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How to capitalize on the value of your brand

c o m p a n y 's brand is oftentimes an underprized asset.

Brand gets confused with marketing — tied up in budgets, used only to inform the look and feel of communications.

As the sum of a company's touch points,

brand is a constant and critical lever to help companies achieve their business strategies. Executives have an essential stake in ensuring a brand continues to appreciate by embedding it into everything the company does — from decision-making to culture to communications.

The brands we know that reach the promised land of "enviable" (Apple, Google, Coca-Cola) get there because the focus begins at the top — in the executive suite.

Many organizations look at brand as secondary to a strategy. If brand is something you evaluate in a reactive manner, you are not capitalizing on its value.

Organizations (and executives) need to make explicit efforts to leverage the brand to inform corporate strategy (what is our brand potential) and ensure that the strategy can be achieved as a result of the brand (how do we effectively use our brand to achieve our strategy). Any other way and you are just wasting your capital, your energy and your employees' time.

"Brand is about self-awareness, understanding the essence of the business and what you want to accomplish," says Jane Park, CEO and founder of Julep Nail Parlor.

Park opened the "social nail parlor" retail concept in spring of 2007 and has now grown it to four stores across the Puget Sound area and to a fast-growing online products business, a feat considering the discretionary nature of the nail business.

"Our reason for being is about creating girlfriend connectedness. Everything we do promotes that — from how we greet you at the front desk to little details in our parlors that one might not notice, like our modular furniture that allows for both a social or a quiet experience for our guests," she says.

Brands are built from the inside out.

CORPORATE STRATEGY

Laura Yurdin *and* Mary Weisnewski

Are you a brand-driven leader?

For CEOs, here are questions to ask yourself and your team.

Infusing brand into strategy

- Do you understand the value of brand?
 As the CEO, are you accountable for the value of your brand in the marketplace?
- What is the interplay between brand and strategy? Do you know the potential of your brand? How are you using your brand to help you achieve your strategy?
- Can you define what your brand is and what it means to your target audiences?
- Do you know how to promote brand stewardship in your organization? Does your leadership team support and invest in brand related activities? How do you support and reinforce this?

Communication focus

- Does your culture reinforce the value of your brand experience?
- Can every employee articulate what is expected as a contributor to the many

touch points that cumulatively make up your brand over time?

- Are you authentically delivering an experience that is aligned with what you are saying?
- Are you focusing on connecting with customers and prospects that care about the same things your brand delivers?

Customer focus

- As the CEO, are you (not a delegate) regularly talking to customers, prospects and competitors about your marketplace?
- Have you experienced your brand from your customer's perspective, in relation to one of your competitors?
- Do you have a realistic view of your customers' needs and experiences? Are you more than one step ahead of them, leading them to want what you will provide next?

— LAURA YURDIN AND MARY WEISNEWSKI

Organizations are like people.
They have personalities, values and beliefs, and we connect with them differently

— positively or negatively — based on the

— positively or negatively — based on the experiences the organization delivers.

Trusted brands create lasting, consistent experiences that we rely on. Executives have the opportunity to foster strong brands from the inside and to capture employees' passion to help move a company's business strategy forward.

Being a "must work with or work for" company strengthens brand reputation, allowing you to attract both top talent and targeted clients. Just as your customer experiences need to be based on what is authentic and to resonate with your target audiences, so does your employment brand.

For Loft9, a startup consulting firm based in Bellevue that focuses on business analytics and project coordination, brand was a critical first investment in their growth strategy.

Trusted brands create lasting, consistent experiences that we rely on.

"We leveraged 10 percent of our starting capital to ensure our brand was defined for both our clients and associates," says Mark Birzell, co-founder/partner of the firm, which began in January 2010. "Our brand serves as a filter for decision-making — at the end of the day, it keeps us honest."

The results of a strong brand are measurable and lasting. Whether your strategy is about increasing your customer base, retaining employees, seeking funding or creating a new class of service, your brand matters and must be put to work if you want to achieve your goals.

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