

# The HR Consultant's S

## How To Brand From The Inside Out

If you work for Vodafone in Auckland you are likely to have attended a first quarter strategy briefing from senior managers. That's not exceptional? In this case the managers were on stage at the Civic, immersed in a stage set from *The Matrix*. After being interrogated by Agent Smith and MCed by Morpheus they did their strategy spiel. The response from the staff in the stalls was great.

Making a Joe of yourself while selling the company vision to staff might not be every manager's idea of a fun time. Paying the entertainment expenses might make some shiver. But for Jan Mottram, HR director of Vodafone, connecting with staff, and establishing that managers are people too, is critical to the message getting through.

To help its business grow from 3% brand recognition in 1998 to 99% now, Vodafone has invested in an ongoing sequence of zany campaigns. It has also invested significantly in internal brand building. Working back from its external brand promise and values, the company has developed its own unique organisational values. And built a range of practices and internal products around these values.

The assumption is that people learn more about how to behave – to work cooperatively, and to support internal and external customers – through the guidance of values, than from 'how to' manuals. And that building emotional commitment to the brand values will produce greater organisational commitment and also commitment to customers. That should ensure positive brand experiences for customers.

Or look at it the other way – any time your whole organisation isn't living your brand you are losing customers.

Companies like Vodafone are taking branding logic and applying it upstream in their company value chain. For service-intensive offerings the company's employees are a critical part of what customers value and buy. Brands are valueless if they lack integrity or consistency. Service companies need to offer people who are capable of the same consistency. Working with staff to help ensure that their behaviour is congruent with the brand promise is where a lot of businesses think it's at.

Meanwhile, HR people are talking about their recruitment brand, or even their retention brand. They have latched on to the importance of the brand concept. But they are often applying it back-to-front. It is true that to attract and retain staff you need a clear and consistent image of what your organisation is and what it stands for. But having HR do their own insular branding thing can be counter-productive.

The ultimate test of internal branding efforts is the extent to which they reinforce the integrity of consumers' brand experience. By having internal and external brands out of synch, the business risks not delivering for its customers.

The American operation of one multinational financial services business found that its HR people had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on organisational values that, unfortunately, had nothing to do with the company's market brand positioning. In contrast, Vodafone's organisational values such as 'zesty' are clearly part of the value proposition that its mobile customers buy.

Successful HR practitioners use the following ways to make organisational values stick.

**Make it loud.** Invest in promotions and communication. It takes repetition and emotion to get the message through. People usually need at least six opportunities to see, hear or touch a marketing message before it gets through.

Remember the Deloitte billboards, and now those from its competitor KPMG? Deloitte promised that it was 'the future of business'. KPMG promises its clients passion. How do their employees feel about the messages? They sure don't ignore them. Not when mums and drinking buddies ask what they're about.

While it's great to put up posters inside the building the point of external promotions is they provide conventional customer impact while mobilising staff commitment through 'pulling' the behaviour along.

**Give people voice.** Invest in staff involvement. Your people will be in behind those billboard messages. Especially if they are the same messages they got when they were deciding to join up.

But if this is a new direction for them, you need to spend time with them working it through. Both the head stuff (about why this makes sense) and the heart stuff (what this means for them). After all, most people feel that their values are a matter of personal integrity. It takes a lot of trust to say you'll try to align with someone else's values.

**Make it matter.** Behaviour in and out of synch with values should have consequences. Using behavioural definitions means you have maximum clarity about what the values mean, and what expectations there are for behaviour. Good definitions include examples of behaviour that typify the values, and of what behaviours do not. Both are important. It's how you handle the trans-

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BY STEWART FORSYTH

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gressions of values that ultimately defines the values.

Vodafone's Jan Mottram uses a two-by-two matrix to illustrate this. It's about business results and values performance. Failure in either is a performance issue. Failure to demonstrate values that are in alignment with the organisation ultimately ends in the person leaving.

**Help leaders make it happen.** Invest in leadership measurement, coaching and training (and all the other HR practices). Surveys help managers by giving them feedback on how their behaviour is matching up to the value standards. Those in leadership roles can be helped further by coaching on practical ways to use the feedback and how to change their behaviour.

**Make it count.** Invest in surveys, buzz-groups and other ways to help your people make the organisation itself value-driven. Regular surveys – focused on leadership behaviour and work issues – test the extent to which the values are being lived and are making a difference. With well-defined and agreed descriptions of what the values mean, it is straightforward to ask your people if they see these behaviours being rewarded.

Finally, consider the relationship between the values and commitment to the organisation. Organisational commitment has been demonstrated to relate to staff retention, client retention and to the bottom line. As companies such as Vodafone know only too well: values do matter. ■

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Photo by Grant Southam, Campbell Photography

Stewart Forsyth: Seminars aren't enough.