



Winning People Winning Branding

4 steps to winning over
decision-makers for
professional brand management.

4 steps to winning over decision-makers for brand management

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- ... **This white paper is for you** if you...
- ... are responsible for marketing, communications, branding or corporate identity within your company
- ... have realized that key decision-makers or stakeholders are not aware of the significance of branding for company success – either in general, or with reference to a particular branding project
- ... would like to make your company more successful by convincing decision-makers or stakeholders to deploy branding consistently

This is where we come in – over the following pages, we will recommend **4 steps** you can take to raise awareness among decision-makers and stakeholders of the importance of branding:

1 Defining your terms

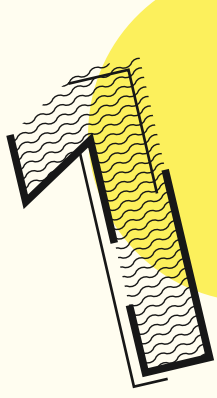
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Defining your terms



Defining your terms

In this section, we'll be looking at what you talk about when you talk about branding, and the language you use to do this. Both of these variables significantly influence how people perceive your proposal and yourself.

Branding is often only patchily understood outside marketing and communications departments – and this relative ignorance can sometimes be a dangerous thing. It is across such difficult terrain that you will have to negotiate a safe course.

The concept of “branding” is abstract and multivalent; there is no one exclusive definition. This fact frequently aggravates brand-related communications.

Your goal is to get all stakeholder groups that play a key role in branding within your company – especially at management level – **to back a common definition of the concept of “branding”;** you want everyone to be speaking the same language.

What you want to avoid is a definition of branding that reduces it to some superficial characteristic or feature – visual appearance, for example.

The definition of branding that you are advocating should instead...

- ... appropriately reflect the significance of the brand and thus be a potential source of genuine value for the company
- ... be crafted in such a way as to convince a range of stakeholders of the value of your proposal and expertise for the company

We propose the following definition:

A brand is the sum total of the preconceptions about the performance of your company in the heads of customers and the public.

Source: Arnd Zschiesche, Oliver Errichiello

This definition is still not enough on its own; you will need a **story** that properly communicates the important role branding plays in the success of the company. A story that you have on tap as soon as an opportunity to win over a stakeholder or decision-maker presents itself. The story for the definition we have suggested goes as follows:

A brand is created when a preconception – ideally, a positive one – about the performance of a company is formed. Here, “performance” is understood to mean anything relating to **what an observer of the brand may experience**, especially in respect of products.

The performance of a company may be experienced via marketing communications, website, sales channels, distribution methods, customer service, product packaging, physical locations such as stores or offices, or other touchpoints. It is also perceptible in the behavior of the company towards customers, staff, suppliers, the environment, neighbors and society at large.

Where there is neither a brand strategy nor rules for its application, anarchy will reign at the various touchpoints. The company has no coherent profile, becoming incomprehensible and unrecognizable to its customers – and thus playing no significant role in their lives. The job of brand management is to prevent this kind of scenario from occurring.

Brand management involves reinforcing positive preconceptions about a company’s performance and translating these into positioning to which customers can relate; it does this by creating brand experiences.

Strong brand experiences highlight the company’s original and best performances and interpret these in a timely and relevant way for target audiences.

Relevance is crucial in respect of what the company has to offer, i.e. products and services. But it is also essential to the positioning →

→ of the brand. To put it another way, it boils down to the question: what are your consumers really interested in and what credible role can your brand play here?

Relevant positioning will enable your company to enjoy long-term success in dynamic markets.

What is the difference between brand management and branding?
We propose the following definition of branding and its purpose:

Branding is all about establishing how a brand is expressed in terms of **optics, tonality, sound, odor and feel** – and ensuring that the rules relating to this are adhered to. It is a sub-discipline of brand management. The purpose of branding is to win the trust of your clientele and of the general public.

Branding is especially concerned with the trust engendered by **clarity** and **orientation** – by presenting a uniform face to the outside world. In short, branding ensures that your clients don't get confused. (Disorientation may arise if a company plays fast and loose with its visuals, for example, perhaps even rendering them unrecognizable.)

Conclusion


The definitions we have suggested here are powerful – they establish that brand management and branding are not aesthetic ends in themselves.

The crux of the matter is how customers weigh up which products and services they should invest their money in – and **how they trust your organization** to offer them something that is worth more to them than just saving their money.

We suggest promoting this mindset in your company.

Formulating **your** **arguments**





Formulating your arguments

As you are reading this white paper, we will assume that there is something in your company relating to branding or brand management that is still sub-optimal – or lacking entirely.

Substantive arguments can help you to set out clearly to decision-makers and stakeholders what action your proposal requires. But they do more than that.

Sooner or later, you will probably run up against poorly thought-out or **unsubstantiated opinions** on the subject of branding – and it is important that you are **prepared** for this and can respond swiftly with **solid arguments**.

The aim is to prevent the lack of objectivity of certain statements from silencing you – and ideally, you will manage to guide the discussion into objective territory from which you can then **argue** in the best interests of the company and **win people over**.

At this point, we would thus like to furnish you with a few **arguments** – some may chime with your situation now or be of use at a later date. They are based on a few common scenarios we elaborated.

Statement — “We should use different colors, fonts and imagery in different contexts – it’s much more appealing and varied. People always want to be offered something new.”

Argument — Repetition and consistency are essential in branding. If we don’t present a uniform appearance, our image will be distorted. Distortions prevent trust from growing within potential customers – and if our existing customers are unable to recognize us, that too will undermine their confidence in our company. The trust of our clients is one of our most important assets.

Statement — “Brand management is the preserve of big corporations. We’re too small to get involved in brand management.”

Argument — It is not an option for our company or product →

→ not to be a brand. Our customers and target demographics automatically construct an image of our performance from their experiences at every touchpoint – whatever is created in their heads is the brand. This is why it is important for us to shape this perception actively and holistically, so that our company's performance is recognized as relevant and appealing by customers and target audiences alike.

Statement — “Our customers come to us because we have good products. Period! They’re not interested in all that other stuff.”

Argument — The qualitative features and characteristics of products and services are becoming increasingly indistinguishable, and hence interchangeable. Moreover, product and innovation cycles are getting shorter. In such fluid circumstances, a strong brand is a crucial differentiator that we can sustain over the long term, if we cultivate and maintain it correctly.

Statement — “It’s fine to align our communications with the brand; but we have to decide business on a case-by case basis. Brand management would only complicate matters there.”

Argument — Strong brands are particularly clear, unique, attractive and internally coherent in the minds of their target audiences. To ensure that people’s subjective perception is shaped in this way, every aspect of the company should be aligned with the brand image you’re working towards – not just marketing, but product development, HR, sales, manufacturing, customer service, etc. as well. To achieve this, we need properly thought-out brand management that is planned and applied consistently over the long term.

Statement — “You rebrand, or refresh your brand, every couple of years – and that’s that.

Argument — We should move away from seeing the brand in the context of individual projects and understand it as an overarching management tool – as a source of inspiration, but also as a road-map. In addition to strategic considerations, we should shape and orchestrate its operational implementations at suitable touch-points. We should also embody a culture within the company that brings the brand alive to employees in their day-to-day work. Doing so creates genuine value in a range of areas.

Statement — “Senior management has more important things to do than get involved in branding; that’s something for the marketing department.”

Argument — Branding is unquestionably a boss’ business. Your strategic management should flow from company management, ideally from the CEO, and brand strategy is the translation of corporate strategy into experiences that impact the attitudes and behavior of target audiences. Operational and cultural implementation of the brand is the boss’ business as well – it should be constantly articulated and “lived”. This is why senior management need to demonstrate a clear commitment to brand management – and provide appropriate support for those beyond senior management who have been entrusted with cultivating the brand.

Statement — “Everyone has the right to offer input on branding decisions and to make their mark on the brand.”

Argument — A brand should not be subordinate to the personal taste of employees – on the contrary. A brand is a positive assertion based on corporate vision and strategy. If the brand is left to the whim of personal taste and opinion, it’s lost on the wind. Management of the brand is undertaken at the behest of the CEO and any →

→ brand-relevant alterations or variations must be decided by senior management.

Statement — “This new product really is something innovative, but our brand is a bit outdated. We therefore suggest presenting the product as if it were from a new brand and doesn’t at first glance look like it comes from us. That way, people will at least take a look at it.”

Argument — To our way of thinking, the goal is for all corporate activity to contribute to the perception of the brand among our target audiences. If we have the impression that our brand is a little stale, we should use the new product launch as an opportunity to inject the brand with new energy and credibility.

Conclusion

If you think these arguments are solid, we suggest you read through them a couple of times so you'll have them fresh in your mind in the appropriate situation. But don't forget the human side of communication – avoid pinning your conversation partner to the wall with your arguments!

The goal here is to take deliberate steps to counter the preconception of brand management as a waste of time and, where possible, **to turn sceptics into supporters.**



Finding your allies



Finding your allies

To achieve success with branding, you will need a **network of contacts** within the firm. Fire up your colleagues with enthusiasm, lobby for your interests and win supporters for brand management.

The larger, more diverse and heavyweight the group of people who fight your corner, the more you will find top management inclined to listen to your case, as:

- ... **broad-based support** demonstrates a **relevant** and **urgent** need within the company
- ... the social cost of refusing the request is higher
- ... undertakings that enjoy bottom-up support can be **implemented with less friction** and **involve less risk**

But a few things should be borne in mind, not least: it matters greatly that you find the **right** allies.

Absence of knowledge, ability, interest or authority are the classic sources of **in-house resistance** that may also stymie your endeavors.

To overcome such internal resistance, you will need **allies** who are enthused by your ideas can actively advocate these within the company to the appropriate stakeholders.

You will need such advocates in **4 promotional roles**:

I Technical advocates are in-house subject experts who will be as highly respected as possible. They will provide you with additional substantive arguments and will lend your proposals additional credibility through their status as technical specialists.

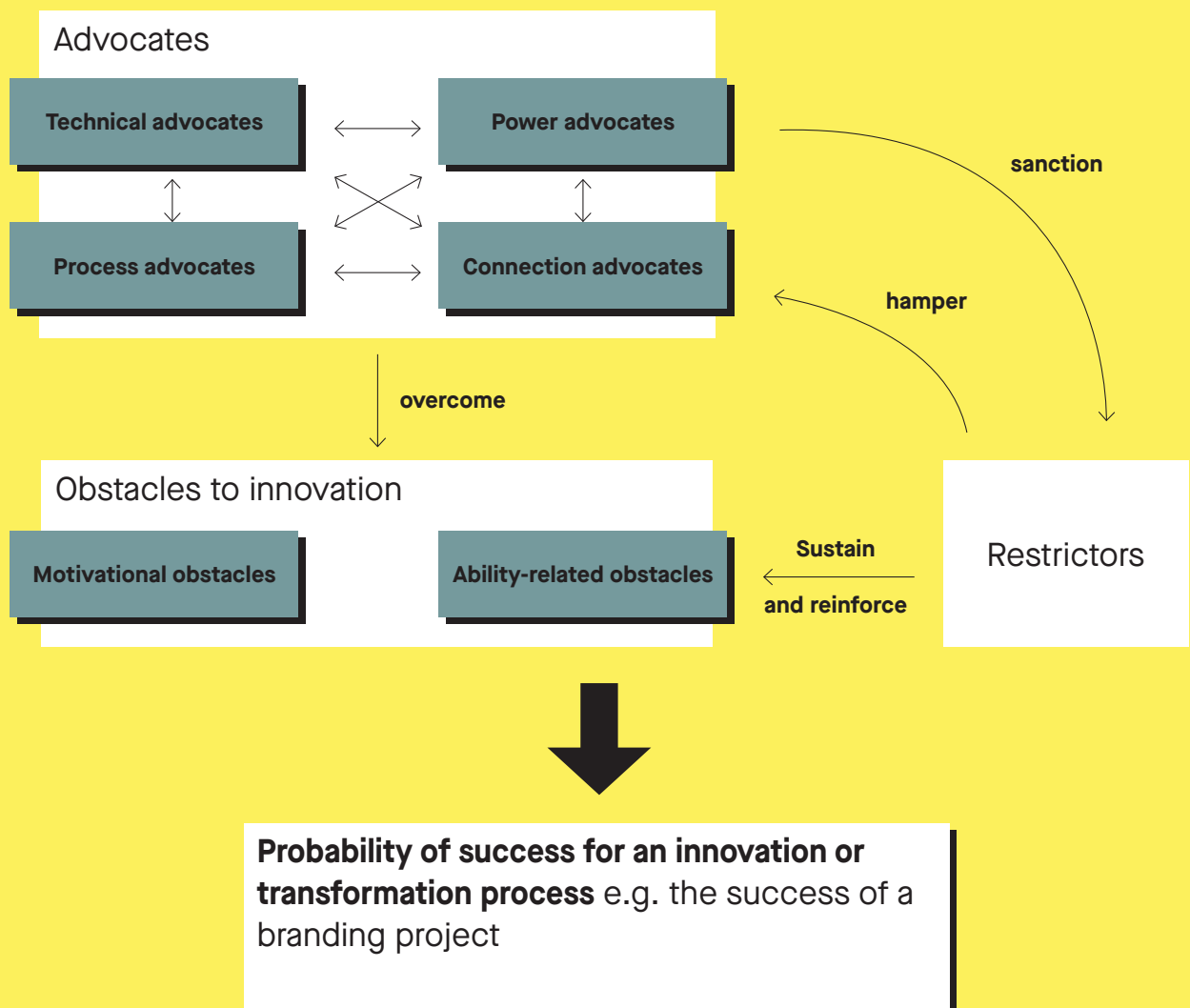
II Power advocates are decision-makers in the upper echelons of the corporate hierarchy. These individuals are able to push through your requests top-down thanks to their position and decision-making authority.

III Process advocates are organizational wizzes who are familiar with the firm's structures and procedures. They will help you to position your request within company processes such that it can be implemented in a streamlined, efficient and effective manner.

IV Network advocates are well-connected team players with strong social skills. They will use their lobbying abilities to help you get the right people on board at an early stage and for the long haul.

Use the advocacy model to fill these positions with your allies and make sure that you effectively **populate all 4 advocacy roles with people that are truly supportive of your cause** – one or more individuals may wear several hats at the same time here. And don't forget: you can take on an advocacy role yourself.

How the various players interact in an **innovation** or **transformation process**



Make sure you are in a position to convince potential allies of an advantageous risk/benefit ratio. Run through the technical, process-related and other challenges and opportunities facing your possible allies. Consider how your branding proposal can help the various stakeholders to achieve things that are truly important to them – whether these are of a functional, emotional or social nature.

You may discover that certain important stakeholders lie outside your network. To find an anchor for your proposal, you might like to think about stakeholder groups that are important for the department in question – job applicants for the HR department, for example, or major clients for key account managers.

Make slides showing simple **customer journeys** in which you demonstrate how these target demographics are faring with the company at each **touchpoint** and how things could be better – if the brand were deployed consistently.

If you are preparing such a **customer journey** for the HR department, for instance, work from the particular needs of the stakeholder group to consider how the brand can help to improve interaction with the firm at every company touchpoint – to the mutual benefit of the HR department and the firm as a whole.

Show the people you talk to new options, e.g. the possibility of being involved with future branding projects either actively or in an advisory capacity or of using the branding project as an opportunity to define and refine their own field of expertise.

If you find potential allies are receptive to your suggestions, you can talk about concrete aims and activities; this will help you position the topic successfully.

Customer journey using the example of a job applicant

Phases

1. Association

2. Information

3. Application

Rational needs

- Being aware of employer
- Being aware of employer's characteristics
- Being aware of role descriptions
- Knowing the application process
- Knowing contacts within the company
- Understanding job description
- Information about application status

Emotional needs

- Confidence that there are appealing employers on the market
- Simple acquisition of information
- Finding relevant information
- Gaining an insight into culture (getting a "sense" of employees)
- Simple, speedy submission of application documents
- HR gets in touch quickly
- Friendly contact with HR

Value chain

- Market presence
- Information transfer
- Job advertisement
- Submission of application

Touchpoints

- Employer's advertising (print/online)
- University sponsoring
- Press/PR work
- Online profile (Twitter/blog)
- Jobs & careers websites
- Online job portals
- Job fairs; university recruiting
- Workshops/presentations
- Blog
- "Word of mouth" program
- Job adverts
- Recruiting Tool
- Personal contact with HR services or line manager
- Confirmation of receipt of application
- Provisional update in the event of a longer recruitment process

Phases

4. Decision

5. Introduction

6. Retention

Rational needs

- Finding out decision
- In discussion: knowing managers, job parameters and culture
- If rejected: knowing reason for rejection
- If accepted: knowing next step
- Knowing workplace and work environment
- Being aware of duties and responsibilities
- Knowing the company, culture and strategy (induction program)
- Putting skills to work
- Development opportunities
- Independence
- Further training
- Staying informed

Emotional needs

- Feeling that you are being taken seriously
- Respectful dealings
- Quick decision-making
- Building sympathy
- Reliable decision-making
- Being made to feel welcome
- Building up network
- Sense of being in good hands
- Sense of belonging
- Feeling at ease
- Support from team & management
- Meaningfulness of work

Value chain

- Recruitment
- Integration phase
- Staff loyalty

Touchpoints

- Job interviews
- Rejection letters (no discussion)
- Telephone contact (with discussion)
- Assessment center
- General terms and conditions for employment fact sheet
- Code of conduct towards applicant
- Welcome from team/line manager
- Intranet induction
- Introductory conversation with HR
- Staff magazine
- Intranet
- Staff survey
- Staff parties/informational events
- Development programs

Conclusion

Clearly, allies play a key role in securing a mandate to build up and maintain brand management in your company.

Many of your colleagues may be tempted to see **brand management** as a discipline that doesn't need to be taken seriously or that can be performed by just anyone, and this is why strong allies are essential for success over the long term.

The better your personal network within the company, the easier it will be to obtain a mandate to manage the brand and to guide operational brand management in day-to-day business, despite the many (frequently diverging) interests that may stand in its way.

An abstract graphic featuring a large, irregular white shape with a thick black outline, filled with horizontal wavy lines. This shape is set against a yellow background that also contains a smaller, similar white shape with wavy lines. The overall composition is dynamic and modern.

Securing a mandate



Securing a mandate

So, you've found the right allies, you've got your stakeholders on the same page with a uniform understanding of branding and you have all your ducks in a row with your persuasive arguments? It's now time to **draft a decision paper ahead of some CEO or C-level decision-making.**

But first, a couple of basic points: we are assuming that the decision-makers won't have too much time to waste and that you have a sense of what the **right length for a presentation** will be.

Think about the **context** – the decision-makers' interests, motives, attitudes and needs. Anticipate how your proposal will be received by each party and be prepared for the discussion to veer off in an unanticipated direction.

We'd like to give you a few **suggestions to inspire you** as you embark on drafting your decision paper. Use the following elements to construct a coherent story:

The anchor

Make sure your proposal is fully **embedded in the company's most pressing strategic priorities** and related **KPIs**. What is management hoping to achieve over the next year or two? Where can improvements be made? How do you define the brand and why will brand management be able to help to achieve these goals?

The pay-off

This is all about the **potential** that can be unlocked by your brand management proposal. Make a realistic promise of the benefits anticipated, based on KPIs. But that is not all that the pay-off has to offer – the **decision-makers** will be able to **work up important aspects of brand strategy themselves** in guided workshops, so they can then interpret what's been going on in their particular field through the lens of the brand. You should mention this.

The big picture

Site your proposal within the context of **credible sources**, ideally with verifiable figures, **examples of best practice** and a **benchmark** with your competitors. Use examples that are easy to understand, draw logical conclusions and make sure that there is a coherent progression to your argument.

The no-brainer

Show the way forward to a **strategy** that builds on the findings of the last section. Close your presentation with a **list of the next steps**, which you wish to be authorized – these should be as compelling, indisputable and practicable as possible.

4

Conclusion

Your proposal will live or die with your ability to demonstrate clearly to decision-makers where and how the brand can bring the company closer to achieving its objectives – but you must also make it crystal clear that **branding must be part of an official mandate and requires long-term backing from senior management.**

Emphasize that the decision-makers would themselves be part of the process to translate key aspects of corporate strategy into any branding strategy. Drawing comparisons with your competitors can help to highlight the need for action.

Last but not least

In this white paper, we have looked at how important **a shared understanding** of branding is for **brand management**. It will enable you to free discussion from subjective, sweeping judgements and clearly illustrate the significance of discipline for company success.

Having a set of **arguments** in your back pocket to counter possible objections will help you to guide unanticipated discussion down to a factual level from which you can argue convincingly in the best interests of the company.

Strong allies are essential to successful brand management. We have suggested a few approaches you might like to use to show potential supporters the value of brand management – not just for the company as a whole, but also for their particular area of responsibility.

In our conclusion, we have explored how a **decision paper** can be formulated to make it easy for decision-makers to support your brand management proposal.

We hope this white paper will help and encourage you in your plans and projects. Please feel free to share your thoughts and suggestions in an e-mail to: **feedback@process-group.com**