

How personal branding benefits your company brand

Businesses today have it tough. As soon as you develop something new, a competitive premise or a product/service that will set you apart from your competitors, your rivals all copy you and that competitive advantage is quickly lost.

 By Donna Rachelson ^{27 Mar 2012}

My point is that your competitive advantage as a company is not sustainable because other companies will always change the ballpark by catching up or even overtaking you.

How then should companies differentiate themselves and their brands? I believe that by focusing on assisting your employees to brand and market themselves as individuals you will be able to give your organisation a sustainable competitive advantage.

Aligning your personal brand with your company's

Ever since the financial crises of Worldcom and Enron, people have increasingly lost confidence in corporations. They tend to trust individuals more. That's why I bank with a certain bank - not because I think they offer me something wildly more impressive than any other bank would, but because I trust my personal banker and when I think of my bank, she is the person who springs to mind. It is her personal brand that ensures I trust my bank's brand.

In fact, I would say that the success of your company is based on the impact that individuals have in developing and marketing their personal brands. We are all branded, whether we like it or not. If an employee doesn't take responsibility for their personal brand and marketing it effectively, others will do it for them. This is what really sets one employee apart from another who may have similar qualifications and experience. It's what often makes companies hire one candidate over the other.

It's key to note that while an employee's personal brand must align with his or her company's brand in terms of values, they are not the same thing. A company's most effective employees tend to be those who share the company's brand values but have also developed and learned to market their own personal brands, which enable these people to be memorable, build great reputations and build long-lasting, authentic business relationships.

There is a misconception that allowing employees to develop their personal brands can be very dangerous. Employers reason that customers will become so loyal to a particular person's brand that if that employee leaves, the customers will leave with her.

This is admittedly a risk, but the fact is that people buy into people. Would you willingly trust a brain surgeon you'd never met just because he worked under a hospital brand you recognised? People buy products and services from people they feel they can trust.

Marketing the company brand

When your employees build and market their personal brands, they are effectively building and marketing the company brand because people buy into them before they buy into your products, services or compar

Having said that, it's also important you are also building the company brand, rather than relying solely on your employees' personal brands. When a customer buys from you, they are effectively buying three things: the product/service offering, the company and the person selling the product or service.

If your product is good, your company brand is strong and your employees are developing and marketing their personal brands well, your customers will stay. The odd employee may leave and there's always the possibility that clients will leave with that person, but employees who are building and marketing their personal brands are engaged. They are learning to fulfil their potential, which makes them far more effective at their jobs and ensures that they are effectively helping to develop the company brand at the same time.

Companies that assist employees in this regard are actually busy building a sustainable competitive advantage for the organisation by recognising that the old cliché is true - a company's greatest asset is its people. In fact, a company's greatest asset is people who have developed and know how to market their own personal brands for their individual success and the benefit of the company as a whole.

Identify key strengths, talents and characteristics

To help your employees build and market their personal brands, you need to understand that building a personal brand is about identifying key strengths, talents and characteristics that make employees distinct and then building on these. It is about understanding your employees' personal values and helping them to identify how they can demonstrate these from a behavioural perspective. It is about passion for the work they do, a sense of giving back and, above all, it's about identifying what makes them unique and different.

If they learn to do this effectively, they'll not only boost their careers, but they will build your company's brand and business as they do so.

ABOUT DONNA RACHELSON

Donna Rachelson is the CEO and founder of Branding & Marketing YOU, a company that specialises in personal branding and marketing - and the author of the best-selling book of the same name. Donna can be contacted on donna@brandingandmarketingyou.com or visit www.brandingandmarketingyou.com.
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