

INWARD'S

BRAND AMBASSADOR

2009 SURVEY FINDINGS

And the Top Ten Things You Can Do About It

By Allan Steinmetz, CEO | Inward Strategic Consulting

I'm very happy to announce the results of our first annual employee brand ambassador benchmarking study. We had a very robust response and meaningful input. Before I get into the specific findings and details however, I want to share an experience I had last week while briefly attending an Association of National Advertising meeting in New York City on brand equity. I was there to meet someone and only had an opportunity to see a small part of a panel discussion discussing the contributing factors of brand equity. The panel was presenting the findings of a membership survey that identified the top ten factors contributing to brand equity. The first was no surprise. Over 89% believed the product/service was the most contributing factor to brand equity. The second was customer service with 86%. Third was employee brand advocacy with 81%. I have to admit, a smile came to my face. This brief interaction once again confirmed that employee brand advocacy was the third most important factor in establishing strong brand equity that is bankable.

Now comes the shocker. Despite what was confirmed by the ANA panel and their research, Inward's brand ambassador benchmark study suggests otherwise. Even though employee brand advocacy is the third most important factor in building brand equity, over 68% of the people we surveyed said that their companies did not fully embrace the concept of brand ambassadorship programs that formerly promote brand values and new behaviors. Only a third (32%) felt their companies fully embraced this idea. And in comparison to the previous year, 25% believe that their companies will invest less time and money for employee advocacy and brand championship programs. These are startling findings in our opinion.



Companies are not engaging in brand ambassador programs to promote employee advocacy.

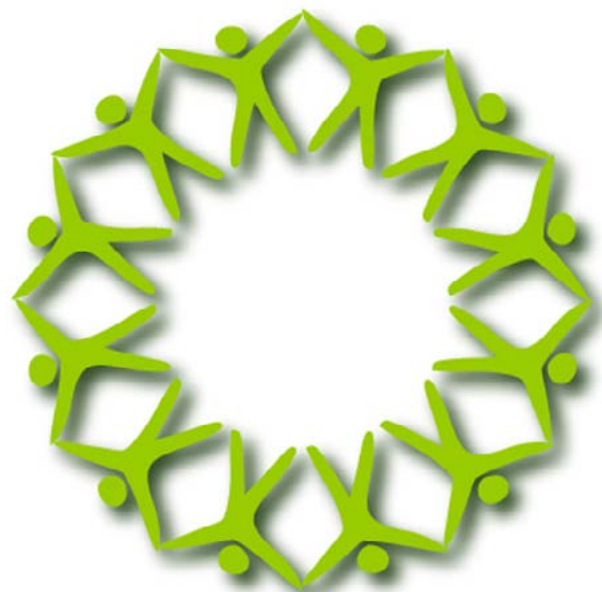
So there you have it. While employee advocacy and brand ambassador programs are considered to be a strong leading indicator of brand equity, two thirds of our sample feels it is not endorsed or embraced fully within their companies. That is amazing.

This represents a huge opportunity to improve performance by enabling a sophisticated process and integrated planning to stage brand ambassador programs within companies.

The second big news headline is that in addition to not embracing brand ambassador programs, few companies are effectively deploying process and tactics successfully within the company.

The top ten tactics that were most often initiated to promote brand ambassador programs were as follows:

1. 51.4% - outbound e-mails and newsletters to staff
2. 43.5% - employee recognition and award programs
3. 42.5% - posters and broadcast videos
4. 38.6% - brand intranets for explanations and brand standards
5. 37.6% - branded slogans and posters/banners around the company
6. 29.7% - company wide decorations with branded messages
7. 28.7% - storytelling sessions about successful brand customer experiences
8. 27.7% - customer facing branding testimonials
9. 26.7% - conduct annual employee engagement studies regarding the brand and report the results
10. 25.7% -prepare brochures and explain the brand and why it is important



Analysis:

In an open ended response to what tactics are used, respondents cite not having a sophisticated tactics in place, lack of process or integrated plans, limited resources, lack of senior management support and generally an uncoordinated program that does not have an orchestrated goal and objective in sight.

- **Old fashion, Non-engaging tactics** - Companies must employ up-to-date and sophisticated communication techniques and integrated communications processes to benefit from employee advocacy.

We know from our experience that the best employee advocacy companies use social networking and Web 2.0 platforms have highly engaging companywide training programs, and integrated HR appraisal and recognition rewards systems. They also employ groups of people who are charged with the responsibility of championing and promoting the corporate brand promise. The survey results indicate that these techniques are not being deployed in large numbers.

- **Vision Mission & Values** - In addition, many companies have clear statements for mission vision and values and support those activities with regular and ongoing communications to staff relying on a variety of "old fashion" tactics such as newsletters, intranets, and town hall presentations and meetings.
- **Effectiveness** - 46% felt their brand ambassador programs were only somewhat or not effective while only 14.8% believed their programs were very effective. Surprisingly 17.8% have no brand ambassador programs in place at all which represents a significant lost opportunity.
- **Measurement** - By and large very few organizations have a formal measurement tools to measure the effectiveness of their brand ambassador programs. The tactics they cite are limited employee engagement research which is somewhat formal, but by in large measurement is antidotal and undocumented stories and hearsay.

- **Improving brand ambassador programs** - It was cited that formality and process would help improve brand ambassador programs. Often programs are grass roots-driven with little involvement from senior management and no accountability. Also many cited that individual groups should be charged with driving effective programs within their firms by creating fun, integrated programs around informing employees, training, realigning HR processes, peer to peer review and regular recognition and reward programs.
- **Least/Most Deployed Tactics** - The survey illustrates that there are several tactics that are least and most deployed with varying degrees. For instance we know from our experience that HR appraisal and incentive systems that are aligned with brand behavior and values are highly effective at achieving employee brand engagements coupled with dedicated investments and resources. However over 50% of those surveyed say these tactics are not being deployed.
- **Building Social Networks** - In addition, technologies such as social networks and Web 2.0 platforms also contribute to effective employee engagement yet 45% say their firms do not deploy them. In contrast, those tactics that are fully employed successfully and that have an impact on successful programs are tactics such as senior management support through behavior alignment, enterprise meetings on a regular basis and effective integrated internal communications process.
- **Most deployed brand ambassador tactics** - The tactics that were cited as most successful in promoting brand ambassador programs were ;
 - 48% - CEO briefings
 - 45% - senior management supporting behavior through walking the talk
 - 39% - staging enterprise-wide meetings on a regular basis
 - 37% - an effective integrated internal communications process
 - 34% - frequent communications that explains brand values and behavior

- **Least deployed brand ambassador tactics** - The tactics that were cited as least deployed in promoting successful brand ambassador programs were:
 - 51%- monetary investments and resources to reinforce brand values
 - 50% - appraisals and incentives that are aligned with the brand behaviors/ values
 - 45% - technology and software to communicate the brand values and messages internally
 - 44% - communicates his brand in an informality fun and useful experiential way
 - 37% - stages enterprise-wide meetings on a regular basis

So what does all this mean? Despite this, employee advocacy is viewed as one of the top three contributing factors to strong brand equity.

Very few companies according to our survey are relying on an integrated internal communications platform or process and utilizing limited effective tactics to achieve employee brand advocacy.

Here are our top ten take-a-ways that will help you design and measure an effective employee ambassador program.

1. There must be a clear statement of behavior that is embodied in a vision mission and values
2. The company must engage the senior management to participate in an active role
3. A group of individuals must be designated to be responsible and accountable for driving an effective brand ambassador program
4. Must have an integrated internal/brand ambassador program that is process driven to inform employees, training employees, evaluate employees and recognize and reward employees
5. Measure the current level of brand knowledge through employee engagement research to determine priorities and develop core messages

6. Tactical marketing plans should have common tone/manner, messages and continuity with sustained programming
7. Choose tactics that have the greatest impact and return on investment such as employee training, social networks and Web 2.0 technologies, experiential-cross functional and enterprise wide communications that are creative and fun to participate in
8. Realigning HR processes and appraisal systems to support brand behavior and accountability
9. Formalize and engage a group of people representing all areas of the company to become a standing active committee of brand ambassadors with specific responsibilities and roles
10. Engaged the CEO in the dialogue with employees with full transparency and honesty

Marketers need to deploy similar standards and processes that they deployed for external sophisticated marketing programs to their internal constituencies alike.

If you would like to get a full copy of our research report on brand ambassador programs please drop us a line and we will send you a copy as soon as we can.

About The Author:

Allan Steinmetz is the CEO and founder of Inward Strategic Consulting, an internal & external branding, change management, team alignment and market research consulting firm with offices in Boston, Orlando, Chicago and San Francisco.



He has over 30 years' experience in marketing, branding, change management, and advertising/communications. His background includes work for Ford Motor Company, US Postal Service, Ericsson, Pitney Bowes, Campbell's Soup, several High Tech companies and start-ups and professional services firms.

Prior to establishing the firm, he was Senior Vice President and Corporate Director of Marketing for Arthur D. Little, a premium management consulting firm; where he was responsible for the firm's brand identity, business development, lead generation, advertising and communications. Prior to ADL, he was the Worldwide Director of Marketing and Communications for Andersen Consulting (now called Accenture). Prior to Andersen he was with Young and Rubicam for ten years as Senior Vice President and Director of Marketing in a variety of management and new business roles.

Allan has been cited in over 100 business publications such as the Wall Street Journal, Adweek, BtoB Magazine and many others. He has been a featured speaker and presenter at International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), American Learning Institute, American Marketing Association, Information Technology Services Marketing Association (ITSMA) and the American Strategic Management Institute (ASMI).



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