

A Brand and Its Marketing Partner

Exploring Their Mutually Supporting Relationship to Build Better Brand Communication

Abstract

While at first glance it may seem self-evident, organizations that rely exclusively on a small subset of either traditional marketing or branding analytics for crafting a brand's communication strategy are potentially ignoring the greater value to be gained by leveraging the symbiotic interrelationship that exists between the external lens of marketing and the internal lens of branding.

Introduction

Usually because of time, resource, or best practice limitations, decision makers are often constrained in their ability to fully appraise the merits of their brand's communication strategy. Whether tasked with reviewing the potential merit of executing an advertising campaign that seeks to position the brand favorably with the financial community or with planning the launch of a newly acquired brand that doesn't fit squarely within the existing brand architecture, the individuals charged with evaluating a communication approach will typically make their observations through one or both optical instruments comprised of a "marketing lens" and a "branding lens". These lenses offer unique focal powers that facilitate the cognizance of the various components that contribute to the success of a brand communication strategy. The clarity with which the relative merit of a specific communication strategy is perceived may be obscured, however, when decision makers choose to favor the focal power of one lens while remaining blind to the contribution of the other.

The Marketing Lens

Decision makers frequently utilize external observations of the target market as a basis for shaping a brand's communication strategy. These external observations are conducted through a diverse set of primary and secondary research tools and comprise the "marketing lens". These tools, varying by degree of best practice, can range from a casual poll of the personal observations or experiences of a few individuals in the Company's boardroom to the commission of a quantitative study nationwide of a stratified sampling of respondents. Intended to provide detailed information about an audience, such as their demographics, perceptions, attitudes and purchasing behavior, the information gathered often forms the foundation for determining the appropriate marketing tactics for delivering a message to the intended audience.

Although the marketing lens provides clarity about the external characteristics of the intended audience of a given message, it can be short sighted when it ignores the brand when

crafting a communication strategy. Understanding the demographics and behavior of a target audience accomplishes little when it is not unified with the brand's messaging and visual language. For instance, while using the marketing lens to understand the demographics and media usage of a target audience is important for media planning, its value can be suspect when the demographic knowledge is not synchronized within the context of relevant brand messaging and visual language. Sole reliance on noting the occurrence of audience-related data as a means to craft a strategy without acknowledging the value and purpose of the brand will ultimately increase the probability of achieving 100% awareness of the wrong message.

The Brand Lens

The second lens that decision maker's employ as a basis for developing brand communication strategy is internally focused. In contrast to the marketing lens, which is fixated on the characteristics of the external audience, the brand lens concentrates on the organization's core competencies, personality, values, promise and vision. Based on an understanding of a brand's strengths, employing the brand lens is an effective tool for faithfully representing the brand in communication along all brand contacts.

Relying on this approach to the exclusion of understanding the audience, however, can be problematic if the faithful communication of the brand's messaging and visual language is irrelevant or undeliverable to the target audience. While the brand lens is an effective tool for crafting the intended brand image, it will likely be ineffective if this image is not aligned with the attitudes, perceptions and behavior of the target audience. For instance, although immersion into a brand's soul can provide the strategic framework for crafting the look and feel of a brand and its messaging, it does little to suggest what tactics should be used to communicate a compelling story to the audience. Similarly, listing the strengths of the brand, such as leadership in a growing market or international patent protection, does little to convert these strengths to messaging that is germane to the specific needs, attitudes, perceptions, and behavior of an audience.

Marketing and Branding Unified

The solution is to see the soul of the brand in relation to its audience by looking through both lenses. Making observations through both the marketing lens and the brand lens creates a complete picture of the brand's communication, enabling the reconciliation of the specificity of the audience with an effective delivery of a relevant message and compelling visual language. By understanding the symbiotic interrelationship that exists between both lenses, decision makers can open their eyes to brand communication that faithfully creates a pertinent and persuasive brand image in the mind's eye of the consumer.

About the Author: Vice President of the Arttime Group (www.artimegroup.com), a Los Angeles-based branding, advertising and marketing agency, Steve Rapier has over twenty years of executive experience in branding and marketing strategy on both the client and agency side. He is the author of the Rapier Report™, a three-volume report that that delivers the Arttime Group's Brand Strategy, Brand Marketing Tactics, and Marketing Planning and Budgets.