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# Creating Sustainability Through Corporate Branding

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# CREATING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH CORPORATE BRANDING

by

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a thorough definition of corporate branding, including its benefits when used as a strategic marketing tool. There are many who believe that the logo of a corporation is its brand. However, the logo is only one interpretation of the brand. The brand is the corporation's ethos. It is the fundamental character or spirit of the corporation. It is an expression of who the corporation is. It is the essence that links the corporation's product or service with its consumer through loyalty and emotional attachments.

Corporations use various processes and methodologies when they begin to create and enhance their corporate brand. Corporations must define their corporate personality, build recognition, standardize, and fulfill brand promises. There are also obstacles and challenges that corporations face in their endeavor to implement a branding guideline, and the chance of overcoming them without defined leadership is unrealistic.

This study focuses specifically on existing literature about corporate branding and cites case study examples to show what makes the best brands successful and where failing brands could have been more successful. The study concludes by providing insight into the future for corporate branding and offering suggestions for technical communication professionals who find themselves a part of the brand building and defining process. There are various rules to branding and traits that are common to every top brand in the world. By instilling its brand with such traits, and following certain processes with focus, passion, and persistence, and most of all a long-term commitment to the brand, a corporation will find its brand among the most recognized brands in the world.

This thesis is dedicated to Jennifer, Heller, and Nicholas—my three jellyfish.

When you fall off the rock, remember to always jump back on.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

After spending a century building a business, can a corporation one day decide to distill what it wants people to think and feel about it? Can it convince people to think about it in a new way by developing the views they already hold and creating new loyalties, awareness, and emotional ties? Can it commit to the difficult branding process referring to its corporation's mission and vision in each and every scenario? It not only can, but it must.

Superior quality, professionalism, and technical excellence may have kept the corporation in business for 100 or more years, but with increasing competition in the marketplace, marketers are dedicating considerable energy to corporate branding, or the formal branding of their business in addition to or instead of branding their product or service. This new approach requires formalizing the brand identity, brand equity, or brand loyalty that makes a corporation recognizable, memorable, credible, and preferred.

Smart corporations realize that corporate branding is a strategic marketing tool that allows the corporation's clients and stakeholders to recognize the business and its offerings by providing a consistent look in all of its communications. A consistent look increases recognition in the marketplace, thus creating sustainability. Whether the corporation is already well-established or is just starting up, there are a few things that it should understand. In *Branding for Dummies,* written by Bill Chiaravalle and Barbara Findlay Schenck, the authors state, "when you build your business, essentially you're building your brand, and vice versa. The two are interdependent and mutually beneficial" (56).

Corporate branding is a promise. Through corporate branding, a corporation introduces itself and says, "This is what I stand for, these are my assurances, this is my contract with consumers." Then, the corporation must live up to its word every single time it comes into contact with those consumers through any of its brand representations. The brand is only as strong as the corporation's ability to deliver on its promises. The brand promise must be based on the experience that can be delivered completely and without fail. Everyone in the organization, from the top down, must understand the brand promise and maintain a commitment to delivering it every time. Time and again brands break down because they could not deliver on the promise that they made. Chiaravalle and Schenck tell readers, "Brands create consumer trust and emotional attachments. As a result they foster relationships between consumers and products that withstand pricing wars, transcend offers from new competitors, and even overcome rare lapses in product or service excellence" (10).

## Defining Corporate Branding

Corporate branding refers to the system of using a corporation's name as a product brand name in an effort to create brand name recognition. Brand identity is the essence of the brand. Essentially, it is branding, or burning, the name and reputation of the corporation into the minds of its clients and potential clients as a visual representation. A corporation's branding refers not only to names and logos, but also to color schemes, tag lines, images, style, and other design elements.

The identity defined by a corporation (or corporate community) is unique to that community and unifies all of its operations with a single, strong brand that is easily identifiable and recognizable. Marianne Rosner Klimchuck and Sandra Krasovec, authors of *PackagingDesign: Successful Product Branding from Concept to Shelf* comment, "Whether it conveys abstract or concrete ideas about a product, when fused in the mind of the consumer the identity becomes the mental picture or perception of the product" (40).

Corporate branding applies to service providers as well as those corporations that provide a product. According to Joe Marconi in his book *The Brand Marketing Book*, "people buy products, but which products they buy and how they make their buying decisions have a lot to do with how they feel about the brand" (xi). The better-known brand offering the product or service is often thought to be the better brand, or product or service. For this reason, a corporation's brand integrity is crucial to its sustainability as its reputation is perceived according to how it promotes itself economically, socially, and environmentally.

## The Role Technical Communicators Play in Corporate Branding

Creating and growing a successful brand is an intricate and complex undertaking that relies heavily on written communication, processes and procedures, and an understanding of the end user, or in the case of brand building, the consumer. As professionals in translating complex information into easily understood information for a particular audience, technical communicators can and should be called upon to add value to the corporate branding process. The goal of the corporation in any brand endeavor is to establish and protect its identity. Technical communicators can ensure the success of this goal by:

- Ensuring clarity, organization, and a consistent brand look and feel.
- Focusing on the goals of the corporate branding process and speaking to the corporation's target audience through usable, value-adding documentation.

- Analyzing the needs of the target audience (consumers) by investigating and conducting interviews with subject matter experts to understand the products.
- Linking brands with their consumers through the establishment of online help, user manuals, and process and procedure manuals.
- Working collaboratively with other brand professionals to communicate new policies.
- Aiding in logo and communications design.
- Producing effective proposals for marketing purposes.
- Safeguarding the continuity of the brand.

## The Purpose of this Study

This thesis provides a thorough definition of corporate branding, including its benefits when used as a strategic marketing tool. This study attempts to answer the following questions: What are the processes and methodologies for building a corporate brand?; How can a corporation build a collaborative workplace through effective leadership where its corporate identity is concerned?; What are the obstacles and challenges corporations face in their endeavor to implement a branding guideline, and can they be overcome if there is no defined leadership?; and How does corporate branding promote sustainability within the marketplace?

This study focuses specifically on existing literature about corporate branding and cites case study examples to answer the questions stated above. Finally, this study shows that corporate branding cannot take place without corporation collaboration, or "buy in," and defined top-down leadership.

## **Common Themes in the Literature**

A common theme that runs through much of the literature focused on branding is "the brand as religion" or "cult-like cultures." Brand management begins with an employee's indoctrination into the corporation. Using significant training programs, strict rules of personal conduct, and an ingrained ideology or biased point of view bestowed on their employees, corporations can manage and preserve their brand. In his book, *Brand Royalty: How the World's Top 100 Brands Thrive and Survive*, independent marketing and branding consultant, Matt Haig, discusses brands as religion and asks his reader to consider the following characteristics of brands:

- Faith. Like religions, brands want people to have faith in what they have to offer.
- Omnipresence. Successful brands want to be everywhere.
- Purity. Brands, like religion, often centre around the pursuit of purity.
- Icons. Iconic figures from the world of sport or entertainment attract the kind of devotion once reserved for saints and prophets.
- Miracles. Religion promises the miraculous. Brands imply it. (2)

Brands link positive emotions to their product or service. In *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, authors James Collins and Jerry Porras define brands this way, "They also instill an intense sense of loyalty and influence the behavior of those remaining inside the company to be congruent with the core ideology, consistent over time, and carried out zealously" (123). Examples of successful corporations that have conducted their brand strategies from this viewpoint include IBM, the Walt Disney Company, and Nordstrom. Each of these corporations has managed to maintain their core ideologies and consistently screen out those persons or things that do not fit within their corporate behaviors. Employees are expected to "live the brand" of the corporation, so it stands to reason that employees who are promoting their brand, feeling proud about it, and delivering the promises of the corporation remain successful within the corporation and keep the corporation successful.

## A Few Brand Conductors

Industry leader IBM believes that "it's never been more difficult to retain customers and grow their loyalty... and the quality of a customer's interaction with your organization makes all the difference" (http://www-935.ibm.com/services/us/index.wss/offerfamily/igs/a1024109). This is stated directly on IBM's website. Perhaps this is why it has one of the world's most recognizable brands—a brand so strong that IBM consumers will place a logo, "IBM Technology," on their products simply to enhance their own brands.

IBM had been building its brand for almost 100 years when former chief executive Thomas J. Watson, Jr., set up and maintained firm rules of personal conduct for his employees to follow in order to inspire loyalty, enthusiasm, and high ideals, which IBM held out as a way to achieve success. As Collins and Porras state, "By the 1930s, IBM had fully institutionalized its indoctrination process and created a full-fledged 'schoolhouse' that it used to socialize and train future officers of the company" (124).

It is not magic, nor is it fairy dust, that maintains the core ideology of the Walt Disney Company and ensures the success of its brand. It is the consistent perseverance of the brand promise to its consumers. To guarantee its promise, the corporation requires each new employee in every level to attend its employee orientation class known as Disney Traditions. The orientation is designed to teach new members of its "cast" the corporate history, legacy, and brand culture. In addition, new employees must follow a standardized appearance while representing the Walt Disney Company brand (no fingernail polish, dangling earrings, or two-toned hair for the women and no facial hair or visible piercings for the men).

Walt Disney, founder of Walt Disney Company, began his corporation believing this mainstream type of environment makes people happy. This was what he stood for, this was his assurance. It was his contract with his consumers. Even with the death of Walt Disney, the takeover of the corporation by Michael Eisner in 1984, and the installation of Rob Iger as President of the Walt Disney Company in 2000 and as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in 2005, the preservation of Disney's self-image, or brand, remains in tact.

Nordstrom employs more than 50,000 people and is a member of *Fortune Magazine*'s "100 Best Companies to Work For." According to its website, "the company's philosophy has remained unchanged for more than 100 years since its establishment by John W. Nordstrom in 1901: offer the customer the best possible service, selection, quality and value" (http://careers.nordstrom.com/company/culture/index.asp). The bottom line: the corporation's *good name* has brand equity. Brand equity is the value of that name.

## To Stumble or To Stumble and Fall

Similarly, a corporation's mistakes, whether due to forces beyond its control, poor management, management complacency, or a mix of all three, can cause a brand to link a negative emotion to its product or service. A blunder in social responsibility or a failure to maintain quality, trust, and loyalty causes brands to fail. For example, if a corporation or individual does not act responsibly while promoting its brand or does not maintain ethical business standards, their actions will have a negative impact on the brand itself, such as Exxon suffered as a result of the Exxon Valdez oil spill and the deception that followed.

The most important asset a corporation has is its reputation. Reputations are meticulously built over many years and often rapidly destroyed by a single event. Brand reputations are determined when corporations establish emotional ties with their consumers. Those same reputations are shattered when consumers feel wounded or deceived, as was the case with the Exxon brand, whose name is now tantamount with environmental devastation.

In 1989, Exxon Corporation caused one of the worst environmental disasters of all time. The *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker ran aground, spilling more than 10 million gallons of oil into Alaska's Prince William Sound. Initially, efforts to contain the spill were slow, and the corporation refused to communicate with the press. As time went on, Exxon apologized to the public but continued to evade responsibility and defer blame. In his book, *Brand Failures: The Truth about the 100 Biggest Branding Mistakes of all Time*, Matt Haig observes, "John Devens, the Mayor of the Alaskan town Valdez, commented that the community felt betrayed by Exxon's inadequate response to the crisis" (104). In the end, Exxon's reputation was damaged. Exxon fell from being the largest oil corporation in the world to the third largest.

Sometimes brands fail as a result of scandal, a product malfunction, or danger, which causes the public to boycott the brand. Recovery of such brands from these pitfalls often depends on the corporation's willingness to be honest with the public. Immediate decisions that are made by the CEO can impact the public's trust, thus impacting the brand identity and value. In 1982, Johnson & Johnson experienced such a scandal brought on by cyanide-tainted "Tylenol

Extra Strength capsules that resulted from product tampering and triggered one of the most effective crisis management programs in the history of public relations" (Chiaravalle 312).

The company Johnson & Johnson has no mission statement. Instead, the corporation relies on its credo to guide its actions. When faced with difficult decisions, the corporation looks to its credo, which has been in place for more than 60 years. It begins, "We believe our first responsibility is to doctors, nurses and patients, to mothers and fathers and all others who use our products and services" (www.jnj.com). For this reason, in 1982, when the corporation faced a major crisis and a potential for brand failure, it immediately turned to its credo, knowing that its brand integrity was crucial to its sustainability. Many individuals would look to the corporation to see how it promoted itself economically, socially, and environmentally.

When seven people died in the Chicago area after ingesting Extra Strength Tylenol capsules laced with potassium cyanide poison, Johnson & Johnson assumed a unique, unprecedented role. The corporation's reaction to the crime set a new standard for crises involving product tampering. Johnson & Johnson used the incident to confirm its credo to all who use its products and services by ordering a nationwide recall of Tylenol products. Though the corporation's stock fell drastically, it took less than a year to rebound as a result of its aggressive campaign to rebuild its reputation.

The management of a brand relies on the understanding of the answer to the question, how important is brand image? According to Marconi, "It is what people remember, if they remember anything at all" (xii). But companies often forget that the hard part is managing the brand. In his book, *The Best of Branding: Best Practices in Corporate Branding*, James Gregory puts forth the idea that developing and personifying brand strategy is a start, but managing the brand is the corporation's only way to ensure that its audiences will get from the company what is consistent with the brand strategy (47).

Leadership is crucial. The brand guardian must not only protect the brand from the short-term actions that result in long-term value destruction, but also safeguard the continuity of the brand. Gregory also provides a discussion about creating the branding culture. He says, "No matter how much care you take to create your brand, if you don't nurture it and help it grow, it will die and take with it the investment your company has made to date" (48).

## **Organization of this Study**

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows. Chapter Two addresses various processes as defined and discussed by previous literature on the topics of corporate branding, brand equity, and brand management and attempts to answer the question, "How can a corporation build a collaborative workplace through effective leadership where its corporate identity is concerned?" by examining brand names, brand building, and corporate identity of various corporations.

Chapter Three explores the "how to" of brand protection by reviewing literature aimed at promoting, maintaining, and protecting the brand identity. It will identify brand principles, brand rules, and brand strategies, and it will relate how previous corporations have gotten the most impact from their corporate brand communications. How did they bring life to their brand and nurture it as it grew through leadership and "buy in"?

Chapter Four reviews existing literature and cites case study examples to answer the questions. It discusses results that will support major claims and ultimately prove that corporate branding cannot take place without corporation collaboration, or “buy in,” and defined top-down leadership.

Finally, Chapter Five discusses overall findings, conclusions, and future opportunities for research about corporate branding. It offers suggestions for technical communication professionals who find themselves a part of the brand building and defining process.

## Looking Ahead to Chapter Two

As discussed in the following chapter, strong corporations recognize that a corporate brand is an asset with significant, measurable, bottom-line-impacting value. Stronger corporations also recognize that bottom-line delivery is not enough. Corporate personality, identity, consistency, and accountability in reputation must also remain a part of the process. There is a great deal of literature that defines and discusses the topics of brand building processes and methodologies. Through the exploration of such literature, Chapter Two emphasizes the importance of corporation identity and image and addresses the four-step process to upholding both.

# CHAPTER TWO: PROCESSES AND METHODOLOGIES: CRITICAL POINTS OF CURRENT KNOWLEDGE

How can a corporation build a collaborative workplace through effective leadership where its corporate identity is concerned, knowing that its identity and image are among its most important assets? Bill Chiaravalle, Principal and Creative Director of Brand Navigation, and author of *Branding for Dummies* says, in fact, "brand equity is so important that, in the world's most successful businesses, the most valuable single intangible asset is the brand" (253). The answer to the question is through the process of strategic brand leadership, brand building, and brand management.

This chapter focuses on existing literature that clearly defines brand image and brand identity and the attempt of corporations to bridge the gap between the two; corporate branding; brand equity; and brand management. In addition, it guides readers through the process of brand building as viewed by various scholars on the topic.

## Branding Success—A Starting Point

There is no one single formula that determines all successful brands. To ensure success, a corporation must rely on its individual name and valuable reputation. In order to protect and enhance its brand, it is vitally important for the corporation to remain consistent in how it presents itself to its consumers (both internal and external), suppliers, potential employees, and other stakeholders associated with the corporation. It is imperative that brands fulfill consumer needs. Allen Adamson, author of *BrandSimple: How the Best Brands Keep it Simple and Succeed* says, "The success of the brand is determined in large part by its relevance to a specific group of people and its differentiation from competitors" (109). Corporations brand meaningfully when they connect products and consumers consistently and in some emotionally profound way. For this reason, corporations are beginning to concentrate on each and every one of those times when they come into contact with their consumers. They are directing their brand building awareness to those instances where they come into contact with the consumers' senses as well as their emotions.

In his book titled *Emotional Branding: The New Paradigm for Connecting Brands to People*, Marc Gobé explores this concept: branding is about bonding with people in their everyday lives. He states, "In order to build up and retain equity as a preferred brand in the mind of the consumer, the brand must evolve to stay connected to its target audience in its day-to-day moment-to-moment existence. Brand presence at its best connects intimately to the consumer's lifestyle" (185). Because consumers' lifestyles are constantly changing, and brands are merely perceptions consumers have about a corporation in conjunction with those lifestyles, the corporation does not really have any control other than to continue to keep its promises and maintain its core ideologies. This begins with the CEO of the corporation, but it does not and cannot stop there.

Over the years, marketing departments have recognized the need for the brand process in order to encourage people to buy their products and services—those products and services they feel good about. Scott Bedbury, author of *A New Brand World: 8 Principles for Achieving Brand Leadership in the 21st Century* and former Senior Vice President of Starbucks, reminds readers:

> Brand building is much more than the responsibility of the marketing department or even of the CEO, although both functions must participate actively in

> championing and protecting the brand from within for the effort to succeed. Building and supporting a great brand is everyone's job, from the CEO on down. (xiv)

## **More Common Themes in the Literature**

"Where corporations begin when embracing a corporate branding initiative" is another common theme that runs throughout the literature that addresses corporate branding. Sources agree, first and foremost, that the CEO must be personally involved in the strategizing and must also be fully on board with the idea of branding. The higher up the representative of the corporation, the more powerful that person is seen as a representative of the brand. In his book, *Brand Failures: The Truth About the 100 Biggest Branding Mistakes of All Time,* author Matt Haig quotes John Karolefski, former editor-in-chief of *Brand Marketing* magazine. Karolefski used this phrase to explain the CEO's power in brand representation: "The fish rots from the head" (150). In other words, those with the most responsibility must act the most responsibly.

Many sources guide readers through the offering of principles, rules, and examples for brand building, but the process design is always the same. Sources agree that corporations must commit to four steps. They include defining corporate personality or identity, building recognition, standardizing, and fulfilling their brand promises.

## **Defining Corporate Personality/Identity**

Keeping in mind that a brand provides a consistent look and feel, allowing materials such as logos, signatures, fonts, colors, imagery, and brand elements to work together to increase recognition in the marketplace, it is imperative that a corporation first pay close attention to defining its personality or identity. It must identify the promises it wants to make to its consumers and create an identity for itself to portray to its consumers. It must ask and answer the questions, "Who am I?" and "Who do I want to be?" A corporate identity is a philosophy that drives the corporation, combining its mission, values, culture, and image. The main objective when developing an identity or personality is to guide the experiences and emotions of the consumers when interacting with the corporation.

Johnson & Johnson defined itself as early as 1935 when General Robert Wood Johnson "urged his fellow industrialists to embrace what he termed 'a new industrial philosophy.' Johnson defined this as the corporation's responsibility to consumers, employees, the community, and stockholders" (www.jnj.com). In addition, Nordstrom Corporation defines its culture by values identified on its website that include,

- Use good judgment
- Be empowered
- Setting goals matters
- It's your business
- Be honest
- Be kind
- Our door is always open (www.nordstrom.com)

These corporations know who they are. They have maintained their brand identity for nearly two centuries combined. As a result, they maintain their positions in today's market, respectively, as one of the world's largest and most diversified health care companies, and one of *Fortune Magazine's* top 100 best companies to work for.

In her work *Branding: Brand Strategy, Design, and Implementation of Corporate and Product Identity* Helen Vaid claims, "The modern definition of branding developed in the 19th century during the industrial revolution when it became increasingly important for manufacturers to create identifiable names and symbols to make their products stand out from their competitors" (2). Chapter Three will discuss a more thorough definition of corporate, or brand, identity; however, corporateidentitydesigner.com provides a succinct definition in terms of the tangible aspects of branding. It writes, "Corporate identity is the group of pieces, aspects, ideas, methods, and techniques that your brand needs to be identifiable. Your company's corporate identity can be formed by many of the pieces that form a communicational style: logo, letterhead, business cards, envelope, folder, inserts, etc" (www.corporateidentitydesigner.com).

Branding is the process by which products must become one-in-the-same with their personality. The most well-known example of a corporation that has become synonymous with its personality (or brand) is McDonald's, a corporation whose consumers see it as it sees itself—family-oriented, fun, and convenient. McDonald's has never swayed from that personality type. Its symbols, logos, colors, imagery, and brand elements continue to identify it and define its personality.

In order to succeed, brands must display genuine integrity. Humanity and trust are the cornerstones of that integrity. Bedbury tells his readers, "We are defined by the experiences and actions of our lifetime. So are brands" (19). He goes on to clarify how deeply the definition ingrains itself into our identity. He states, "We are the product of the things we controlled as well as the stuff that landed on our laps courtesy of fate, chance, bad luck, or destiny" (19). Because consumers base their buying decisions on perception, brands have the potential to lose their value swiftly.

While we never get a second chance to make a first impression, each of our impressions counts from the first forward. The brand that hurts its image in our minds, whether intentional or not, will always be the one that wounded us. Forgiveness is improbable. Emotions linked to branding run deep. A brand has the potential for success only if its personality is likable "because people want to associate themselves with the images of things they like—and they'll pay extra to do it" (Marconi 3).

Branding is a popularity contest like no other. We love the Earth-hugging, ex-hippy founders of Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield. In *Brand Royalty*, Haig quotes their philosophy. Haig says they claim that "business is the most powerful force in society, and it should therefore have a responsibility for the welfare of society as a whole" (167). This caring attitude contributes to the success of the brand. Haig attributes their secrets of success to, among other things, personality, principles, employees, philanthropy, and fun. Alternatively, we do not love feuding fashion models Naomi Campbell, Christy Turlington, Claudia Schiffer, and Elle MacPherson whose Fashion Café closed its doors just three years after its opening.

## **Building Recognition**

In a world of various contending corporations, developing brand recognition is becoming more and more competitive. Creating recognition and establishing a value proposition about why people should do business with one's corporation are core components of branding. People must have a high level of recognition in a corporation's brand and services in order to be able to develop an opinion towards it. By formalizing the brand identity system, the corporation has the ability to define a consistent look and feel for all communications coming from that corporation.

In order to be recognized, a brand must clearly differentiate from its competitors. Marconi says:

> Most products have to work hard to be noticed at all, much less to stand out from the pack. The approaches to achieving name recognition have been varied, from companies poking fun at themselves ('With a name like Smucker's, it's got to be good') to actually spelling it out for you ('How do you spell relief? R-O-L-A-I-D-S'). (4)

The first step to building recognition is determining one's corporation's promise of value. This means considering what is important to the corporation, what drives its business decisions, what differentiates it from the rest of the pack, and what assurances it guarantees to its consumers. Once established, this understanding of values and goals can help guide the corporation in making decisions consistent with its brand objective. This allows a corporation to focus on its target audience and identify what it needs to do to appeal to that audience.

Once a corporation has established a brand that is relevant to its target audience, the key to building brand recognition is through carefully designed elements that remain brand-consistent. Consistent logos, signatures, taglines, typefaces, colors, imagery, and brand elements in press releases, trade show displays and booths, office signage, brochures, banners, print ads, posters, and marketing for sponsored or charity events should all be used in any and all consumer communications regardless of significance. This, in turn, creates the brand identity. Klimchuck and Krasovec offer yet another definition of brand identity:

> Brand identity is the tangible aspect of the brand—the essential components including the name, color, symbol, and other design elements. The visual representation of these elements and their combination defines the brand and differentiates the products and/or services of one marketer from another. The brand identity creates an emotional connection with the consumer. (40)

To illustrate how something as simple as the design element of color creates an emotional connection, one can look to Tiffany & Co. In 1837, Tiffany adopted a distinct shade of blue to symbolize its reputation for quality and craftsmanship. Today, the color of the Tiffany boxes and bags is as recognizable as the corporation itself. As a result, receiving a Tiffany Blue box or bag can be almost as exhilarating as receiving the gift within. Lands' End Apparel's Corporate Director of Marketing, Ellen Beckert, is also aware that color is important. Her powerful statement is strategically placed on the front cover of the Lands' End marketing brochure. She states, "Making a commitment to color consistency is proof you're more than an apparel provider; you're our strategic partner" (Lands' End).

## Standardizing

How important is brand image and who are those in charge of protecting that image? James Gregory addresses the "standard bearers," the organizational understanding, the documentation, the training, and the accountability, thus supporting the hypothesis that corporate branding cannot take place without corporation collaboration, or "buy in," and defined leadership.

A brand can be a company's most valuable asset. However, in his book, *Protecting the Brand: A Concise Guide to Promoting, Maintaining, and Protecting a Company's Most Valuable Asset*, Talcott Franklin reveals, "Because the brand is an intangible asset, many companies do not understand how to protect it" (7). One solution Franklin offers is the creation of brand standards. Like a style guide, Franklin recommends a brand-standards manual as the primary means for communicating brand standards to employees, licensees, and vendors. His concept that "all employees should have access to the brand-standards manual and should learn the brand's core values and how the brand represents those values" again reinforces the "buy in" necessity to promote branding (122).

A brand-standards manual is designed by a corporation to be distributed to employees on each and every level. Its goal is to ensure that every representative of the corporation is a part of the standardized process to build and protect the corporation's brand. In general, the manual guides employees on a step-by-step process of the corporation's brand identity and brand styles usage to generate greater mindshare and eventually greater market share.

## **Fulfilling Brand Promises**

The reputation and prolonged existence of a brand depends on whether that brand is able to consistently uphold its promises. Employees must "live the brand" as stated and backed by senior management. Employees must act as brand ambassadors and strive to generate positive brand building experiences with the brand's consumers. They must inform management of gaps in brand delivery to assist in the development of strategies and programs that ensure brand promises are being met.

At the same time, “overpromising—saying or suggesting that a product or brand will deliver more than it actually does or can—is not only deceptive, but a sure way to diminish or destroy any goodwill or loyalty the customer might have had or sought to have with the company or brand” (Marconi 77). Consumers are not willing to stick with brands that deceive them. And, each corporation/consumer experience must fulfill the brand promise.

In summary, when the corporation’s brand is at the center of all that its employees do, the CEO is personally involved in the brand process and delivery, and the top-down leadership has continued to focus all decisions, behaviors, and attitudes toward promoting the brand, strategic brand leadership is taking place within the corporation. Brand building is the process of building an emotional tie with consumers. And brand management takes place when the promises of the brand and the identity or personality are controlled and carried throughout the entire organization and through all internal and external consumer outlets. The role of building and supporting a terrific brand belongs to everyone from the CEO down within a corporation. First, all must commit to the four crucial steps in the brand building process.

## Looking Ahead to Chapter Three

The following chapter discusses the steps involved in protecting the corporation’s most valuable asset. Because brands are intangible, and critical to a corporation’s success, there is never a conclusion to the job of brand maintenance and protection Collins and Porras claim, “The critical question asked by a visionary company is not ‘How well are we doing?’. For these companies, the critical question is ‘How can we do better tomorrow than we did today?” (185). Chapter Three helps answer that question.

# CHAPTER THREE: PROMOTING, MAINTAINING AND PROTECTING THE BRAND IDENTITY

If a corporation has followed all of the processes and methods and has created its brand to impress its shareholders and the public, can it finally sit back and rely on the brand image to maintain its success? It absolutely cannot. This chapter examines the “how to” of brand protection by reviewing existing literature aimed at promoting, maintaining, and protecting the brand identity.

While Chapter One briefly presented brand identity, this chapter provides a more comprehensive definition and discusses brand identity in contrast to, and in conjunction with, brand image. This chapter also discusses brand management, identifies the brand marketing team players, and reiterates to its readers that every member within a corporation must remain dedicated to the fulfillment of the brand promises through each and every touch point of the corporation, or those places where consumers interact (touch) with the product or service. Touch points can include, but are not limited to: one-to-one consumer interaction, consumer service contact, promotional items, websites, e-mail, tech support, advertisements, publications, announcements, presentations, and telephone conversations.

Touch points are critical to the success of the brand because they impact the various stakeholders involved. With every consumer contact, and whenever the brand is represented, the corporation has the opportunity to either strengthen the brand or cause it to lose staying power. It is important for corporations to know their critical touch points in order to constantly monitor those areas and nurture them for marketing success; however, all of the corporation’s touch points should be aligned and treated with the same consistency and care in every consumer experience.

Consumer experience touch points can include the physical (product, packaging, store, or office), communicative (advertisement, e-mail, direct mailing), or face-to-face contacts (sales representative, receptionist, customer service representative). Each individual encounter has the ability to negatively or positively impact the brand, from the CEO who faces the media with each new success or failure of the corporation, to the receptionist who is the very first brand representative a new potential consumer comes into contact with, to the return e-mail to a dissatisfied consumer, to the package on the shelf waiting to be sold. It is the touch points and how they work in conjunction with one another that eventually contributes to the successes or failures of the brand.

## Defining Brand Identity

The brand identity of a corporation is its "essence." Brand identity is also synonymous with the brand's philosophy. It consists of a combination of the corporation's service reputation, packaging, product quality, benefits, promise delivery, and value. Brand identity comes in many forms to include logos, color palettes, design elements, and page layouts. Brand identity can be seen in:

- Documentation
- Advertisements
- Press releases
- Promotional materials
- Acts of philanthropy
- Corporate behavior

- Corporate environment
- Employee attitude.

In *Designing Brand Identity: A Complete Guide to Creating, Building, and Maintaining Strong Brands*, Alina Wheeler offers several additional characteristics. She claims that brand identity:

- Is flexible to encourage creative thinking and execution
- Engages the senses and understands its customers
- Creates a unified persona from a merger of equals
- Communicates a unique vision for the future
- Attracts an audience and creates a desired perception
- Works across languages and cultures to build a powerful brand
- Is product and retail design that seizes every opportunity to delight customers. (2-7)

In order to clarify Wheeler's characteristics one needs only to look to two of the best-built brands in the marketplace today and identify where they fit in to her description.

## Google.com

In its company overview, Google.com admits, "Google's utility and ease of use have made it one of the world's best known brands almost entirely through word of mouth from satisfied users" (http://www.google.com/intl/en/corporate/index.html). This clearly establishes its ability to attract an audience and create a desired perception. And for Google that audience is worldwide. Google works across languages and culture to build its brand every day. Google's homepage offers an always-changing logo that is still identifiable and consistent with the brand identity but seizes every opportunity to engage the consumer. The changing logo is yet another opportunity to show that Google is not just a static corporation. It is ever-changing and flexible enough to meet most of the characteristics identified by Wheeler.

### Target Corporation

Target employees want their "guests" to feel delight upon entering their stores and to receive exceptional value as well. With its clean environment, bright lights, bold red trim, and inviting aromas permeating from its neighboring Starbucks Café, Target Corporation has hit the branding bulls-eye at presenting its identity not only in engaging the senses, but also in attracting an audience and creating a desired perception. The corporation is committed to communities and "gives back more than $3 million each week to communities nationwide" (http://www.careerbuilder.com/Jobs/Company/C8F49B5ZM4VLK88XNZ5/Target/). This identifies the social responsibility that "communicates a unique vision for the future"—another brand identity characteristic according to Wheeler.

## Defining Brand Image

Brand image is the consumer's perception of a corporation's brand identity. The image may or may not directly match the corporation's sought after brand identity. It is made up by a combination of the consumer's experiences with the corporation at all touch points. Corporations must work hard to bridge the gap between the two. The identity a corporation desires to achieve is sometimes eclipsed by the reputation it receives.

The "essence" of Johnson & Johnson's brand was embodied in its credo, and its identity was maintained by the image people received when the corporation referred to its credo in a time of crisis. Johnson & Johnson saved its reputation and was able to bridge the gap when it put the consumer first and suffered great losses as a result.

An example of a corporation's failure at bridging the gap where brand identity must work across languages and cultures is the story of a popular faux pas made by Gerber when it began to sell its products in Africa. The corporation used the same packaging that it used for Western markets with a cherubic American baby boy on the label. In Africa, however, Western companies commonly place pictures on the labels showing what the product contains.

## **Promoting and Managing the Brand**

Despite having a unique brand with a clear, meaningful point of difference, terrific visuals, and built-in values and principles, if a corporation does not promote its brand properly, the brand will fail. Often, corporations forget that the hardest part of branding is promoting and managing the brand. Developing and personifying brand strategy is a start, but managing the brand is the corporation's only way to ensure that its audiences will get from the company what is consistent with the brand strategy (Gregory 47).

Brands must be built from the inside-out. Employees must first understand the brand and then deliver it. If a corporation cannot sell its brand to its employees, selling to the outside consumer would be out of the question. Employees are the vital link between corporation and consumer; therefore, corporations live or die every day based on their relationship with their employees as well as with their consumers. Brand equity is protected when employees become more than just employees—when they become brand champions.

Unquestionably, corporation-wide awareness of the brand is essential. With awareness, however, employees should also have a passion for the brand. They should maintain the role of brand ambassadors. In order for corporations to ensure individuals are committed and their brand promises are consistently delivered, they should instill loyalty and brand enthusiasm in each member of the brand team.

Howard Schultz, Director at Starbucks Corporation knew the importance of instilling branding team loyalty. It was clear to him that store-level employees, those who came in contact with consumers on a daily basis, had the power to impact the shape of his brand. For this reason, he created one of the best employee training programs ever in an effort to attract and retain high quality employees.

Consumers entering into any Starbucks, on any given day, will find employees with extreme product knowledge, a strong commitment to consumer service, and exceptional interpersonal skills. In addition, Schultz provided a terrific work environment for those employees, and "during the most critical growth period for Starbucks, in the mid to late nineties, Starbucks had the lowest turnover rate of any restaurant or fast-food company in the world" (Bedbury 141).

While every employee is a representative of the brand and should be involved in the process, leadership is crucial. Gregory discusses creating the branding culture: "No matter how much care you take to create your brand, if you don't nurture it and help it grow, it will die and take with it the investment your company has made to date" (48). Chiaravalle states, "Buy-in, participation, and leadership from the owners and top-level executives of your company are absolutely essential to your branding success" (58). To the CEO, branding practices must be taken seriously. He or she must communicate this seriousness across the board.

## The CEO/Standard Bearer

Brand management begins with the persistent, visionary leadership of the CEO and flows throughout the organization. It is the sole responsibility of the CEO to lead the corporation in creating and nurturing a strong corporate identity. Gregory calls the CEO the "standard bearer." The CEO can also be referred to as the "brand guardian." The role of the CEO is not only to create and nurture the brand, but also to act as brand protector, protecting the brand from actions that may result in value destruction.

The CEO must safeguard the brand's continuity, maintaining consistency corporation-wide, anticipating the future, and engineering the brand's path in it. Gregory reminds readers, "a CEO is not the brand, but he or she is its most prominent representative. As such, his or her role is indispensable in managing the brand" (49).

If, however, the CEO, or senior member of the corporation, criticizes the corporation's products, employees, or services or insults its consumers, it can be damaging or detrimental to the brand. This was the case when Gerald Ratner, CEO of one of the biggest brands of jewelry, in a speech to the Institute of Directors in London, claimed that the reason one of his products could be sold so cheap was because it was "total crap." This comment represented a total lack of respect for the product and consumer, and gave rise to the negative expression "doing a Ratner." The direct insult to his brand made his products one and the same with "crap," as well as insulted those consumers who had purchased those products.

There are also those cases where the CEO *is* the brand. Examples include Martha Stewart, Michael Dell, and Mary Kay. In those cases, the individuals have placed their names on the brands and staked their own personal reputations on their products. Sometimes, however, the *product* reputation is flawed or damaged by the *individual* as a result of a personal blunder, as was the case of the Martha Stewart Corporation, which suffered when Martha Stewart herself was indicted in 2003 for insider trading in ImClone stock. She immediately resigned her position as CEO of the corporation, but remained within the corporation as Chief Creative Officer.

Immediate action based on a clear plan for the CEO of a corporation in times of crisis is essential to the brand. First and foremost, it is the responsibility of the CEO to communicate the corporation's position to the consumers. In the eyes of the consumer public, the CEO is the credible resource to the actions of the corporation. He or she is expected to maintain a high ethical standard

Great brands are achieved through the leveraging of management controls. As Gregory explains, "The CEO is truly the only person in the corporation who can launch an effective brand management initiative. Eventually, the process will encompass an intense effort that will include company-wide training; internal and external communications; even changes in chains of command" (48).

Once a CEO successfully launches a brand, the long-term process requires momentum achieved through successful, top-down management. Wheeler agrees:

> Effective leaders invariably understand how to leverage symbols, prioritizing communication about the meaning of their brand. Not surprisingly, the brand identity projects that are successful are top-down initiatives, which means that a

> CEO has endorsed the project. This endorsement is critical because it sends a strong message to everyone involved that the project is a priority that will affect future success. Brand identity projects that do not have CEO endorsement tend to fail. (17)

The attitude the CEO maintains about the brand creates a filter that determines the attitude of the rest of the corporation. An exceptional CEO promotes the brand vision among the corporation's employees, motivating them to work harder and consistently promote the brand.

## The Employees/Brand Deliverers

Because everyone in the corporation has the ability to make an impact on consumer perception, once a clear vision has been created and a strategy for brand building has been mapped out by the corporation's leaders, all members of the corporation must learn to live the brand. It becomes not only the employees' abilities but also their responsibilities to deliver on the corporation's unique brand promises each and every day. It is vital that corporations educate their employees on their branding culture.

Gregory tells readers that "a company with a healthy branding culture is one in which every employee—from the CEO down—not only understands what the brand is about, but understands what their role is in delivering that brand" (48). Employees must be familiar with and uphold the established brand principles, brand rules, and brand strategies. For this reason, extensive training to familiarize employees with the goals of the brand is essential. Employees must interact with the determination for cooperation and respect for the brand. It is the responsibility of each member of a corporation to uphold the brand—to be the brand.

According to marketing and branding consultant and professional speaker, Jack Simms, "Companies must be passionate about the way their brand is nurtured, developed and presented to target audiences. Every correspondence that leaves the building and impression that employees make has a lasting impact" (http://www.mpiweb.org/CMS/mpiweb/mpicontent.aspx?id=3195). For this reason, when forming a branding team, it is imperative that there are representatives from all aspects within the corporation.

Protecting the brand is difficult. One solution Franklin offers is the creation of brand standards. Franklin recommends a brand-standards manual, like a style guide, as the primary means for communicating brand standards to employees, licensees, and vendors. His concept that "all employees should have access to the brand-standards manual and should learn the brand's core values and how the brand represents those values" again reinforces this study's "buy in" requirement to promote branding (122).

A brand style guide will help employees understand the elements that make up the corporation's brand identity and image. This increased understanding will allow all individuals responsible for the brand to create powerful, targeted communications and experiences that consistently reflect the corporation's style.

This chapter reviewed how corporations obtain the most impact from their corporate brand communications through promotion, management, and protection. It encouraged the nourishing of brands to help them to grow through top-down leadership. Engaging the employees in the process of brand marketing using employee-focused education and relationship building is one key to a corporation's success. This can be achieved when all individuals involved realize there is a difference between brand identity (who a corporation thinks it is) and brand image (who the corporation's consumers perceive it to be).

## Looking Ahead to Chapter Four

The following chapter looks to specific examples of brand successes and failures and identifies what went wrong and what went right. No brand is the same. There are good brands that succeeded as well as good brands that failed, but had the potential to succeed. There is no defined secret to success that all brands must follow. Brands succeed most often when they have a unique business identity that puts its best face forward time and time again through conformity and consistency.

# CHAPTER FOUR: MAJOR CLAIMS SUPPORT

In today's rising competitive marketplace, it comes as no surprise: successful business leaders of forward-thinking companies are securing their place in the market through the power of the brand. It is important for visionary companies to conduct thorough reviews of existing literature that is focused on positioning, defining, managing, and protecting their brand. Beneficial practices also include reviewing lessons learned from brand failures and brand successes.

This chapter examines such existing literature and cites case study examples to support the major claims concentrated on in this thesis. It discusses the ways in which corporations promote sustainability within the market place. It demonstrates how corporations build collaborative workplaces through effective leadership where their corporate identities are concerned, and why those corporations must differentiate themselves to survive in today's brand market.

There are many obstacles and challenges corporations face in their endeavor to implement a branding guideline. This chapter also takes a look at those corporations that triumphed over them as a result of their defined leadership to support major claims and ultimately prove that corporate branding requires corporation collaboration, or "buy in," and defined top-down leadership.

## The Original/Sustainable Brand Leaders

What do Tiffany, Ford, Johnson & Johnson, Wal-Mart, Xerox, Levi Strauss & Co., DuPont, Walt Disney World, and Hewlett-Packard all have in common? They are a few of

America's best known brand names, some of them conceived more than 100 years ago, which have stood the test of time. They are institutions, foundations for the future of corporate branding that simply started out as great ideas. Collins and Porras believe "all great ideas eventually become obsolete…Yet visionary companies prosper over long periods of time, through multiple product life cycles and multiple generations of active leaders (2). In other words, visionary corporations, like the ones stated above, have had the ability and fortune to change with the changeable market. They have survived market fluctuation, brand crisis, and sales slippage.

In many cases, corporations' names become synonymous with their products or services thus also creating longevity in the marketplace. If consumers want a pair of jeans, most think Levi's. If they sneeze and need a tissue, most ask for a Kleenex. If they want a world class family vacation, Walt Disney World comes to mind. Like other corporations, these corporations hit pitfalls. No one can predict the always-changing market for brand success. It is up to corporations to take the necessary steps to redefine their missions time and again. Branding is not a process with a beginning and an end. By its definition, sustainability comes with time and must be nurtured with strong leadership.

## Lesson Learned from a Brand Failure: Levi Strauss & Co.

Levi Strauss & Co., one of the largest brand-name apparel marketers, with sales in 110 countries, is not a foreigner to brand struggles. With its original "brand" burned into leather and stitched onto the back pocket, Levi's jeans have been standard attire for men, women, and children for more than half a century. It is no wonder the superbrand would take its leadership for granted. In *Big Brands Big Trouble: Lessons Learned the Hard Way*, Jack Trout states, “Not establishing your leadership helps your competition. When you’re on top, you have to make sure the marketplace knows it” (69). In the aggressive market, and without warning, competition rose up around Levi’s.

Lee, Wrangler, Rustler, designer brands Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger, and youth-oriented brands Diesel, Mudd, Fubu, Bongo, Faded Glory, and many others inundated the market. As a result, Trout says, “The world had turned upside down for the people who invented jeans. Their leadership had evaporated as did a lot of their sales” (69). Levi’s would have to look to its corporate identity to take back its leadership. In *Brand Failures*, Haig says, “If Levi’s stands for anything it stands for ‘the original jean’” (244). Levi’s differentiated itself by being first. The corporation was a leader. Lesson learned for Levi’s—redefine its values and take back what belongs to the corporation.

## **Promoting Marketplace Sustainability**

For the purpose of this thesis, Wheeler’s definition of sustainability best serves the reader. She states, “Sustainability is the inherent ability of an identity to have longevity in an environment that is in flux, characterized by future permutations that no one can predict” (24). In other words, a sustainable brand is a brand with staying power under changeable conditions. It is a brand with endurance, resilience, and strength. A sustainable brand is a brand with loyal consumers, and a loyal consumer is one who has made that brand an internal, personal, subjective part of his or her life—a consumer who no longer has to make a conscious buying decision when it comes to that brand.

In today's unpredictable marketplace, corporations with strong brands have the ability to change their leaders, look, ownership, and even their style and still maintain their sustainability. However, those corporations whose consumers perceive them as having weak brands are forced to watch their steps and work harder to build a stronger brand, or die. Consumers make decisions on what they know and what they have come to value. Traditions play a large part in a consumer's brand choice as well. If their mother used it, so should they. However, Mark Di Somma, a contributor to allaboutbranding.com, writes, "Brands that rely purely on their longevity and "glory days" are at real risk of finding themselves overtaken, overlooked or undermined. Credibility is vital but past reputation is no defense against the insatiable demands of today's markets" (http://www.allaboutbranding.com/index.lasso?article=421). Consumer demands in an ever-changing market require corporations to evolve their brands in order to ensure sustainability.

In *Brand Failures*, Haig says, "Consumers make buying decisions based around the perception of the brand rather than the reality of the product. While this means brands can become more valuable than their physical assets, it also means they can lose this value overnight. After all, perception is a fragile thing" (1-2). As branding becomes more and more prevalent in the marketplace, corporations have to work harder to build their brand perception in order to keep their products alive. A strong brand works hard to foster consumer loyalty and develop relationships; however, success in brand building begins with differentiation.

## Differentiation Made Simple

Differentiation is simply the act of being perceived as unique or distinctly beneficial. It is a point of individual worth that sets a brand apart from all of the others. Differentiation is a brand strategy that offers consumers a clear reason why a corporation's product is the best. The product itself, however, does not have to be the difference. In addition, it is important to recognize that slight changes and variations on an existing product or service is not differentiation. Patrick Barwise and Seán Meehan bring to their readers' attention that "when companies are so preoccupied with fiddling with individual products and brands, they lose sight of the value they can create for themselves, and for consumers, by raising the bar for the entire category" (http://www.strategy-business.com/press/enewsarticle/enews093004). As a result, they encourage corporations to learn what consumers really care about and raise category quality. To make this concept more comprehensible, they provide the following example:

> If Crest, Exxon Mobile, Tide, Citibank, or Marriott disappeared tomorrow, most American consumers would at worst feel slightly inconvenienced by having to switch to an indistinguishable alternative. But, how would they feel if an entire category—toothpaste, gasoline, detergent, consumer banks, or hotels—disappeared? That would have an affect on their lives that they would notice. (http://www.strategy-business.com/press/enewsarticle/enews093004)

In order to differentiate, corporations should start by distinguishing the concrete differences between their brand and the competing brands. Is their brand the least expensive, the most service oriented, or the best quality? Next, corporations should identify their personality differentiators. Are they socially conscious, consumer oriented, or dedicated to employee satisfaction? In another work, *Differentiate or Die: Survival in our Era of Killer Competition*, author Jack Trout states:

> Leadership is the most powerful way to differentiate a brand. The reason is that it's the most direct way to establish the credentials of a brand. And credentials are the collateral you put up to guarantee the performance of your brand. Also, when you have leadership credentials, your prospect is likely to believe almost anything you say about your brand. (Because you are the leader.) (107)

Again, it is important that consumers see a corporation's brand value in the exact same way the corporation offers it to them. Therefore, in regard to differentiation, it is essential that the corporation communicate its unique difference to the consumer. Trout tells readers, "You can't overcommunicate your difference" and "a real differentiating idea is also a real motivational tool" (69).

## Lesson Learned from a Differentiating Brand Success: Pepsi

On its website, under a heading titled Sustainable Advantage, PepsiCo claims, "There are three major sustainable advantages that give PepsiCo a competitive edge as we operate in the global marketplace:

- Big, muscular brands
- Proven ability to innovate and create differentiated products
- Powerful go-to-market systems" (http://www.pepsi.com/home.php).

One of their big, muscular brands, Pepsi, has been referred to as the "differentiation brand." In *Brand Royalty*, Haig claims:

> The reason why Pepsi is one of the world's top 25 most valuable brands (according to Interbrand) is because it has defined itself against, rather than replicated, the market leader. Coca-Cola is 'classic'. Pepsi is 'new'. Coca-Cola is red. Pepsi is blue. Coca-Cola's advertising is about timeless values. Pepsi's advertising is about celebrity and humour. Such different branding has helped distinguish two very similar products. (114-116)

A visit to Coca-Cola's website, with its red, scripted Coca-Cola logo prominently displayed, offers the user information about careers, investors, corporate responsibility, and conservation. Rival Pepsi's site labeled PEPSI USA in thick, bold letters offers music, car culture, sports, entertainment, and fashion. This identifies another way in which Pepsi distinguishes itself as "different from" Coca-Cola.

## The Power of a Mantra

To communicate its unique spirit and differences, a corporation sometimes develops a mantra, or tagline, that sums up its distinctive value in a few words that concisely express the essence of the corporation. As an example, Subway Restaurants, using its mantras "eat fresh" and "serving great tasting healthier alternatives," employs healthfulness as its key point of differentiation to other fast food chains.

In the past, when corporations felt sales slipping, they immediately looked to their products to find the defect or flaw that was causing the failure. Today, more and more corporations are coming to the conclusion that their products are not failing, but their brands are. In his book, *Brand Failures*, Haig quotes Scott Bedburry, Starbucks' former vice president of marketing who “controversially admitted that ‘consumers don’t truly believe there’s a huge difference between products’” (Haig 3). Therefore, like Subway, Starbucks relies on the mantra “Rewarding Everyday Moments” to encompass all of the experiences within Starbucks brand structure (their differentiators) whether they be selling tea, books, or newspapers, or just providing a comfortable, well-lit place to relax (Bedbury 53).

A mantra is more than a catchphrase or jingle. Bedbury tells his readers, “Brand mantras are not slogans, but touchstones that help shape what kinds of products and services companies create, how they conduct their business, and even how decisions are made as to what kind of people they hire” (50). Mantras focus on the heart of what a corporation stands for, its most essential beliefs, and fashions internal alignment around its most dynamic ideas. In addition, it helps to channel the external messages of those professionals who represent the corporation.

## <u>The CEO: The Buck Stops Here</u>

The buck stops here, or in other words, responsibility does not pass beyond this point, is a phrase popularized by U.S. president Harry S. Truman. It meant that he did not “pass the buck” to anyone else, but accepted personal responsibility for the way the country was governed. Likewise, all CEOs should govern their brands with the same approach. Trout’s book *Big Brands, Big Trouble* centers on the mistakes made in a super competitive marketplace that can potentially lead to total corporation, or brand, collapse. In regard to the role and responsibility of the corporate CEO, Trout states, “CEOs often make bad decisions leading to big trouble. They either do things that cause problems or don’t do things that could have avoided problems. And when danger looms, the CEO is probably the only person who can effectively take the company out of harm's way" (211).

To reiterate instituting top-down branding as part of a corporation's culture is a necessary and value-building endeavor. It begins with the CEO, who is responsible for shaping the vision, and requires buy in from top leaders. Catherine Ostheimer, Brand Director of CoreBrand, a company solely designed to help corporations leverage their corporate brands, states:

> The CEO has the credibility in the eyes of all the stakeholders to be that force. People won't believe that they have to fall in line unless the CEO says so; that's just the way it is. There's a trickle-down effect. If the CEO says to his immediate staff, 'this brand stuff is a little soft, I don't really believe in it,' eventually that attitude will trickle down, and the brand will fall to pieces. (Gregory 50)

## Looking Ahead to Chapter Five

The following and final chapter concludes this thesis and recaps its findings. As discussed throughout, a brand is a corporate asset that adds value to its organization. It should be managed over time, consistently, and with great care and responsibility. There are many opportunities for technical writers to take part in the building and defining of brands in the future. Chapter Five will also look at where those opportunities lie.

# CHAPTER FIVE:  CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While attending Yale University, Fred Smith, founder, Chairman, and CEO of Federal Express Corporation (FedEx) received a "C" on a paper that elaborated on a unique concept for reliable overnight delivery in a computerized information age.  His professor found the idea unlikely.  Today, "FedEx delivers 5 million shipments every business day.  It is the world's leading delivery brand, worth billions of dollars" (Haig, *Brand Royalty* 291).  Not only does FedEx Corporation carry brand power that ensures its sustainability, but it has also transcended itself into everyday verbal communication as a verb that means "to send overnight."  This inspirational story illustrates a straightforward concept.  To predict the future is a difficult task, but a terrific way to begin would be to define one's place in it.

This chapter reviews the overall findings of this thesis, offers concluding thoughts, and provides a glimpse into the future for corporate branding.  In addition, it proposes recommendations for technical communicators who are involved in the process of building, managing, and maintaining the value of corporate brands.

## **Branding: A Review**

In contrast to 100 years ago, consumers are faced with considerably more choices on products and services.  Thanks to the Information Age, they are also provided with more information than ever before.  For corporations, both established and forthcoming, branding is becoming increasingly important.

This thesis has shown that consumer trust and emotional ties play a crucial role in product or service achievement.  A differentiated brand with consistent promise delivery from all aspects of its organization is well on its way to promoting sustainability in the marketplace. In a flux world where we cannot predict change, corporations must be prepared to meet obstacles and challenges.

CEOs must remain proactive in crisis management and always forthright and honest with their consumers. They must live the brand and buy into the brand from the start, knowing there is no finish, and remembering that brand identity and brand image are not one and the same. The brand identity the corporation puts forth, the anticipated consumer perception, is not always the consumer perception, or the brand image.

The key to any brand's success is its positioning in the marketplace. Positioning is a promise, a mission, a vision, a representation of the corporation's personality. It defines who the corporation is and what it does. It identifies where the corporation fits into the marketplace and what its differentiators are.

## The Future of Branding: Spreading the Word

As the future approaches (daily), brands must be prepared to extend and evolve confidently, knowing that new markets, new services, and even new consumers, the likes of which they have never seen before, will be approaching with it. Highly technical and consumerist Gen X-ers and Gen Y-ers, those who helped to drive the Internet evolution, despite the existence of extensive advertising campaigns, are reaching out to MySpace, blogs, and message boards to get the advice of fellow consumers about their chosen brands and services. They are basing their purchasing decisions on the emotional ties or consumer experiences of those consumers who have come before them. There is no type of advertising more powerful than word-of-mouth advertising, and in the case of the Internet communication chain, there is no greater mass market to receive the word.

There are even websites dedicated to advertising of this nature. Social networks, Mouthshut.com and Epinions.com, are websites that provide opportunities for consumers to compare pricing, read or write reviews on almost any product or service, and allow others to access those reviews for buying recommendations and warnings. Ultimately, this gives consumers an opportunity to neglect advertising altogether in decision-making and leaves corporations with no control over what will be said about their brands.

Many websites for products offer post-purchase feedback opportunities that can be accessed by those consumers in search of a product or service. Amazon.com offers a forum for consumers to share their thoughts with other consumers about each product offered on the site. In addition, consumers can read reviews and rate them according to their usefulness. A five-star rating system identifies each review from the most to the least helpful. This provides easy access to future consumers in locating a useful review. In this scenario, corporate advertising becomes obsolete.

In the future, corporations will begin to focus their efforts on controlling this type of advertising. There is a way. Realizing that consumers are in control and are talking to one another, corporations will need to concentrate on building the best relationships they can while maintaining their positive identities. Consumer care at every touch point will be more critical than ever before.

**The Future of Branding: Digitally Speaking**

Digital video recorders (DVRs), like TiVo and other brands, allow television-watching consumers who were once radically influenced by commercial advertising, and perhaps even walked around with a product jingle in their heads for a day or two, to fast forward right through television commercials. As a result, brands will be forced to find new ways to finagle their way into the homes and minds of their consumers, perhaps leading to more product placement in television shows, music videos, video games, books, and movies.

In some cases, brands are already claiming their place in these new mediums. For example, in the gamers' market, brands are already making their appearances virtually. Gamers are often in a world of their own. Brands are finding ways to introduce themselves into that world by taking a part in the action. In Adidas' Power Soccer for Play Station, the Adidas brand is portrayed throughout. Adidas shoe advertisements appear along the field, players wear Adidas clothing, and there are even signature moves named for Adidas products. Players can let loose a Predator Kick (named after Adidas' soccer shoe).

In an effort to get in touch with even more consumers, brands will reach out to books as well. Consumers often tend to tune out advertisements, but it may be more difficult when they are forced to read about them smack in the middle of their text. Many people believe that the first literary author directly commissioned by a corporation to write a novel occurred in 2001. Author Fay Weldon wrote *The Bulgari Connection* after being "sponsored by the Italian jewelry corporation, Bulgari—with a requirement in her contract for at least a dozen mentions of its products," but the future can expect to see many more of these occurrences (http://books.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/0,6109,546599,00.html).

Brands may also have to work harder to make commercial advertising more enjoyable to the consumer—to make the consumer want to watch it. Super Bowl advertisers know that their advertisements are the most anticipated of the year. If all advertisements were as fun and produced as many water cooler discussions, perhaps the new consumer (the one who chooses what he or she watches) would actively pursue watching them.

## The Future of Branding: Going Green

The future is green. The future of branding must also pay attention to this color. This is not a reference to logos and color design elements, but to the hottest concept in environmentalism. Corporations, or brands, will find themselves promoting greater social conscientiousness than ever before. Consumers expect it. As they always have, they always will hold corporations responsible for their actions.

Now, however, instead of simply expecting corporations to avoid negatively impacting the environment, consumers expect them to positively impact it. Consumers will come to insist on products and services that are sustainable, or capable of being produced and used with minimal long-term effect on the environment. They will look to the corporations, or brands, that are the most socially responsible and passionate about the support of various causes.

## The Future of Branding: Value-Adding Employees

Thanks to the frontrunners, corporations like Nordstrom, Starbucks, Google, and the various other corporations that top the *Fortune Magazine* Top 100 Companies to Work For list, corporations are going to work harder in the future to incorporate their strategic market plan with the personal values of the employees who work for them. Knowing that dedicated, quality employees extend the value of the brand, future corporations will have to make great strides to help their employees promote the mission and keep their value-adding promises.

A corporation's brand value is enhanced and protected by employee communications. Therefore, future corporations will focus on making sure training and development programs, performance management systems, and compensation programs are designed and reinforced to promote living the brand.

## **The Role of the Technical Communicator in the Future of Branding**

Technical communication, as well as corporate branding, encompasses visual communication, rhetoric, style, and usability. The identity defined by a corporation is unique to that corporate community and works to unify all of its operations (touch points) with a single, strong brand that is easily identifiable and recognizable. It is an identity system that defines a highly professional (consistent) look and feel for all communication and in all media.

Technical communicators can help in the branding process because they are driven by the rhetorical situation in any given communication process. Brands seek to understand and communicate with their consumers. In *Designing Visual Language, Strategies for Professional Communicators*, Charles Kostelnick and David Roberts discuss the rhetorical situation. They state, "The act of creating any workplace communication, then, is driven by the writer's understanding of three basic elements:

- Audience
- Purpose

- Context" (5).

In shaping corporate documents consistent with branding guidelines, technical communicators will always first examine the rhetorical situation to maintain consistency and branding value. Adamson says, "A brand driver is the shorthand required for effective, unmistakable communication. It will conjure up all the right mental associations" (109). A corporate brand is the aggregate of everything the corporation says and does, so it comes as no surprise that technical communicators are called upon to provide clarity, legibility, information architecture, and usability to the branding process.

Because the role of the technical communicator often encompasses the production of usable documentation, and the branding world relies heavily on written communication, technical communicators are sought out to create value-adding documentation that focuses on the end users (consumers). Technical communicators should be the first considered to contribute to the process when corporations are called upon to define their brands.

Technical communicators are no strangers to working collaboratively, and by definition of their role, they are essential to the establishment and protecting of a brand's look and feel. Technical communicators are called on to provide consistency within documentation and across documentation sets, online as well as printed. They are trained writers and communicators of all topics technical and otherwise. Maintaining a keen knowledge of goals and audiences, and creating clarity and organization are key responsibilities of every technical communicator in the branding environment, and for this reason, a technical communicator's abilities in these areas are essential to the branding process.

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