

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, February 14, 2010

BEST PRACTICES (WE ADMIRE)

From time to time we are asked to say which companies or brands we admire the most. Naturally, when attempting to answer a question like this we aim first to identify what *actions* and what *results* certain companies and brands have implemented and accomplished—wanting to go beyond simply saying what companies or brands we *like*. Actually, regular readers of *Dispatches* can pretty readily name some of those companies and brands we really admire because we consciously feature what we consider to be best practices in these weekly e-letters.

But more than individual companies or brands, what we have come to admire the most throughout our long years of work with brand-builders and marketers are certain, consistent behaviors (and yes, here's that term again, "best practices") that always contribute to better results. For this week's *Boats & Helicopters*, since we are still early in a new year, we thought we would generate a list of some of these practices that always lead to better results and that we always admire. If there are some here that you and your teams are not consistently using, we hope you will give them a try and see for yourselves what's to admire.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS—Marketing Practices We Admire

1. **Setting SMART Objectives**—Management by Objective, or MBO as it has so often been abbreviated, would seem to be such a classic business practice that it must happen automatically. But, we find all too often that objective setting—not merely for an annual business plan, but for individual projects, initiatives, research programs, and especially for things like consulting and strategic-thinking assignments—gets by-passed. Sometimes objective-setting gets by-passed because, well, the team believes they have no means of *measuring* an objective; but more often than not, the team is simply moving so fast that the objective-setting step gets left out in the interest of time. But if we cannot make time to precisely articulate and agree upon what outcomes we expect, how do we really know *what* we expect? The best way is to insist upon SMART objectives for everything we do, for everything we invest any amount of the Company's money against: objectives that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.
2. **Providing the Brand Positioning Statement to All**—Everyone who has a role in successfully getting the brand from the Company to the Customer (or Consumer) deserves to have in his or her possession a current copy of the brand-building blueprint—the Brand Positioning Statement—to guide them in cross-checking that each of their actions contributes to building the brand "according to specification." Actually, it is not

enough for everyone to simply have a copy of the Brand Positioning; they must also have an understanding of what it means and why it makes sense (in other words, upon what marketplace research and learning it is based).

3. **Championing Ideas**—Simply stated, marketers must be the idea-drivers of the organization. This does not mean that they must be the only ones who have ideas. But it does mean that they should be pushing the organization to create, to think differently, and to solicit creativity from their suppliers. It also means that marketers are responsible for instituting an on-going process to retrieve and assess ideas: product ideas, communication ideas, pricing ideas, PR ideas, merchandising ideas and so on.
4. **Maintaining Customer (or Consumer) Closeness**—While it is certainly expected that the Company's Sales Force should have strong relationships with the Company's customers, there is no substitute for marketers getting and staying close to those same customers, particularly the end-user ones. Sometimes we'll hear a marketing team say they are "finally getting out into the market." And that always discourages us because it indicates that the team is much too tied up in internal meetings, e-mails, and deck-updating. There are so many ways now of keeping in contact with the brand's customers and consumers that, honestly, there is no acceptable excuse for not interacting with them on a weekly basis.
5. **Assembling Talent Teams, Not Merely Functional Teams**—This practice can make a big difference! But it is rarely used. Typically, when a company brand group assembles a project-team to develop new strategies or new ideas, they automatically "fill the chairs" with the required multi-functional team members, as a means of informing everyone on what is about to happen and of making all the functions "feel involved" (you know, to solicit buy-in). But all too often these chairs are taken by people whose skill sets are not best-suited for the task at hand. For example, if the aim of a given session is to create out-of-the-box product or communication ideas, it is much more productive to fill the chairs with strong creative thinkers—from inside and outside the company. This is exactly what you would expect your creative agencies to do when given an assignment to develop a new communication campaign...the last thing you would want them to do would be to invite, say, accounting or media trafficking people in these creative development sessions. No, we want the talent assembled to match, as best we can, with the outcomes required.
6. **Insisting on Creative Participation**—As a corollary to the above, we always request that our clients invite creative team members to participate in the strategic and creative sessions we lead. We have found that good creative people are not only creative; they are inherently strategic as well. And, unlike so many of us MBA-trained marketers, creative experts speak a number of very useful languages: the language of customers and consumers; the language of metaphors; the language of multiple examples; the language of visualizing. Different languages give us the advantage of different perspectives.
7. **Demanding Options**—Whatever the exercise, marketers who seek many possible solutions (to their desired SMART objectives!) usually come out ahead. More options make us smarter: they show us a wider range of approaches and they often indicate approaches that are missing. It's true that having more options sometimes makes a team uncomfortable—the discomfort of divergent thinking. But we have all learned that not

all ideas are good ones; so it's better to have some choices to consider—at least for a period of time during the project work—and to share with customers and consumers...some divergence before the eventual convergence on a Good Idea!

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Have you signed up for the upcoming Open Brand Positioning & Marketing Communications College yet? The course which will be held at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kansas City, Missouri April 27-29, 2010 is filling up rapidly and we don't want to leave anyone out. If interested, please call Lori Vandervoort at 800-255-9831 (620-431-0780).

*Please forward any comments regarding the newsletter to Lori Vandervoort at our Central Division Offices of BDN International, 800-255-9831 or 620-431-0780.
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