



Aligning Your Brand to Your Strategy By William Malek, Strategy2Reality LLC

As the business world grows, businesses and consumers become more competitive. With that competition comes an increasing drive for success. Aligning your brand to your strategy comes from narrowing the brand focus, great leadership, dedicated and valued employees, customer loyalty and a strategic plan.

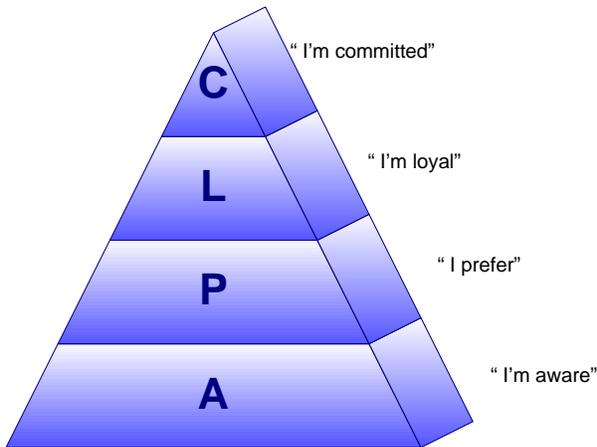
The reality is that if you want to create a strong brand, it is the leader's responsibility to keep the brand promise. Brand value and customer loyalty come from the smart and disciplined leaders who implement brand strategy and model branding in everyday action. **“Integrated branding is the process of revealing the brand promise, then aligning the entire organization to deliver that promise.”** Living the integrated brand is the road to long-term business success and sustainability. A company's brand is what a satisfied customer remembers and relates to the positive or negative experiences. Branding is not just marketing or corporate identity function, it is something that lives in every experience a customer has with the company. The goal of integrated branding is to create a company that consistently and carefully orchestrates and delivers to the consumers the initial brand promise.

Training every employee in the proper way to treat a customer is one of the first steps in integrating your brand. If your company has integrated its brand, every employee from the top to the bottom knows what its company is good at, its personality and its key promise to the consumers. When employees are living and integrated brand, they can:

- Make decisions smarter and faster
- Consistently act in a way that customers appreciate
- Design products and services that emphasize the company's key promise
- Consistently act to increase the company's differentiation
- Hire the type of people and create a work environment that reflects the company's key values
- Budget the company's money in a way that builds the brand and reinforces key brand attributes.

Brand Equity Pyramid

Moving up the pyramid creates an unbreakable customer relationship.



(Davis, LePla, Parker, 2003, p.8, Figure 1.2)

Loyal customers are the key to a successful business. The goal of the integrated branding process is to create unbreakable customer relationships, not just to gain the customers attention. Professor Susan Fournier of Harvard University has outlined three triggers to create an emotional tie with a brand:

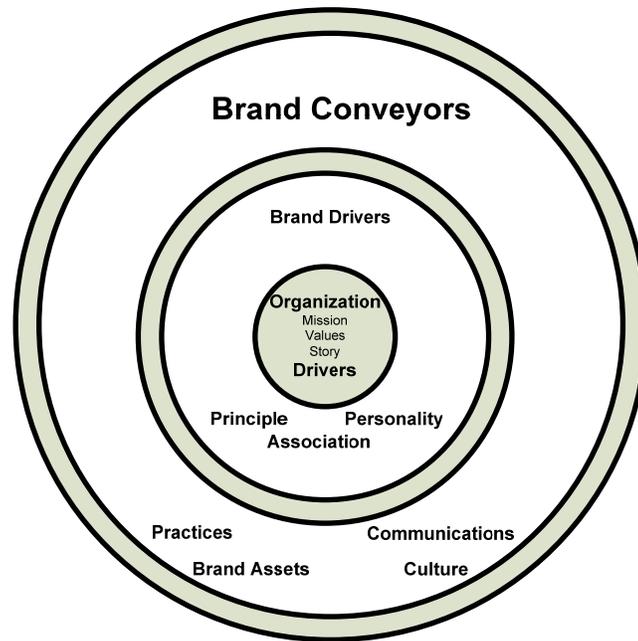
- Congruence with deeply rooted life themes [values], such as personal freedom
- Helping in the accomplishment of life projects such as college graduation or parenting
- Resolution of current concerns, such as getting enough vitamins

All three triggers can occur through the customer's personal relationships with the brand — resulting in the customer seeing the brand as a friend or partner....becoming a significant part of the customer's life.

Your brand must be built on the company's actual strengths rather than a painted-on mask. Integrated branding is the chance for organizations to put their goals in to practice and achieve their vision. The integrated branding process has three key steps.

1. brand clarity;
2. company activity alignment;
3. communications.

Integrated Branding Model
 This outlines the brand tools organization drivers, brand drivers, and brand conveyors is necessary to live an integrated brand



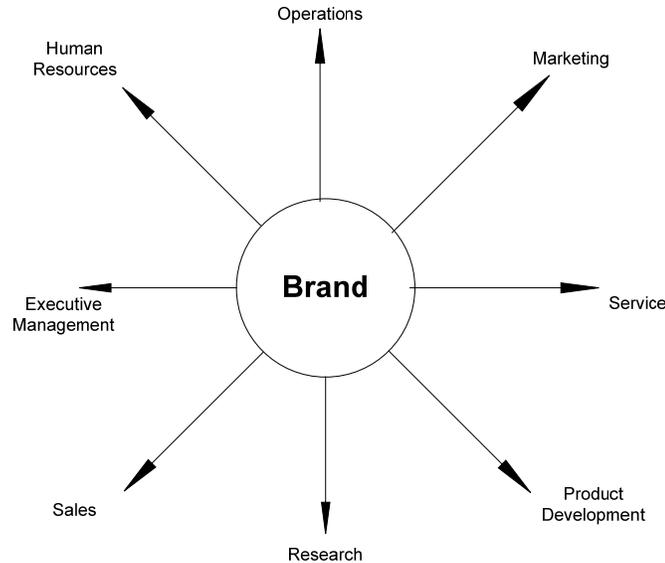
(Davis, LePla, Parker, 2003, p.31, Figure 2.2)

In order to establish brand clarity, you have to know who you are. You have to do research. Ask customers, prospects, employees, partners, analysts, and vendors. Sort through research to discover the brand assets of your company. The full benefit of integrated branding can't be achieved until all employees are living it.

Company activity alignment focuses on creating a company filled with leaders leading from the brand and employees **executing** it. This requires leaders becoming brand evangelists as well as setting up employee compensation systems rewarding brand-based behavior, hiring based on branding, organizing company processes and designing products and services to reflect the brand.

Tell the world who you are. Brand based communication, via logos, ad campaigns, collateral, taglines, brand characters, colors, public relations, direct mail and Web sites, delivers different brand tools consisting of verbal and visual tools. Effective communication of your brand will help promote your marketing efforts, proving that your brand message is true, effective and consistent.

The Truly Integrated Brand
The company brand is at the center of all actions and functions.



(Davis, LePla, Parker, 2003, p.5, Figure 1.1)

A brand stands for the relationship that an organization has with its employees, as well as the relationship it has with its customers through its products and services. For a brand to really appeal to a customer, the organization must be **internally** aligned to deliver the brand promise through the organization's culture, reward systems, key success activities and structure. Employees must 'live' the brand values in their day to day interactions.

There are four critical success factors that will help achieve the alignment of the organization to the brand promise. (Interbrand)

1. Senior Management Stewardship

Visible leadership will drive consistent behavior. Top managers must demonstrate that internal brand alignment is a high priority for the entire company through their own commitment to brand goals, values and behaviors. Through words, matching actions, and the initiatives they support, senior managers can demonstrate that the whole company is serious about keeping its brand promise.

2. Aligning Business and Brand Strategy

Customer relationships fuel success. Brand strategy must foster loyalty-based relationships by defining a relevant, differentiated and credible value

proposition. Such success is achieved by ensuring the product and service quality is consistent with your brand promise. Support customer expectations through every interaction and purchase. Failures to live up to the brand promise will quickly depreciate brand equity and ultimately, your bottom line.

3. Responsibility and Accountability

Middle managers are key to delivering the brand promise. Their role is to infuse their teams and their operations with a practical commitment to the living brand. This protocol applies as much to ‘back office’ functions as to sales and customer service. In this way, the brand becomes the platform for focusing staff attention outwards, towards the customer priorities that will secure future earnings. It often involves changes to processes, incentives, training and management style as much as communication.

4. Ongoing Performance Measurement and Feedback

What gets measured gets done. A coherent brand evaluation program with milestones, progress measures and celebrations of success is vital for sustaining the momentum of internal brand alignment. Regular customer feedback to monitor the effectiveness of your brand delivery serves two distinct and equally important purposes. It determines how successfully internal managers are translating business strategies into compelling value propositions. It also creates an employee feedback loop to assess customer acceptance of and satisfaction with the brand promise.

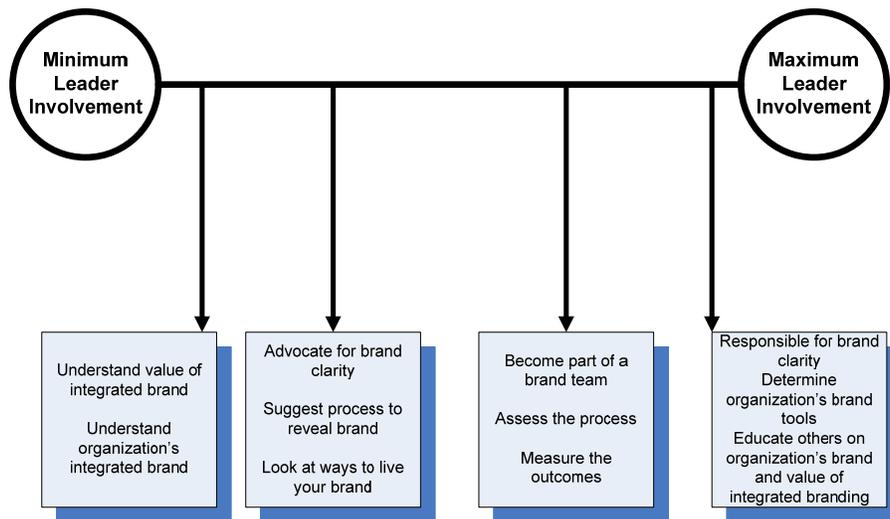
At the integrated level of branding, senior management and other company leaders guide their actions based on the company’s brand principle, while demonstrating its consistent personality and values. Everyone believes in and advocates for the mission and tells a consistent company story. The benefit of brand integration is that every employee action, company practice and even the corporate culture helps deliver a valuable and differentiated customer experience. At the integrated branding level, part of a leader’s job is to recognize and nurture valuable brand assets. The result of creating an integrated brand is a shift in the company’s focus from delivering products and services to delivering a unique and compelling customer experience based on your strategic goal. Creating a brand alignment team for high priority alignment projects is useful in helping to tackle critical alignment projects as well as oversee existing project management teams.

Brand Strategy is the guideline that a company uses to build its integrated brand. An effective brand strategy deals with all of the ways you plan to improve your customers experience and satisfaction. It includes aligning not just the marketing department but all departments with your integrated brand. It focuses on things that need to be changed and the priorities and timeline for that change. A brand strategy answers this question, “What is our brand focus this year?” Your brand strategy is a core component of your organization’s annual plan.

Brand Strategy Questions Every Leader Should Ask

- What areas of the brand promise (based on your brand tools) does the customer experience currently not deliver?
- What is the current competitive situation that the brand must address?
- What are the current threats that the brand must overcome?
- If you could wave a magic wand and create the perfect customer experience based on your brand, what would it look like? Make sure that your new-and-improved customer experience meets the criteria of unique and compelling.
- Given current company brand assets, practices and culture, how much of this experience could you realistically provide in one year? In two years?
- What would leaders need to sponsor to ensure the success of this strategy?
- What resources and capital would it take to make it happen?
- If you believe this is the right thing for the company to do, what are the logical next steps to make it happen?

Leader Involvement Continuum
Leaders in every role have a part to play in living the integrated brand.



(Davis, LePla, Parker, 2003, p.24, Figure 2.1)

The goal of a brand strategy is to capture the hearts and minds of your customers and lead them to the loyalty and commitment levels of brand equity. There are three components to an effective brand strategy:

1. **Internal:** your company brand direction as played out in your customer experience; new or existing product and service development; company activities; budgets.
2. **External:** economic cycles; competitive threats; regulatory threats; industry threats such as a sea change in your customer experience area (for instance, from black and white to color television, or from mainframes to networked computers).
3. **ROI and improvement:** how you will handle implementation, benchmarking, contingencies, feedback and fine-tuning.

It is important to create a brand strategy that keeps things fresh. The brand manager's mantra should always be: "What should we keep? What can we safely update?" While keeping it fresh, however, you must also keep your brand core consistent. What's unique about your approach to customers that shouldn't change? If you consistently use your strategic role, brand principle, personality and values over a period of year, you'll build defensible differentiation.

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