



Building Brand Culture

Part of a series of Best Practices from the Liquid Brand Summit 2011

This article captures the findings from a session about Brand Culture facilitated by Robert Richman from Zappos Insights at the Liquid Brand Summit 2011. The Brand Summit brought together more than 100 professionals to discuss the latest ideas about branding and marketing. More articles will follow.

TOPIC:

Building Brand Culture.

Today's leading brands large and small have one thing in common: they have a strong culture. Growing companies often ask themselves: how can we grow and sustain the culture that makes us successful? Amazon recently purchased Zappos.com. Why? One key reason: because of their culture and potential to innovate the customer experience on the web and "WOW" them. What are the ingredients for the kind of brand culture that will fuel your company's sales, create customer loyalty and attract the right people to work with? Here are some of the findings from the discussion facilitated by Robert Richman on this topic.

TOP BEST PRACTICE:

People are your greatest asset.

When it comes to creating culture, people are your greatest asset. Companies exist in a world today where everyone — employees, customers and partners — talks about who and what they are, all the time. That's why people and what they think and feel matter now more than ever before. The look of a company's advertising, design of the web site, coolness of its mobile apps are all important, but not as important as the voice and the actions of its people. Building a strong brand culture, then, starts with the people. The culture isn't "owned" by the marketing team, it's owned by the entire company — from the CEO to the customer service rep and everyone in between. And companies that nurture a distinct brand culture in the workplace will become a distinctive brand in the marketplace. Focus on developing your people and relationships and everything else will follow.

OTHER FINDINGS:

Marry marketing and HR.

Because people are the starting point, the connection between the leadership in marketing and the leadership in HR is pivotal to brand culture success. The two have to work in concert to ensure the entire company is in alignment and pulling in the same direction.

Hire to your culture.

Hire people to your culture rather than trying to fit your culture to an individual. Even if you have to pass up a rock star sales person who could affect the bottom line, it's more important in the long run to protect the integrity of the brand culture by making sure the people who come on board are ones who truly fit in.

Teach them and they will lead.

If people are to propagate brand culture, they have to first understand the vision, history, philosophy and values of the company. To do this, some brands today are implementing new-hire training programs that are as long as four-weeks. Even then, the training doesn't stop at the hiring door. An ongoing program that keeps people aligned and focused on the brand's values is crucial to sustaining culture in the long term.

Alignment trumps values.

The core values that speak to what a company is are meaningless unless they're put into practice and everyone is on the same page. Unfortunately, most companies post their values on a plaque that hangs forgotten in the hall. What good is that? If management doesn't commit to the values and they aren't resonating with employees, they might as well be thrown away. Culture grows when companies find ways to bring life to their core values in every aspect of what they do. What's most important, though, is the alignment of those values throughout the company, from the CEO through the ranks. Strong culture comes about when there is a through-line, a common understanding and drive that runs through all departments.

Go forth and co-create.

Companies that have strong culture, build it from the ground up. When people co-create the brand culture, they have a stake in it. The culture becomes more authentic. sticky.

Embrace frustration.

When it comes to building brand culture, frustration is powerful. Why? Because frustration shows that someone — an employee, customer or partner — sees the potential for what's possible but they're feeling dissatisfaction because the company isn't achieving it. Companies that embrace frustration can use it to gauge how aligned their teams really are and then take action to bring the focus back to the brand culture.

VIDEO:**An interview with Robert Richman.**

Immediately after the summit, we had an opportunity to sit with Robert Richman and ask him a few more questions on the topic of Brand Culture. Here's what he had to say:

An interview with Robert Richman: Building brand culture.

Watch now.



About Robert Richman.

Robert Richman lives in Las Vegas, where he works for Zappos Insights, an off-shoot of Zappos.com that was started by CEO Tony Hsieh to show other companies how to create a workplace people love and a service customers rave about. Robert began his career in 1996 creating sites for U.S. Senators and co-founding the web strategy company Articulated Impact. He co-wrote the business plan for a new online venture from the Tony Robbins companies and has developed digital media strategies for The Hollywood Reporter, Billboard Magazine, and The National Leadership Institute. When Tony met Rob, he asked him to re-launch the Zappos Insights program - then a small web site with a staff of one. Rob has grown the program to a 12-person company, offering a range of experiences and services to educate companies about culture and to give insight into "what" and "how" Zappos.com has built such an amazing culture and brand.