

Facts, Data and Opinion... Branding

by Phil Phillips, PhD
 Contributing Editor
 phillips@chemarkconsulting.net

Is branding relevant to B2B companies? Some notable companies think so. John Deere, Siemens and Boeing are just a few examples of strong B2B brands.

As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), Sherlock Holmes said, “It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.”

So what does this statement dealing with data and facts have to do with branding?

There exists, by some sectors of the human race, the concept that branding only really works in the world of consumer products and markets. In other words, to them brand loyalty only works when Kellogg or Levis (and other B2C) markets to a non-rational consumer base its’ breakfast cereals or jeans. The concept of branding to the “rational” population that exists in the B2B marketplace doesn’t apply.

Therefore, tractors, backhoes, electrical transformer, gas pipe, etc., are examples of product lines that, to “sell” into their respective markets, rely on hard-facts, and would not profit from such irrational tactics as an emotional appeal. Then logic would conclude that we, as human purchasers turn our emotions (brand awareness) way up when considering a box of cereal; can of soup; or a box of pasta but turn it almost completely off when responsible for acquiring industrial equipment. Oh sure! That’s what we do!

Is branding relevant to B2B companies? Some notable companies think so: Allis Chalmers, John Deere, Case, Caterpillar, Komatsu, Bucyrus, Massy Ferguson, Siemens, and Boeing are vivid examples of strong B2B brands.

What is branding and what is it not?

First, branding is not about exciting people into irrational buying tactics. The branding purpose is not to create the illusion that a product is better than it in reality is. Great products can be, however, sustained by great branding.

What is branding? Plainly speaking, a brand is your promise to your customer. It tells them what they can routinely expect from your products and services, and it differentiates your offering from your competitors’. Your brand is derived from

three fundamental and equal elements:

- who you are
- who you want to be
- who people perceive you to be.

What does branding accomplish? Consistent, strategic branding leads to a strong brand equity, which equates to added value brought to your company’s products/ services that allows you to charge more for your brand than what identical, poorly or unbranded products command.

The added value essential to brand equity often comes in the form of perceived quality or emotional attachment. For example, Buick LaCrosse associates its product with star basketball player 7’5” Shaq O’Neil, hoping physically large potential customers will transfer their emotional attachment from the athlete to the product. For Buick, it’s not just the car’s features that sell the car. Another example, but of unsuccessful strong brand transfer, is when IBM (strong brand) sold its laptop personal computer business to a Chinese company . . . now called LENOVO Group, LTD.

Facts, Data and Opinion - Action

- Do your research. . . . get the facts
- Learn the needs, habits and desires of your current and prospective customers. . . data
- Don’t rely on what you think they think. Know what they think. . . . opinions

ACTIONS: Define Your Brand

Defining your brand is a venture of self-discovery. The trip can be difficult, time-consuming and uncomfortable. It requires, at the very least, the answers to these questions:

- What is company’s mission?
- What are the benefits and features of company’s products or services?
- What do company’s customers and prospects already think of the company?
- What qualities do you want customers to associate with the company?

Conclusion:

Structuring and evolving a great brand must become a sustained passion at the top and throughout the entire organization. **CW**