



Engaging Employees
to Deliver a Branded
Customer Experience:
A Roadmap to Success

Interbrand

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When we think about what makes a brand great, we often define it through our own experiences. And while we may experience brands through a logo, advertising, or websites, the most critical touchpoints are people.

When the people within an organization understand what their brand stands for, they are empowered to create truly memorable experiences that ultimately drive loyalty and enhance business performance. In this sense, the corporate brand provides a powerful engine to align the organization and create a differentiated customer experience.

However, this process, which we call brand engagement, is not as simple as it sounds. Employees do not suddenly snap into action once they've watched a video at a company event. Mobilizing employees to deliver on the brand promise requires strategic planning, dialogue, and cross-functional collaboration. Brand engagement begins the moment you start a branding program and needs to be sustained over the long term.

From a process perspective, brand engagement means taking steps to inspire leaders and key influencers to act as role models, clearly defining behaviors, creating relevant communications, and aligning the organization around the brand (and ultimately around the customer).

In this paper, we'll explore a high-level roadmap that outlines some of the steps that all organizations – whether a B2B or B2C brand – can take to develop a brand engagement program that helps connect your employees to your customers.

The theory behind Employee Engagement: Service Profit Chain

The connection between customer loyalty and employee engagement began over 20 years ago when James Heskett and his colleagues at Harvard Business School created the Service Profit Chain.

The links in the Service Profit model are as follows: Profit and growth are stimulated primarily by customer loyalty. Loyalty is a direct result of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is largely influenced by the value of services provided to customers. Value is created by satisfied, loyal, and productive employees. Employee satisfaction, in turn, results primarily from high quality support services and policies that enable employees to deliver the experience (to customers) that has been promised by the brand.

The links between employee engagement and business impact are well documented. Most recently, Gallup found that more engaged workplaces:

- Are better prepared to engage their customers and experience a 240 percent boost in performance related business outcomes
- Experience a 147 percent higher earnings per share compared with their competition

It has also been shown that the financial performance of organizations is significantly correlated with employee engagement. A business with an unenthusiastic workforce not only risks compromising profitability, safety, and quality, but, according to Gallup, disengaged employees cost the U.S. \$450 billion to \$550 billion per year.

Towers Watson's global study shows that only four in 10 employees are highly engaged and 60 percent of employees lack the necessary elements to become highly engaged.



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If the links between employee engagement and business impact are so obvious, why don't we think about it more? And what does it really mean? When, where, and how do we begin engaging employees? Like most things, it must begin with a purposeful plan.

Five steps to building your brand engagement plan

Through our work with clients around the world, we've learned that there are five essential steps required in developing an integrated brand engagement plan for your organization.

1 Engage leadership at the outset
As we know intuitively, strong leadership is critical to business success. The CEO is the only person in an organization who sees the complete brand. Therefore, the brand starts and ends with the CEO.

We also understand that the leadership team must be aligned on the importance of the brand. Any misalignment at upper levels is readily obvious to employees.

When the leadership team is actively engaged in the brand they can better understand how brand can be a filter for business decisions, behaviours and communications. However, managers are key influencers also. We know that employees will not change behaviors unless managers do as well, so it's critical that managers understand their role.

2 Involve the right employees in the process
Often, organizations fail at employee engagement simply because they don't segment their internal audiences with the same discernment as their external audiences. As part of our process, we work closely with communications and human resources (HR) to identify the most influential employees, by level and function, and engage these influencers in our branding process.

Ideally, we want to empower credible, influential employees to cascade information to others, and to provide these influencers with the tools they need to be accountable and successful. Middle managers are a critical link to fostering employee engagement.

3 Identify which behaviors need to change
The corporate brand provides a powerful engine for aligning employee behavior with the core purpose and promise of the organization to help create a differentiated customer experience. While many think corporate values suffice, in some organizations they do not adequately do the job of connecting the employee to the customer, nor are they written with the brand in mind. There must be clarity around the reality that how you act internally within the organization impacts the customer experience. In addition, high-level behaviors can be misunderstood in daily practice, so these should be defined on a functional level.

Connecting employees to the customer experience and educating them about the importance of their role is critical to branding success. By following a systematic, strategic process, you can transition your employees from having only a simple awareness of your brand to understanding and adopting on-brand behaviors in their daily roles.



The brand starts and ends with the CEO.

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Develop an integrated communications strategy

We know that clear, consistent communication is essential to the success of any project. But it's surprising how

many organizations move right into tactical execution without creating a comprehensive communication strategy that keeps employees informed and excited about the project and shows how it is relevant to them.

Decide early in the process what needs to be communicated, and to whom, with the full knowledge that top-down communications rarely suffice anymore. Develop a plan to ensure ongoing dialogue, utilizing a range of communication vehicles. Create opportunities for feedback, seeking to constantly answer the question, "What's in it for me?" and "Why should I care?"

Consider that you will be moving through various stages, beginning with basic awareness (knowing the brand), which is the most fundamental. However, the real work is in sustaining the brand beyond launch day.

5

Align the organization around the brand

Branding is an opportunity to bring together marketing, HR, and communication teams. However, to

ensure credibility, organizations must redesign HR processes and procedures to support any changes in values and behaviors. This includes areas such as recruitment, orientation, training, promotion, compensation, reward, and recognition. Align policy and practices around the brand, and clearly define the criteria and behavioral expectations for areas such as compensation and recruitment to reflect your commitment to the brand. Then, put a process in place to measure, reward, and recognize the right actions and behaviors – because what gets measured gets done.

Sustaining the brand

Whether you're repositioning your brand or seeking to sustain a mature brand, it's crucial to provide information, tools and training that builds employee understanding, trust, and confidence. Creating a long-term plan to evolve and institutionalize these tools and resources is imperative to sustaining the importance of the brand to the business. The rewards can be considerable.

Organizations that put effort into increasing employee productivity, satisfaction, and loyalty not only have a happier workforce, but also deliver a better customer experience and see stronger financial results. Time and again we have seen how vital meaningful engagement is to an organization's success – and that it is, in fact, key to sustaining it.

About Interbrand

Interbrand is the world's leading brand consultancy, with a network of 33 offices in 27 countries. Since we opened for business in 1974, we have changed the way the world sees branding: from just another word for "logo", to a business's most valuable asset, to business strategy brought to life.

Publisher of the highly influential, annual Best Global Brands ranking, we believe that brands have the power to change the world – and we help our clients to do it every day. Our combination of strategy, creativity and technology delivers fresh ideas and insights, deep brand intelligence, clear business opportunities, and compelling brand experiences.



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Carolyn is responsible for client service and ensuring that Interbrand is known for the highest standards of excellence. An innovator and leader, she has over 25 years experience leading branding, communications, PR and marketing mandates for clients across diverse Industries.

Carolyn's career journey brings her back to Interbrand Canada for a second time. In her previous role, she led the global Brand Engagement practice, which focused on the implementation of brand campaigns for employees and external stakeholders. In this role, she led global mandates for Thomson Reuters, John Deere, Microsoft, Celestica, as well as Canadian clients such as Ontario Lottery and Gaming and ATI/AMD.

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