



INTERNAL BRANDING

WHAT IS THAT EXACTLY?

By: Allan Steinmetz, CEO | Inward Strategic Consulting, Inc.

Everyone knows what a brand is, and everyone knows what advertising is. Some of us may be confused about promotion and merchandising but most have a basic idea, at least, of what they are.

Lately, a lot of people have been asking me about internal branding. What exactly is internal branding? It's definitely a hot topic, on which seminars and workshops are offered all around the country. By my count, seven major internal branding conferences were held this past year, and we participated

in four of them, and even chaired one of them.

It's hot, but what is it? Very little is written that defines internal branding; so as one of the pioneers of this new branding phenomenon, I decided to pound a stake

into the ground with my definition. We have earned the right to do this, because, since we started our firm, we have been promoting the power of internal branding with our Inward Marketing Methodology: we really are the internal branding company.

Before I explain what internal branding is, let me clear up some misconceptions. It is NOT letting your employees know about your new advertising campaign. It does not consist of handing out t-shirts and baseball caps to announce a new strategic initiative, name change or company vision statement. Really, it is not anything remotely like these things.

So what it IS internal branding? Why is it important? When should I do it?

Here is Inward's definition: ***Internal branding is a cultural shift within an organization, where the employees become more customer focused and more business focused.***

You achieve this by an organized, communications and behavior driven process, which leads to a desired end state. Meanwhile, at all levels in the company, one big question is answered - "What's in it for me?" After they hear and learn about the internal brand initiative, every single employee should understand what job behavior you expect from them, and how they contribute to the company's success. You need to reinforce the behavior you want, and bring it into line with HR policies, internal communications and corporate marketing efforts and strategy.

Effective internal branding brings huge benefits. Companies whose workforces understand how they operate and make money perform better. Committed employees provide stronger performance and higher customer satisfaction.

Important data that supports this connection between understanding and internal change was released recently. This study by McKinsey concludes that change-management programs succeed only when employees at all levels - senior managers, middle managers, and the front line - share the will and the skills to change. McKinsey studied change programs at forty organizations, and found a strong correlation between good skills for managing change and the value an organization carries away from these programs. These skills, I would add, are the product of effective change communications and internal branding programming.

The more knowledgeable, convinced and supportive the workforce is, the faster you

can implement change. Strongly accepted change is sustainable, and that saves both time and money.

When all is said and done, successful internal branding lifts brand equity, customer focus and ultimately shareholder value. One of our high tech presenters at a recent conference shared startling numbers that demonstrated a powerful correlation between internal branding efforts, external branding efforts and shareholder equity. It's all about the facts, the data, the metrics and accountabilities.

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So the question becomes, "How should a company do internal branding or Inward Marketing?" Here are some of key elements/ best practices we've gathered from studying this topic for the past fifteen years.

- A brand is a process driven, long-term proposition. Not a deliverable! And so is internal branding.
- Internal branding follows a sequential process; through which employees achieve internal brand success. There is a difference between communicating a message, getting it understood, and changing behavior.
- You must have senior leadership participation and involvement throughout the process of internal branding. You can't delegate this or let the managers drive it.
- Start with a clear company vision and purpose. If you don't have one, work with the senior team to establish one and communicate throughout the company by both words and action.
- Set clear objectives and well-defined roles at the outset, and revisit them throughout the process.
- Consider assigning dedicated people to internal change communication and internal branding. Let them create a sense of

such urgency that staff see no alternative to change.

- Conduct an audit of the enterprise understanding of the business objectives and strategy so you can address areas where people don't "get it."
- Internal branding, done well, allows employees to transition from being "Informed," to "Understanding" the information, to becoming "Committed", so that they "Change Their Behavior" in support of the company goals. As a result they should "Receive Recognition & Rewards" and positive reinforcement for changing their behavior.
- Recognize the importance of the customer and all their points of contact with your company: call and service centers, sales associates, statements/ invoices, advertising and more.
- Align your brand externally & internally. Let your inside be like your outside: what you say externally should be the same thing you say/do internally.
- Go for participation, consensus and employee dialogue. These work better than edicts and policies that travel down the hierarchy.
- Having "Employee Brand Ambassadors" is critical - involve a cross section of employees from all levels, who will promote the brand internally through experiential communication.
- Obtain metrics and measures before, during and after program implementation. Research your employees regularly and track their progress over time.
- Hard, Simple, Easy - Work hard to make complex concepts and ideas simple, so they are understood and communicated easily. Seek outside help from experts and consultants in the field - this is hard work, but with help in methodology and process, it can be done effectively.



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