

Marketing

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WALK THE BRANDING TALK

By Eric Blais

***Living The Brand: How to transform every member of your organization into a brand champion* BY NICHOLAS IND (Kogan Page Ltd, 2001)**

Half-way through this much needed book on branding, Nicholas Ind offers this reality check: 70% of employees do not support their company's branding initiatives and 90% do not understand how to represent the brand effectively.

Part of the problem might be that branding is too often the sole responsibility of a packaged goods-trained marketing department. Service brands for example can't be managed according to the principles of a branding approach that places the emphasis on developing and then communicating a cluster of functional and emotional values to consumers. Success requires a shift from focusing on the brand promise, to focusing on the process by which the consumer or customer will experience the promise. In services branding, staff are highly influential in determining brand quality and brand values. Therefore successful services branding must involve as high a degree of attention to communicating brand values to staff as to consumers.

That's why this book is a must read for marketers looking for ways to ensure that their organization's culture is in alignment with their brand's values and that it encourages behaviour that supports the brand.

These behaviours are the important "moments of truth" that are so often in total disconnect with the brand promise. How can a service brand promise a "personal" experience when it sends out a deluge of direct mail to people it only knows as "dear customer"? How can another promise to be "easy to do business with" when customers must repeat previously entered account numbers and verification details in order to be transferred to a customer service rep?

Ind offers a very candid look at the challenges of bringing the brand to life in an organization. "The danger in writing down the meaning of the brand and articulating the vision and values is that people can believe the job is done. The brand is there for all to see. Yet so many organizations never move beyond pinning words up on a wall or sending around a booklet that lists the words that are meant to define the brand."

He also offers important lessons drawn from case studies of how Patagonia, Nokia, J&J, Adobe and many others have successfully embedded their brand values across often complex organizations. To those who obsess over the definition of credo, purpose, vision, values, beliefs, principles, philosophy, attributes and characteristics, Ind simply says: "Generally, it appears that the authenticity of and commitment to the brand idea is more important than the structure."

That is the central point to Ind's book and it should be refreshing thinking for the brand cynics who overdosed on branding fluff; consumers want to see behind companies and to understand what they are really like. Authenticity means saying what you do and doing what you say in a language and a manner that is credible.

ERIC BLAIS, PRESIDENT OF CONSULTANCY HEADSPACE MARKETING, WRITES MONTHLY ON THE 10 MUST-READ BOOKS FOR MARKETERS