

Living your brand promise



By [Abey Mokgwatsane](#)

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Marketers are really good at crafting and communicating brand promises but in the age of the enlightened consumer and fierce competition, it's imperative that they start dedicating more resources to living up to those brand promises.

We all have a pretty good sense of what a brand promise is. It's that thing that companies and products say about themselves that makes them better than their competitors. Most of the time it's on marketing paraphernalia but sometimes you find it in other places like the internal newsletter or the company's annual report.

Most marketers spend the majority of their resources crafting and communicating these promises to sceptical consumers who have become professional decoders of this communication.

So why pretend we are at an impasse?

Ricardo Gressel, our client service director, always reminds us that we are "marketing to marketers" when creating a piece of communication. By this he means that consumers have become so marketing savvy that they can decode your message with ease. This is a good thing by any measure. However, it creates a challenge in that consumers can now hold you to what you say. And in today's competitive landscape, they can punish you by going next door, if you don't deliver on your promise.

This is the next big issue on the marketing agenda.

A company or product's ability to live up to its brand promise will become the real and sustainable competitive advantage that business will strive to achieve. This in turn will create waves of change in the way that marketers and their suppliers develop communication strategies.

Shifts already evident

These shifts are already evident in some quarters. By way of example, Enterprise IG has a division that deals specifically with aligning a company's employees with the new vision which has been manifested in the corporate ID work they deliver. It realised that articulating the vision and manifesting it in great design was only half the job. The delivery of the brand promise is corrupted if employees don't endorse it.

Fearless Executives, a five-year-old consultancy, probably understands this issue more than anyone I'm aware of; it tasks itself with helping companies achieve alignment between the promises they make and the internal systems that deliver it.

So what do you do in the meantime while your peers and suppliers grapple with the issue?

Three basic steps

I propose three basic steps. Define your brand promise, review the value chain that delivers this promise and finally, measure and reward the people throughout your value chain for their part in delivering this promise.

Developing an effective brand promise is a separate article for another day, but in a nutshell it's based on an exploitable human insight, that meets a consumer's needs and differentiates your brand from the competition.

The second step is to review your value chain to ensure that it is configured to deliver the promise. This is about more than just designing your consumer touch points to project a consistent message. It's about aligning staff, suppliers, partners and all the other elements of the value chain behind your promise.

When Steve Jobs returned to Apple, he slashed its research and development (R&D) projects from 137 to three; one of the three was the iMac. This goes to show that commitment to your brand promise can even influence what kind of projects you have in R&D.

Everything impacts on delivery

The overriding theme here is that everything in the value chain impacts on the delivery of the brand promise.

The last element to consider is measure and reward the people in your value chain for their role in delivering on the brand promise. People are driven by what they are measured on; aligning measurement to what you ultimately want to deliver to consumers will ensure your best chance of success. It seems obvious, but most organisations and brands measure in silos, often with no unified brand promise objective, so you end up with the R&D division developing groundbreaking innovations that don't add any more equity to your brand promise. You have brand promises that completely outstrip the product's delivery. This creates the crazy situation where these divisions individually score top marks but ultimately create consumer dissonance.

Marketing responsibility?

These are just basic guidelines that will help you get started. I'm sure that there will be many more organisations that will create far more robust models to facilitate this thinking. Having said all of this, is this still a marketing responsibility?

Pod McLoughlin, the ex-SAB marketing director, used to repeat the line "Marketing is too important to be left to the marketers" and he was right. It's the marketing department that's at the forefront of positioning brands on behalf of organisations. It is therefore this department that makes promises to consumers and gets measured on how effective those promises are in creating product demand.

Logic follows that sustainable product demand is going to be directly impacted by how much consumers perceive brand promises have been met by the actual delivery of that product experience.

This is an opportunity for marketing to take its rightful place as the lead department in the organisation. Holding all other departments accountable is an essential part of delivering what we have been promising for years - sustainable consumer demand.

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