

## Mind the gap!

***Brand, marketing, communications, business development and selling are an unbroken continuum. A truly integrated approach will drive business success.***

Is it just me, or has a rather odd gap appeared in recent years between the various manifestations of marketing? In professional services and most of all in law firms, there appear to be isolated islands called (generally) brand, marketing, marketing communications, communications and business development.

And roughly in that order, there is an ascending level of perceived value. Business development being the most valued, because it's seen to be about real business. Brand having the least value, because it's seen to be intangible and fluffy.

I find this troubling, because, ever since my birth as a brand manager, I have worked across the entire spectrum. So I feel the need for the gaps to be closed. I feel the need for the value of each part of the mix to be clarified. And I feel the need for better connections across the board.

## Some clarity

Put simply....

**Brand** is a set of perceptions in the customer's mind. Marketing is about managing those perceptions, rather than letting them manage themselves, so that we create a perfect fit between the needs of our audience and the offerings of the firm.

**Marketing objectives** define exactly where we want our brand to be at the end of the next year or beyond.

**Marketing strategy** determines which products and services we will sell to which markets and how to create competitive advantage so that we achieve preferred brand status.

**Marketing plans** set out the actions we need to take across all brand drivers - products and services, behaviour and culture, physical environment and communications and identity (figure 1) - so that we achieve our marketing objectives and deliver the marketing strategy.

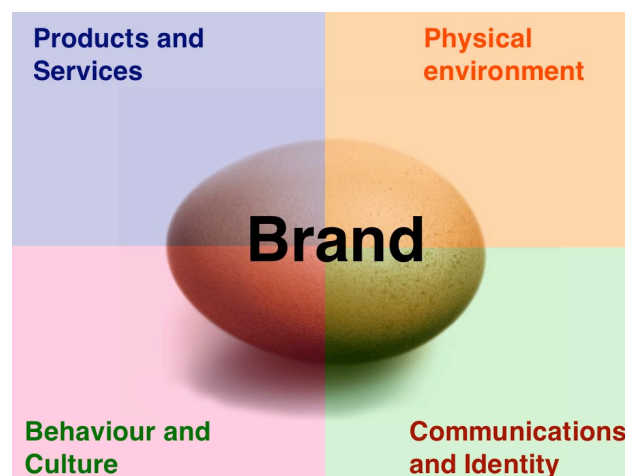


Figure 1

**Business development** is about bringing the marketing strategies and plans to bear on individual clients to build long-term relationships, win new and retain existing business.

**Selling** is the process of helping the buyer to buy.

There's nothing new in any of that. Although some might argue with the broad scope of marketing as described.

The real difficulty arises in aligning all of these elements. This is especially so when each is controlled by a separate department, even if there's a marketing overlord.

### **A seamless pyramid**

The answer lies, at least partly, in a rigorous top down and bottom up approach, in which objectives, strategies and plans are both shared and challenged across all the functions. The result should be a seamless pyramid from brand to sale, where each level supports the level above and builds on the level below (figure 2).

#### **Top down, bottom up approach**



**Figure 2**

All very well in theory. Not quite so easy in practice. How to make it happen? What might it look like?

### **Connecting the dots**

Let's take the example of a mythical law firm.

The desired **brand position** is corporate market leader among global clients.

The **marketing objectives** are firstly to retain the 30 existing international clients and acquire 5 new ones. This will put the firm into number 2 position. Secondly, to drive cross border business to 40% of the total.

The **marketing strategy** is to create competitive advantage through better delivery of complex cross border, cross discipline transactions. The most attractive sectors for this kind of transaction are pharma and consumer goods, which are existing sectors of strength for the firm.

**Marketing plans** include: development of an innovative pre-acquisition audit that will give the firm first mover advantage; launch of the definitive global M&A forum to be held in London, New York and Singapore; launch of a targeted thought leadership website in each sector

**Business development** plans include: the establishment of key client teams on the top 20 international pharma and consumer goods clients/targets; business development training for all key client team members; client feedback programme to provide intelligence to key client teams; senior partner client satisfaction reviews with all existing pharma and consumer goods clients; credentials presentations to all targets; invitations to existing and new clients to attend M&A forum, with follow up

**Sales** plans include: 20 new clients to be in the sales funnel by mid year, with 5 of those coming through to successful completion by year end.

You can begin to see how the owner of the business development plans, with targets to meet, might challenge the owner of the marketing plans to provide a more effective way of supporting his/her new client teams. The owner of the sales plans might challenge the business developer on the number and timing of credentials presentations needed to fill the sales funnel. And so on.

### **What gets in the way?**

It seems that the bigger the brand, the more roles are specialised and organisational structures are separated. Time pressures result in poor inter-departmental communications. Individuals build ownership of their fiefdoms and resist the imposition of others' ideas. Marketing leaders are too busy fighting their own battles to spend time integrating their team with others.

An integrated planning process can help. But it has to go beyond planning. It's one thing to have a neat set of rigorous plans at the start of the year and quite another to put them into effect throughout the year, respond to market changes, see off competitive threats, build on successes, deal with failed ideas etc.

That demands a much greater degree of collaboration and understanding of each others' positions. There's no substitute for finding ways of spending time together. Ideally, doing someone else's job for a while. Retailers are famous for getting all staff regularly to work on the shop floor. It works. We all have a partial view of the world until we stand in someone else's shoes.

Cross-departmental project teams, flexible, consulting style roles, hot desking, daily prayers meetings. Anything that gets people out of their own space and challenges them to see someone else's point of view.

### **The acid test**

All very well in theory, but what are the benefits in practice of this more integrated approach? When it comes to the crunch, when you're trying to make a sale, what difference does it really make?

Well, let's look at it from both the buyer and seller perspectives.

First, the buyer.

Strong brands should make the buyer's choice easier. Good marketing should create a perfect fit between the buyer's needs and the seller's offer. Good selling should make it easier for the buyer to buy.

So, if we've done the job from brand to sale in a properly integrated way, the buyer should be approaching the purchase decision in a very different frame of mind. They should be grateful for the time we have saved them in getting to this point. It was obvious from the start what the firm's offer was about and what it wasn't. So even if

the buyer took time to compare us with the competitors (highly likely), they did so in a more time efficient way.

They are able to approach the purchase with confidence, because of the time and effort we have put into understanding them and building a relationship of trust with them.

They can see a natural fit between what they need and what we can offer. So they don't have to waste time and effort on the basics. Instead, they can focus on making sure that their special needs (and every buyer's needs are special) are met in a tailored way. They can focus on whether the team chemistry is right. They can focus on how this team will be able to add more value than the competitors.

In short, for the buyer, this is an easier, more natural, less stressful, perhaps even enjoyable experience.

And the seller?

Well firstly there's no cold call involved. The partner approaches the sale with the confidence that there is an established relationship. They know that this is not about making a hard sell. The buyer has shown as much interest in us as we have in them. In this area, we are the brand of preference.

Confidence also comes from the fact that we are absolutely clear about what the firm stands for, what it's good at (and not) and what is the specific proposition to the client. We are confident of the multiple benefits we offer and are in no doubt about the value we deliver at the prices we charge.

As we help the buyer through the process of reaching a decision, we feel that we have time on our side. Time to listen. Time to ensure that all the buyer's bases are covered, all their needs addressed. Time to make the experience a relaxed and enjoyable one.

### **To sum up**

Strong brands are built on focus, coherence and consistency. This doesn't begin and end with the marketing department. It involves the entire firm. But marketing can do a lot to set the tone for the firm.

If the marketing teams, whatever their particular labels, can close the gaps between themselves, there's a greater chance that their outputs will be focused, coherent and consistent.

The results? A more integrated and effective marketing programme, from brand through to sale. Increased credibility with the partnership. Greater internal and external clarity. A more confident sales team. A stronger brand. An easier sale.

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