

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, December 14, 2008

“IF I WERE A BRAND MANAGER TODAY...”

A long time ago, sometime in the late 1970's, at Procter & Gamble in Cincinnati a senior executive named Tom Laco gave a talk to all the brand management people that he titled, “If I Were a Brand Manager Today.” As you might assume, the gist of this talk was to pinpoint - from Mr. Laco's perspective - those very essential things **he** would do if were still managing a brand, instead of serving as Vice-Chairman of the entire Company. It was an encouraging and highly motivating talk because Mr. Laco made it perfectly clear that in any given year he expected the Brand Manager to identify and focus against **only** three or four priorities (not ten or twenty projects!) that could make a real difference in the brand's growth.

If we were to go back through a transcript of Tom Laco's talk, we would not be surprised to see that among the top priorities he exhorted brand teams to focus against were these: (1) keeping a steady flow of product improvement and potential line extension ideas coming - ideally at the rate of one per year; (2) always having a “back-up” equity ad campaign in test, not just to replace an existing campaign that's wearing out, but ideally to “beat” the existing campaign in driving share growth; and (3) sustaining a rigorous personal development program for each of the brand team members...training, training, training! As you can see by these three alone, top management at Procter & Gamble put as much stock in brand growth as they did in personnel growth; naturally, they had discovered long ago that if your people are growing their skills a healthy rate, the business growth will more likely follow. (In fact, our colleague in Bangkok, Brenda Bence, has told us that when she was working in brand management at P&G one of her top bosses asked her during an annual plan review how she planned to “grow her people 15%.”)

A lot has changed in the world of brand management over the past thirty years since Mr. Laco's talk. One could argue that in some companies traditional brand management has been replaced with “matrix” brand management, or even in some organizations simply with project management. But the priorities he outlined remain as relevant as ever - oh sure, fewer brands now rely as heavily on traditional TV ad campaigns as brands at P&G did then, so maybe his second priority might be amended to read, “always having a back-up *communications* campaign in test.” But one thing has not changed: the need to keep brand-builders growing in their skills.

So we thought, for our last *Dispatches* for 2008, we would update Mr. Laco's approach and offer our thoughts on what we would do if we were building brands today instead of teaching and consulting with those who do. Our list is longer than his, but you'll see that what we're exhorting are more “process” and “infrastructure-based” moves, rather than his “brand initiative-based” moves. You'll also see, though, that we have retained his last priority.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS: “IF I WERE A BRAND-BUILDER TODAY”

1. The very first thing to do would be to make sure the brand's positioning is as competitive as possible; assuming that is the case, **communicate the positioning to everyone with a role in building the brand.** This would literally mean to explain the

rationale and supporting research for the brand positioning and provide digital or hand-copies to everyone- - from those working in call centers, taking customer calls, to those in the boardroom.

2. Set up a real **brand planning process**, not merely a business planning process. The former requires starting with the brand positioning and laying out the required initiatives (in product development, in communications, in merchandising, in promotion and so on) that will sustain and evolve that positioning as desired. The latter must be done in any event - it requires determining the growth targets - volume, profit, share - that the brand must achieve, as well as the “must do” initiatives to achieve them. But today far too many brands do only the latter; they neglect to link the key drivers or initiatives with the brand’s positioning.
3. Construct a **brand positioning room** in the home office - a place where, literally, the Brand Positioning Statement is printed and hung on the wall...where the inferred brand positioning of each key competitor is also printed and visualized...where there is a timeline showing the brand’s intended “brand plan” over the next 3-5 years, and so on. Ideally, any new initiative for the brand would kick off in this room - for example, a new packaging design effort would start here, making sure that the design brief is consistent with the brand positioning.
4. **Search for and analyze “model brand positionings”** - from a range of product categories and classes; post some of these in the brand positioning room. These would be brands with positioning platforms that we admire, and we hope to emulate in some way. Update and add to these often.
5. **Hire idea people** to work on the brand team. This means looking in quite different places for personnel than most companies do today - places like creative shops, design firms, entertainment companies, even “think tanks.” It also means cutting out the old way of thinking about marketing talent: that the best (or only) talent comes with an MBA. Even more important, this kind of searching and hiring starts with *experienced* people, those who can demonstrate through work already accomplished how “idea-oriented” they really are.
6. **Augment the full-time team with an outside “expert advisory panel.”** Almost like having an additional, outside-the-company brand-building team, assemble a small but multi-faceted team of advisors to brainstorm and check-off plans and initiatives with. For example, a key hire on this advisory panel would be an accomplished cultural anthropologist - someone who has studied and understands *human behaviors*. Another key hire would be an inventor - someone who has already amassed patents, whether the actual products have ever hit the market or not. Still another hire would be someone who has been a creative head, almost anywhere (but preferably not at a traditional advertising agency, more like a design or even a “digital” agency).

7. Every so often, **take the core brand-building and expert advisory panel teams to “idea sources.”** Places where, historically, others have gone to seek out new trends in their early-going, or where the ambience simply enhances one’s ability to create. It may sound unorthodox (that’s because it is!), but taking the team to Paris and visiting the many small, lesser known museums would be a good example of surrounding the team in a known “idea source” with provocative stimulus. Use the time there to not only brainstorm new ideas, but also to learn more from and share more with each other.

8. Create a mantra that the entire team lives by. Better yet, simply steal this one: **Resist the Usual!** Post this mantra in the brand positioning room and everywhere else the brand-building team meets or works. Really try to live by it - which means, of course, being fully aware of “the usual.” If the brand team knows all the promotion activities and communications and PR efforts of the competition (and examines them in their actual context, such as a current magazine or journal), then it will by definition implement something quite “contra-usual” from those activities. But the real test of this mantra’s effectiveness comes when, before approving any brand initiative, the team asks itself, “How does this initiative resist the usual?”

9. **Don’t do any of the foregoing things without also establishing an on-going brand-builder development program.** In other words, set up a disciplined curriculum for the continuing education of everyone on the team—so that the team is growing its skills at a rate that will enable the brand growth you seek. (By the way, an initial workshop followed by implementation reinforcement on Brand Positioning is a perfect one to start any personnel development curriculum with.)

Richard Czerniawski & Mike Maloney

Richard Czerniawski

.....
 430 Abbotsford Road
 Kenilworth, Illinois 60043
 tel 847.256.8820
 fax 847.256.8847

reply to Richard:
rdczerniawski@cs.com or
richardcz@bdn-intl.com

Mike Maloney

.....
 1506 West 13th Street, #17
 Austin, Texas 78703
 tel 512.236.0971
 fax 512.236.0972

reply to Mike:
mikewmaloney@cs.com or
mikemaloney@bdn-intl.com



© 2003 Brand Development Network (BDN) International. All rights reserved.