



## How Do We Look?

Want to stir excitement in an organization? Undertake a branding, or rebranding, effort.

It seems to turn on a switch.

Seriously, the creative juices start to flow. Folks you never took for the how-do-we-look type jump on the bandwagon. (Okay, perhaps not as the drivers, but just watch; some you never expected will be on board before the trip's end.)

Buzz reaches a crescendo. The day arrives. The newness is unveiled. Ta-da! Here we are! High-fives are shared.

After that...well...in many instances, not much happens. It's back to the usual. And, people wonder why all the hubbub.

What's missing?

In this issue of **EA Insights**, let's reflect on a secret of branding that far too many neglect -- but a secret that makes all the difference.

It may be wise to read on...that is, before you seek consensus on an updated color palate.

All the best,

*June*

June Melvin Mickens  
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## Branding's Secret Weapon

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At a recent onsite client visit, I was talking with an executive team member who was jazzed about a branding effort that was launching. Now, if you know me, you know that a question followed this interesting piece of information. So, I'll ask you the same question I posed to the exec.



When you think *branding*, what's the first thing that comes to mind?

It's likely that color schemes, tag lines, or logos, pops up for you first, right? And, that's exactly what I heard that day.

While each of those answers does pinpoint an important aspect of branding, they miss branding's heart. Neglected from the typical response is something that, in many respects, has a greater impact on how an organization is viewed than any one of those usual quick-think items or even all of them put together.

What *is* branding's secret weapon?

It's every person who works in the organization -- its employees.

You see, all too often we consider branding in terms of the trappings. And, no doubt, the part those items play is unmistakable. Yet, if the totality of the effort involves the externals, with little to no attention to the internals, quite frankly, the marketing and design expenses are wasted.

So, what do a business' employees have to do with branding? Short answer -- everything!

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## "Quotes"

*"You have to create a consistent brand experience however and wherever a customer touches your brand[.]"*  
~Angela Ahrendts

*"I find that when you lead with vision and values, engaging employees and showing them that values are just as important as profits, everyone comes on board."*  
~Shari Arison

*"Everyone on our team shares a couple passions - putting the fun back in [our industry], an entrepreneurial spiriting, and the passion for creating an innovative and exciting brand - all of which makes [this] a really fun place to work these days."*  
~Keith Belling

*"People who work for you represent your brand. You want them to present themselves - and represent you - in a certain way."*  
~Marc Benioff

*"Your brand is your public identity, what you're trusted for. And for your brand to endure, it has to be tested, redefined, managed, and expanded[.] Brands either learn or disappear."*  
~Lisa Gansky

*"Creating a strong company culture isn't just good business. It's the right thing to do, and it makes your company better for all"*

**Employees must understand your mission and how you intend to carry it out.**

Think about it. Branding essentially is the story about *you* that you want the world to know. And, which people need to be most familiar with that story? You've got it -- those who live it daily.

For a brand to be more than just pictures and slogans, for it to have real meaning, every staff member needs to understand some key points. Why does the organization exist? What are the long- and short-term goals, and why have those priorities been selected? How will you carry out the direction that's been set? How does each person, and the unit in which s/he sits, matter to what to where you're headed?

A public campaign that tells the world you're about "X", when none, or few, on the inside could have an intelligent conversation about what X is, and how you're going to get X done, oh and by the way, why X even matters, makes that campaign hollow. It may be slick. It may be catchy. But, that's about all it is. The focus, energy, and commitment to make anything happen are missing.

**Employees must grasp and buy into the outward image you intend to send.**

Lest you think that I view branding's outward-facing component as trivial, think again. The words, the images, the colors all send subtle and/or vivid messages that cannot, and should not, be ignored.

Unfortunately, many branding efforts are run and blessed by team members who are the farthest away from the intended audiences of the messages being crafted. Consequently, the intent of the messaging very well may backfire.

Granted, it may not be feasible for everyone to have a say. (Although all-staff feedback on top contenders can be quite useful.) Yet, seeking some level of input from staff, representing a range of organizational perspectives, is a critical strategic step to generate and test ideas and to uncover potential gaffes during the process. Equally important is a commitment to robust internal communication -- to roll out, explain to, and hear from all corners about the messaging. Staff engagement is essential, as it involves the group whose jobs and public images will be shaped by the organization's new or revised story. Employees need to understand it, and they need to embrace it. If they don't, your campaign may say "this" is who we are, but the actual story told in each staff-customer interaction will be far different.

**Employees must experience the attributes and treatment you intend for them to extend to others.**

Underlying your branding initiative is an effort to draw and keep customers or new hires, right? You want customers to know that you value their business and want them coming back. You want recruits to recognize yours as a place they want to join, and stay, and tell others about. And, while you can deliver such messages through websites, commercials, ads, signs, and more, the staff also communicates volumes daily with face-to-face and virtual interactions. The question is whether the two sets of messages are consistent.

One thing I've learned in work with organizations over the years is that it's hard for people to extend to others what they are not receiving themselves. Okay, let's make that plainer. It becomes increasingly difficult for a person to show care and respect and value to an organization's customers if s/he is feeling ignored, belittled, and unappreciated by the organization. It is hard for a person to put on a good face for a recruit and show the best that the organization has to offer, when that same person is dissatisfied and has one foot out of the door.

For the message to be delivered earnestly to the public, a comparable experience first must be had by the staff member who's been placed in the courier position. If people on the inside exist in a culture of value and a sincere desire to produce well for each customer, the marketing team's contribution to branding becomes icing because the primary work already has been done and is conveyed, or reinforced, with each internal and external touch. It...just...shows!

So, does your organization's brand need a lift? If so, please start from within. And, if you could use some help understanding staff impressions and/or developing a strong culture that that draws the best from your staff, don't just wish for it. Take a step forward. Call on us at [Executive Advantage](#). We're here to help you build an internal environment that serves as a solid foundation for the more public-facing branding to come. [Contact us today](#).



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*stakeholders - employees, management, and customers."*  
~Julia Hartz

*"One thing I have always promised is to be open and transparent and to treat employees and partners with respect and integrity."*

~Brian Krzanich

*"Ensure your employees understand what your brand stands for so they can be your first line of word-of-mouth advertising."*

~Simon Mainwaring

*"Every great brand is like a great story."*

~Kevin Plank

*"Defining, embedding, and living core beliefs set the stage for executives and employees to connect. Through actions that consistently convey who we are and how we act, executives can inspire employees to believe in the organization's values and buy in to its brand."*

~Punit Renjen

*"You have to do things right to stay in business, and that's not easy, and that's a choice on a daily basis, the choices you make in how to run your business and how to have a point of differentiation and how to be true to your brand, how to offer something that people want and to offer something that you love."*

~Venus Williams

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At [Executive Advantage](#), we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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