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Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, March 12, 2006

GIVE YOUR PROMISE A REASON-WHY TO SUCCEED

The reason-why is a critically important strategic element of both the brand's positioning and communication strategies. It's also important to ensuring compelling communications. Too often marketers confuse "reason-why" with the rationale for why the customer should choose your brand. No, the reason-why is not about why someone(s) should choose the brand but why s/he should believe your benefit promise. It's all about supporting the benefit – making it believable and, therefore, more persuasive.

Just because a marketer makes a benefit claim it doesn't mean that it is believable. It is probably true that in this age of disinformation, corporate chicanery, caveat emptor, and general distrust of virtually everything including our most sacred institutions the reason-why may be more important than ever. Factor in an "age of sameness," where products and services are indistinguishable and/or interchangeable, the reason-why can enhance competitiveness to *drive customer preference*.

Consider this: two competing toothpaste brands promise to get teeth visibly whiter. Neither one has a proven competitive advantage in the degree to which it whitens teeth. One names an ingredient (that we have never heard of nor understand – which, by the way, is probably better than not having a reason-why) while the other says its ingredient is the same one 99% of dentists use in their offices to whiten their patients' teeth. Which one is more compelling? Undoubtedly you will choose the latter even though they cannot make a whitening superiority claim. That's how the reason-why can make your benefit more believable and, in turn, persuasive (assuming the benefit of white teeth is important to you in the first place).

The reason-why may be "intrinsic" (i.e., inside the product or service) or "extrinsic" (outside the product). Intrinsic reasons-why are comprised of features and attributes of the product such as product design, terms, ingredients - among others. Extrinsic reasons-why consist of things like endorsements (not from a celebrity!) but recognized, strategically appropriate authorities (such as the American Dental Association). Both are important and the pairing of the two can create magic.

The aforementioned case of the two toothpaste brands provides examples of intrinsic reasons-why. It's a feature or attribute of the product that makes it intrinsic. But not all features and attributes have the same value in adding credibility to the benefit - also as noted in the previous case example. It is important that the attribute or feature be related, as in connected, to the benefit.

It is also important to avoid product benefit statements as support for your benefit claim. Product benefits are neither features nor attributes. Product benefit statements are nothing more than claims. Therefore they need to be supported. Think of it this way, imagine you have made a benefit claim and are challenged in court. The judge slams her gavel onto her regal bench and shouts “prove it!” You must have “incontrovertible” proof. Defending a claim with a statement that it “works faster” is not support. It is another claim. You must have evidence – such as clinical studies or some such thing. It needs to be able to stand-up in a court of law. That’s a good test for its legitimacy.

Also, many marketers treat the reason-why as a “given” from the list of product attributes and features inherent in the product. But we need to be more thorough and imaginative. If your benefits and reasons-why are the same as your competitors then we are back to square one. Oh, customers may believe the claim but they lack anything compelling to drive preference for your brand.

The Crest Toothpaste story of how they were able to triple their market share and take the leadership position in the category by securing an exclusive endorsement for its cavity-fighting prowess from the American Dental Association is a telling example of the value of being first with a compelling reason-why. Nearly every brand has the ADA endorsement today. It’s not tripling their market share. Today it is a cost of entry. The same goes for clinical studies. Everyone has clinical studies. It’s nothing more than a foot in the door. But what piece of data from your clinical studies demonstrates what other products cannot? What is it that is so compelling that it will work with the benefit to drive preference? The operative word is “preference” here.

The Crest Toothpaste story is also important in another way. It evidences the strength of linking an extrinsic reason-why (the ADA endorsement) with an intrinsic reason-why (which, at the time was the strategic ingredient stannous fluoride). Combining the two (intrinsic with extrinsic) seems to work to create synergy.

Among the best reasons-why are those that when you present them enable the customer to identify the benefit. For example, Advil has driven sales with its Liqui-Gels (i.e., liquid gel form). When you present the notion of Liqui-Gels to consumers their response is “oh, this is going to work faster.” It prompts an important benefit. They understand it. Can you say the same for your reason-why?

One note on extrinsic reasons-why that often confuses marketers and their agencies. A specific celebrity is not a strategic reason-why but could serve as a credibility aid for your communications. For example, Lance Armstrong is a credibility aid for communications for Bristol-Myers Squibb oncology since he is a cancer survivor who was successfully treated with the company’s pharmaceuticals. What an incredible story it is. Nonetheless he is not a strategic reason-why. The strategic reason-why would be more akin to something like this: “clinical studies show that 80% of consumer-patients treated with BMS oncology drugs survive more than 5-years on average.” On the other hand, Lance Armstrong could be a strategic reason-why if you are selling a racing bike that has been designed by Mr. Armstrong.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

Here are some helpful hints in using reasons-why to make your brand promise more credible and compelling:

1. **Know your product or service** – Really get to know it. Go over your product with your R&D team. Take it apart. Look at it with “Beginners Mind.” See it for the first time all over again. This exercise should be undertaken annually to peel that proverbial onion back further to determine what new things you can learn about how your product is made, its ingredients, design, terms, etc., and how it may differ from competitors. It is helpful to have creative people (like members of your agency team) involved in this exercise. They tend to be very curious and make links from diverse pieces that left-brain thinkers are likely to miss.
2. **Brainstorm extrinsic reasons-why** – Identify what extrinsic connections can help sell your story to customers, making the benefit promise more compelling. Don’t tell yourself, or let anyone tell you, that the extrinsic connection cannot be made either. The Crest team worked for years to get the ADA endorsement and, judging from the business results, it was worth every bit of effort. It made the brand and it made Mr. John Smale’s career. (He later went on to become the Chairman of Procter & Gamble.)
3. **Be creative to be first right** – We didn’t say be first, but first right. You need to be first with the right choice that supports your brand’s benefit promise. And, think creatively to find an angle that others are not using. If your reason-why is the same as your competitors then, guess what, you’re not competitive. You’re the same. What a shame.
4. **Provide “incontrovertible” support** – Deliver the evidence not more claims. If the customer doesn’t believe your primary claim they are not likely to believe a litany of other claims. And, if the customer doesn’t believe your reason-why support then it stands to reason that s/he will not believe your benefit promise. Your reason-why needs to be airtight.
5. **Offer the reason-why to help the customer discover the benefit** – Share the reason-why with (prospective) customers and let them tell you what the benefit is for your product or service. Like Advil Liqui-Gels if they can make the connection to the benefit promise then they can make the connection to your brand. This is a good check to see if you have something of potential value. If they get it then there’s also a good chance it can help establish brand linkage with your brand and to its benefit.

6. **Make the reason-why part of the brand** – Go beyond words to embody reason-why in the design of the product and/or brand. Gatorade’s endorsements from professional sports organizations such as the NBA (National Basketball Association) are extrinsic to the product but, today, after years of widespread use and support, intrinsic to the brand. Own your reason-why by spending behind it, trademark it, make it a part of the customer experience.

Give your promise a reason-why to succeed.

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

BDN International

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Note: All attendees should now have received the Case Study, electronic tool box and a letter containing logistical information you want to have prior to the beginning of class. If you have not received any or all of these, please contact Lori Vandervoort at 800-255-9831 (620-431-0780) ASAP. See you in Chicago!

Program is full!!!

Attention!

BDN International will be hosting a Strategic Positioning & Ad College I in Evanston, IL on March 21st through March 23rd 2006. This program has been very well received in the past and is open to all companies wishing to send one or more participants. Space is limited and generally fills up quickly. If you are interested, please contact Lori Vandervoort at 800-255-9831 or 620-431-0780 to register.
Hope to see you in March!