

Living the Brand

A S BRAND IS ideally evident in everything from strategy to decisions about what a company offers and how it deals with customers, Dave Allen defines Brand AlignmentSM as a methodology for articulating this critical asset and bringing it to life throughout the corporation. The process moves from Brand Discovery to Brand Promise to Brand Expression to Brand Action, and in discussing these steps Allen suggests many ways brand can be developed into a powerful and pervasive design reality.

By Dave Allen

Arguably, one of the most straightforward definitions of brand can be expressed as an equation: Reputation = brand = behavior. An organization's behaviors are manifested through people, products, and services; communications; and environment (both in the electronic economy and in the physical experience). These form the channels that shape an organization's reputation, and as such they determine the brand. And it is the organization's cumulative behaviors, expressed through strategies, actions, and communications that will build the brand in the long term.

If brand building was once seen largely as an externally focused activity, relying heavily on the communication of products and services for a mainly external audience, there is now increasing recognition—at the board level—that it is a responsibility to be shared by everyone in an organization. As Jim Taylor, formerly president of Gateway 2000,



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says, "Building a brand is about consistency. Every company, once it assumes a brand identity, has to live with the moral consequences of that identity. A brand is a promise, and you have to keep promises. There is no difference between what we sell and who we are."

Branding Is Changing

Branding has come a long way from the days when it referred only to a particular product or service; the world of brand management is in the midst of a major sea change. Essentially, the demarcation lines between product branding and corporate branding have blurred. From the perspective of employees, investors, and other stakeholders, as well as that of consumers, there is little difference between the brand and the reputation of a company and its products. An employee may also be a consumer and an investor and, given this, it won't work for a company to

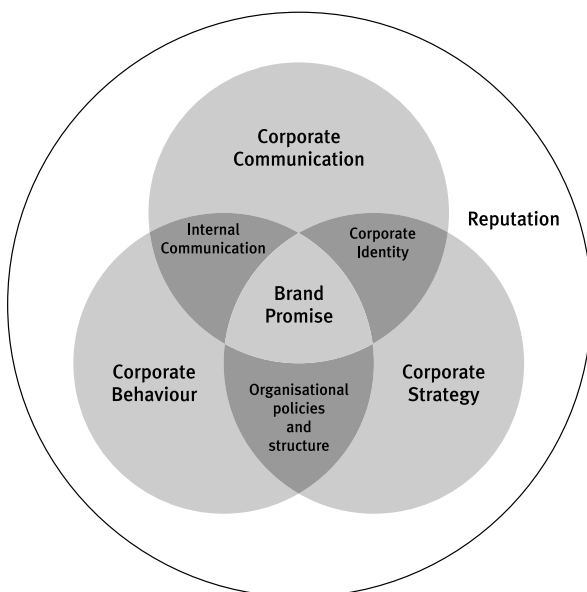
communicate one idea of its brand to the outside world and another internally.

In an increasingly transparent world, in which companies are closely scrutinized for their corporate actions, policies and ethical conduct can have a direct impact on how consumers judge their brands. As Nike learned from the public response to its employment policies and Coca-Cola from the adverse opinion resulting from its actions to recall products in Belgium, what a company and its brand stands for is of supreme importance. Now the most successful companies recognize that their brands are created and delivered by what they do and not just by what they say.

To understand this better, Enterprise IG examined more than 30 great corporate brands to try to identify and isolate the reputation-building strategies they seemed to have in common. We found that while these brands have lots of differences, they do share four attributes.

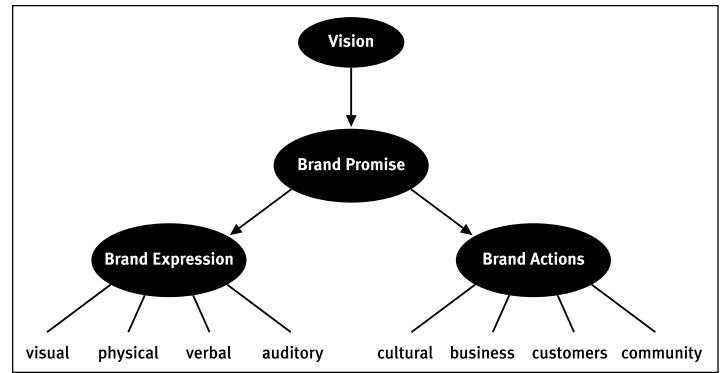
- The brand promise (figures 1 and 2). A world-class corporate brand has a clear understanding of its purpose—what it stands for—which remains fixed over time. Whether that purpose is to create software that empowers and enriches people’s lives, in the case of Microsoft, or to offer affordable, good food for the family, as for McDonald’s, their core purposes underpin how they express and

Figure 1



The brand promise sits at the center of the brand, driving all of a company’s communications and business actions.

Figure 2



The brand promise becomes the basis for the way in which the brand is expressed, from corporate identity to environment to communications. It also provides a means for measuring the success of the organization’s brand actions.


deliver their brands. World-class companies keep this purpose in mind even as they evolve and make improvements; in this way they stay at the forefront in responding to customer needs.

- Second, great-brand companies are clear about how they want the outside world to see them. They manage their brand attributes and shape their corporate personalities to support their core ideas. Brand attributes are so well ingrained in these organizations that they have become folklore. For IBM and Kodak, for example, the central idea of the company’s brand—its values and ambition—has been internalized to such a degree that employees in different areas of the organization understand what behavior and action is needed to deliver the brand promise. They are able to express what their companies stand for in everyday language and can validate it without being told.
- A great corporate brand has a strong brand theme—BMW’s “ultimate driving machine,” for example—which underpins everything it does and all that it delivers to the marketplace.
- Great corporate brands have strong and well-managed visual identities.

Brand Alignment: A Process for Defining and Delivering the Promise

In the case of the companies mentioned earlier, the brand acts as a central organizing thought across the whole of the firm, providing a focus for decisions and actions. But what if there isn’t an alignment of products and services and the brand idea—if policies and responsibilities and brand promise are

Figure 3

World-class brands – how the best do it					
What they stand for / core purpose	Brand attributes	Brand theme	How they live their brand		Visual identity
			Internally	Externally	
The spirit of refreshment. Only the original will do. Bringing people together.	Refreshing Exciting Sociable Red	“Always Coca-Cola”	Brand induction for all new employees. Statements of commitment to distributors.	Universal awareness and availability. Strong defence of trademark. Sponsorship only of ‘exciting’ ventures. Adverts always show people socialising.	

An example from Enterprise IG’s proprietary database of world-class brands.

not interrelated? The people within the company will face a struggle as they try to live up to the promise.

To help companies create a compelling business proposition by connecting their actions to their promise, Enterprise IG developed a management tool we call Brand Alignment. Brand Alignment, as depicted in figure 4, is a four-stage process, consisting of brand discovery, brand promise, brand expression, and brand action. These are the core building blocks for companies like the ones we’ve mentioned above, whose every action, from marketing communications to interaction with suppliers to the terms and conditions of employment, combine to express the brand.

BRAND DISCOVERY

The discovery stage is critical, because it establishes the criteria against which all actions and behaviors are measured—a means

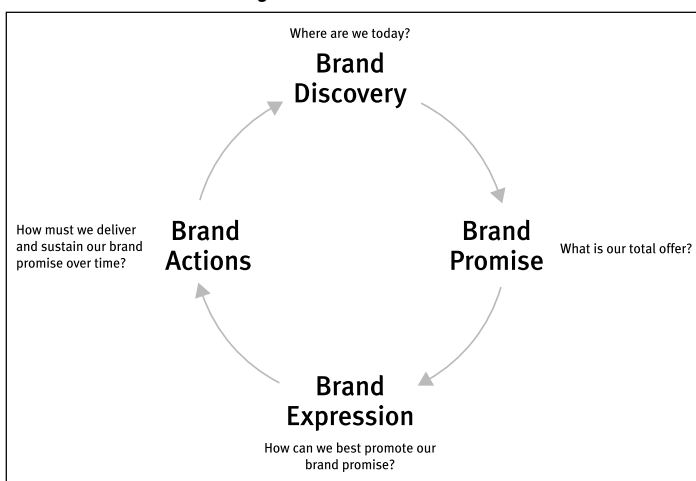
of determining the organization’s real strengths and weaknesses. Perceptions are collected by the consultant through research and interviews. The external interviews are carried out by an independent third party. The aim is to arrive at a central idea that provides the focus for the organization’s strategy, values, and personality.

Take, for example, Arthur Andersen, one of our clients. They were already well aware of the importance of their people in the brand-building process; all 77,000 of their employees around the world have to understand the firm’s purpose and be motivated to deliver it through their individual roles. As Helen Shaw, Arthur Andersen’s global human resources director, a key player in the brand alignment program, says, “The starting point of your brand is your people. The manifestation of your brand is through people. And it’s pointless getting excited about your external messages if it falls apart with your people.” Enterprise IG collaborated with Arthur Andersen on the development of its global brand positioning, setting up a brand council and working with firm-wide marketing and a dedicated working group. The program of desk research, internal and external interviews, and analysis, one part of the project, took about six months.

BRAND PROMISE

The distillation and analysis of the information from the discovery process results in a brand promise that is credible, inspiring and, above all, meaningful for the people inside the company, who will have to make it a reality. The goal is a differentiated positioning that can be embraced internally and translated visually, verbally, and behaviorally.

Figure 4



Enterprise IG’s Brand Alignment construct helps organizations to fill in the missing link between brand promise and real actions.

BRAND EXPRESSION

The traditional visual means of expression—the look, the logo, the colors—are all important in establishing a brand in the audience’s mind, but verbal, environmental (both physical and virtual), and auditory elements are increasingly important in establishing a unique brand personality. In service brands such as banks, the way in which the customer is treated and the type of relationship that is established at every point of contact, from letter to phone call, says more about the organization and makes a more lasting impression than any advertising campaign.

BRAND ACTION

This fourth step of the Brand Alignment process involves getting people to “live” the brand. Getting to this point isn’t easy. It requires gaining the understanding and support of all employees, and ultimately is about focusing the business around the brand promise. The degree to which a company aligns itself in this way depends upon factors such as the stage of the business’s life cycle and the level of commitment from senior management to providing people with the right skills and resources to deliver against the brand promise.

Your Brand Is Your People

When British Petroleum embarked on a five-year brand program in the early 1990s, it faced a significant challenge in internalizing its brand promise. As Lee Edwards, vice president of brands, asked, “How do you create 60,000 ambassadors for the brand?” BP already had in place an extremely successful retail visual identity, which was the result of a marketing-led modernization program to update the company’s logo, retail-station design, and visual identity guidelines around the world. But this was only part of the solution for BP, which wanted to break out of the oil industry mold and move the brand toward a future in which there would be less dependence on traditional sources of fuel. Enterprise IG worked with BP on the first two phases of Brand Alignment—brand discovery and brand promise.


Believing that the definition of the brand should be driven from within, BP began the program with a broad cross-section of the company’s 350 most senior managers, who were canvassed on what they personally

would like BP to stand for and what would need to happen to make a brand promise work within BP. Out of this process came a brand hypothesis—that BP’s employees are the most powerful source of brand identity, and that BP’s brand positioning would emphasize BP’s contribution to society by meeting the world’s need for energy and materials without damaging the environment. Particularly important, management who were involved came away with a desire to communicate the brand idea of BP to all their people in a way that would help inspire and motivate their behavior and performance within the company to deliver on the brand promise. This goal should be readily understood and identified by all employees so that they could begin to “live” the brand. In addition, the interviews made it clear that BP’s suppliers needed to be brought into the process if the company were to deliver on its brand promise.

The primary means for taking this brand idea into the organization was through an internal program the aim of which was to communicate BP’s commitment to acting in a successful, innovative, and constructive way. This program provided the framework for policies and for the expectations of employees, suppliers, and everyone else who comes into contact with BP.

For a company’s brand promise to have true credibility, the leadership needs to stand 100 percent behind the brand and to support its promise with bold actions. Sir John Brown, CEO of BP, defined the link between policies and the BP brand in his introduction to the document “What We Stand For,” which went to all of BP’s 56,000 employees. “Our policies, and our commitment to deliver them,” he wrote, “are the foundations on which the BP brand is built. They will continue to be a major force in shaping BP. They will be the standards by which we judge ourselves, and the standards

Figure 5

Corporate Visual Identity	What We Stand For	Brand Attributes
	<p>Leadership</p> <p>Making a distinctive contribution... responsibility</p>	<p>Successful Innovative Constructive Alive</p>

by which others judge us.”

“Living the brand” was a new idea for many of BP’s employees. Lee Edwards, BP’s vice president for brands, recalls that when BP started talking about the importance of “brand actions” to personnel in the exploration division, for example, “We were concerned that their immediate reaction would be, ‘That doesn’t apply to me.’” However, “they were among the keenest ambassadors of all when we put it in terms of building the company’s reputation through, for example, working relationships with governments and partners of unique quality and depth.”

At BP, integrating the brand into the business and making it a focal point is recognized as an ongoing process, not a quick fix. BP’s commitment to take a stand on sensitive issues in environmental protection has provided the basis for a range of initiatives, from introducing solar energy into petrol stations to supporting scientific research in areas such as climate change. The company also plans to invest in training and to offer support to community projects around the world.

Translating the Brand Promise into Action

THOMAS COOK

When a company is relaunching itself, brand actions are critical in order to signal a break from the past. Take, for example, Thomas Cook, the UK tour operator, which unveiled its new brand in the autumn of 1999, after acquiring three other tour operators. Producing tangible features to support the brand promise, and developing ways to differentiate itself from competitors, were as important as a new name and identity.

This was a tremendous opportunity for Thomas Cook to establish a brand that could challenge convention in this market. The holiday travel industry had changed little in terms of design and delivery over the previous 10 years. Four main groups controlled 80 percent of the market, but there was little differentiation. The travel industry was seen as promising more than it could deliver to its customers, and customer dissatisfaction was high. Studies showed that the majority of British travelers had never used the same tour operator for two consecutive years.

Thomas Cook aimed to become the leading consumer-led, vertically integrated leisure travel company in Britain, serving

Figure 6



JMC’s brand aims to communicate simplicity, honesty, and delivery, and this is expressed here. The expression of the brand, from brochures to airline livery, is clear and straightforward and is distinctive from the standard in this market. Simple layouts and images of “real holiday moments” replace the traditional clichés of buckets and spades in these two brochures.

package-holiday travelers under one brand, from ticket counter to destination. To differentiate itself from its competitors, the company’s first move was to bring together all three tour operators and its charter airlines under a new brand, JMC, and a new visual identity. But even a distinctive and memorable visual identity won’t, in and of itself, build a brand or set a company apart from the competition in the long term.

The company settled on the proposition that the most important thing a travel company could do to be successful was to focus on exemplary service to the customer. This brand promise arose from a 12-month market research review, involving consumers who tested package holidays, focus groups that sought the views of holiday-makers, competitor analysis, and feedback from employees. Enterprise IG worked with Thomas Cook to identify that what frustrated customers wanted was a “delivery brand.” The idea of getting the basics of foreign travel right and not overpromising then became the brand hypothesis. To support that core proposition, JMC positioned itself as *the first holiday company to approach holidays from the customer’s perspective*. On this principle, JMC is reexamining everything about the package-holiday experience, with a focus on making holidays straightforward and easy. To come up with some ideas, the company went to its employees, involving people from each of the

internal operations groups—overseas travel, health and safety, airlines, agency relations, customer service, and product development—in brainstorming sessions in which they looked at every stage of the customer journey and then identified ideas to lessen the stress points for a customer. Enterprise IG was the facilitator in asking people in these groups to rank their ideas on the basis of ease of implementation, cost, and differentiation. The brainstormers came up with all sorts of inspirations—24-hour access to travel representatives, survival kits for travelers, free pre-bookable seats (making it possible for families to sit together) and late check-out from resort hotels when customer flights were leaving in the evening. Staff also recommended that the company sponsor an ongoing consumer panel to generate in-depth exploration of further improvements JMC might make to accommodate customers.

The company has emphasized its commitment to fundamentally changing the way package holidays are developed and experienced. Enterprise IG is working with JMC on its brand-action process, which began with looking at how JMC could change the way it does business. The company concentrated first on making changes that could be implemented easily, at low cost, and within a year. Longer-range plans are meant to explore more-revolutionary concepts. To that end, Enterprise IG has brought together small groups from across different functions of the business to participate in inventive thinking meant to develop ideas that would buck the traditions of the travel-agency

sector. (At one point, Enterprise IG collected more than 150 suggestions in one day!) The group leadership gathered up all the concepts and made them available to participants in catalog form, asked participants to choose their favorites, and took the top 15 to consumer research.

While JMC is still very new, the changes have already had a significant impact on staff recruitment. Job applications for company representatives overseas have risen from the usual average of 200 to 300 per season to 6,000. Many people who heard the JMC story either wanted to leave their current companies or join JMC from another industry.

Brand as the Central Organizing Thought

The benefits of aligning actions around the brand promise are tremendous. A powerful core idea of what the company stands for can provide a focus for every thought, action, and relationship made in the company's name. It also can engender pride and passion in employees. For consumers, even a bold new proposition will gain credibility if the organization is seen to be making regular and consistent business decisions that support that positioning.

A brand proposition also provides a focus for organizational policy and operational decisions about quality standards. Employees and suppliers will be asked to measure themselves in a different way, asked to deliver a performance that can—and will—be judged according to how well the brand promise is delivered. ♦ *(Reprint #00111ALL35)*