce business results



Sandeep Soni

ED AND CEO, SPANCO BPO

One of the key issues associated with internal branding is to decide on the most effective tools and techniques that can promote a company's brand values to its employees

and unless one is told how to use it, it is open to a lot of misuse from all stake-holders. This can also lead to improper representation of the brand and inconsistency, where the opportunity for effective brand building is lost.

The business benefits

The business advantages that revolve around internal branding are manifold. Effective internal branding mechanism gives the company an edge over its competitors as brand employers are known for their reputation, good retention tactics, less attrition levels, who value employees and their individuality, who breed a cohesive culture, provide growth and development opportunities, and there is inclusive growth and overall organizational development.

In the age of differentiation and value addition, it is important to focus on how the company



R Ramkumar

DIRECTOR, CORPORATE MARKETING, RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATIONS, COGNIZANT

The style and systems in a company are critical expressions internal brand fortifications. The 'what is said' and 'how things happen' are strongest expressions that companies focus on to build powerful internal brands



Naresh Vassudhev

SENIOR DIRECTOR, HR, e4E BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

Internal branding is made up of multiple components, including customer interactions, employee communications, corporate philosophy and advertising/marketing efforts

differentiates itself from other industry players. Having a USP is critical to the business prospects as it determines the core value and strength of an organization.

Meera Huddar, Director, HR, SupportSoft opined, “The internal branding of core values helps each of the employees to behave and conduct themselves in a certain way. This helps in creating an environment of sharing and belonging which is necessary to get each of the employees to be committed to the organizational goals. When there is collective effort towards realizing organizational goals, it surely reflects in the success of the company.”

Sudha Jagadish, COO, Dax Networks, suggested that without excellent internal branding, there would be a disconnect with the market. On the tangible front, when field commitments are not met, the company could lose millions in wasted expenditure and customer business lost. Employees would not feel rooted and leave, which costs a lot in recruitment and retraining and even more in disruption costs.

Naresh Vassudhev, Senior Director, HR, e4e Business Solutions summarized, “Internal branding is made up of multiple components, including customer interactions, employee communications, corporate philosophy and advertising/marketing efforts. Lack of a concrete internal branding program can be detrimental to the organization in the long run, specially in service organizations that don't have concrete products, but the main offerings are soft assets like knowledge, experience and people.”

In the Convergys formulae, lack of identity means lack of cutting edge professionals, that is, lackluster market performance. ■

reenuka.vembu@expressindia.com

