

Who Owns Your Brand?

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I recently heard a young brand consultant very entrenched in marketing web2.0 state that "that in today's social network environment the brand no longer belongs to the company; it belongs to the community so you better be entrenched in social network communication."

OUCH. If this is true the greatest value of many Fortune 500 companies has just been dramatically reduced. Coke, Nike, Apple, and most others devote themselves to building and delivering a great brand. Tiger destroyed his brand by being totally inconsistent with the image he had established. Sports celebrity morality is not usually so harshly judged, the degree of inconsistency caused the fall

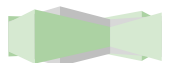
Any of us that have ever been part of a great brand owe a tremendous amount to our predecessors who built it and a sacred obligation to the brands stakeholders to hold the brand sacred in delivery even more than in image and do no harm to it. We may fail at enhancing it but we must at the very least protect it by understanding and delivering its promise.

All the social networks in the world won't change this. We cannot foist the responsibility on to others, it is the obligation of every stakeholder working on a great brand or starting a new one to protect it, and then if possible enhance it.

I am hearing more and more often that the community owns the brand and it is usually asserted as a new inescapable, final statement.

It is vital to know what the consumer thinks of your brand not because they decide what is or should be but because the brand is a covenant with the consumer. A covenant formed by the brand's past behaviour: it allows the consumer to anticipate what he can expect of the brand today and possibly in the future.

The more consistent it is, the more comfort and confidence the consumer has that he will get what he needs, Brand awareness demands consistency, brand loyalty demands quality performance. The depth of the consumer's comfort with the brand is at the root of a brand's strength... I was taught to refer to it as "the brands values". A bank's brand strength is not just in its products, everyone offers mortgages and lines of credit, it lies in its brand's values, that the consumer will be treated fairly, the bank will be secure or its officers will give the best advice. It needs to be trust focused. In real life, your values and the consistency you exercise in adhering to them define your character and will define the strength of your brand's value and reputation.



The company or organization needs to look into its soul to determine its values, not rely on research, consumer opinion or the latest blogs

The objective in using great listening devices like random6 is not to shape the brands strategy, not to determine what it should be but to determine the degree the brand is delivering its strategy.

The objective of listening is uncovering consumer wants or clarifying the brand values as seen by the consumer.

I have always found it instructive to take 5 brands I respect and write out their brand values and then to try to do the same for myself and my four or five closest competitors, place them on a brand map and think about whether that is where I want to be or where I want to migrate to. Once I know where I think I am and where I think I want to go, I check it through well constructed research and then put in place the learning needed to expertly and consistently deliver what we are or want to be.

Where can you find a basis for brand values? With the consumer? That is unlikely. Consumers are interested in their own needs and aspirations, and in the products and services that can help them, not in the behaviour of your brand. The important thing consumers tell you is what past brand communication and delivery has told them, not what it should be. The only way that the consumer can possess brand information is because it has been imparted to them in the first place by you or your competition.

Consumer research tells you whether your product is delivering what they need and to ensure that communication indeed gets across the product's message, features and positioning to the consumer in a way that is memorable and appealing.

If you disagree, we would love to hear your rebuttal- debating issues like this provides clarity of thought. Head over to the contact us section and drop us a line!

