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CURRENT ISSUE TOP OF MIND

March 26, 2007

Hey marketer, give it up!

By Ted Matthews

TED MATTHEWS on why your brand is too important to be handled solely by the marketing department

"I'm here to take away your responsibility for the brand."

That's what I say to marketing managers inquiring about my presence at an industry event. Then I wait for their heads to snap back.

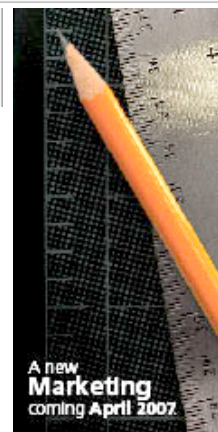
I go on to explain that a brand is not the logo. It's not the website. And it's sure not the advertising you're blowing all your money on. A brand is what people think of you.

Because a brand is what people think of you, every touchpoint matters. Every time your brand comes in contact with your employees, customers and all the other stakeholders out there, they judge you. If you're a marketer, this means that all your hard work and all the money you spend on advertising and promotion is pointless if your entire organization isn't out there every day doing what you say it will.

When every touchpoint matters, the brand is way too big and important to be the responsibility of the marketing department alone. It's got to be owned by the CEO, the only person who can make it everyone's responsibility. Thus the CEO must become the CBO-the chief brand officer. The CBO's role is to tell everyone in the organization how their specific job affects what stakeholders think of the brand-because the brand lives and dies with the behaviour of every single employee.

The talented marketing managers I talk to feel ineffective and frustrated. Without the permission of the CEO, trying to get everyone in their organization to fulfill the brand promise is next to impossible. They can walk down to the loading dock to chat with the transport manager about painting the trucks in brand colours-because trucks are a fantastically effective way of getting out the brand message-but the transport guy will just gripe about how he'll have to wash the trucks and paint them when it's time to sell them. He doesn't "get it" because the CEO hasn't explained to him how important his job is in the context of the brand.

When I talk about CBO leadership, the talented marketers quickly see the positive implications: "You mean you're going to get me permission from my CEO to permeate brand thinking into every nook and cranny of this company-as opposed to just being the logo cop and paid braggart?" In contrast, the average or simply traditional marketers don't want to hear about it. They're happy little clams making advertising-so what if what their



ad's promise doesn't get delivered at the front end?

Consider Nissan. I think the kaizen-like premise of their "Shift" campaign is brilliant: "Everything we touch, we shift. And everything we shift, we make better." Set against this, I was intrigued that Nissan Canada Finance didn't ask a friend to renew his Infiniti lease until four weeks before it expired. Naturally he'd al--ready made other plans with a competitor-Lexus.

Yet he'd very recently taken his Infiniti in for service at the dealership. Why didn't the service guys-who knew bloody well that the lease was expiring-walk him into the showroom and get him talking to a salesperson? "Everything we shift, we make better," right?

Well, not entirely. "Shift" was no doubt created by the smart folks at Nissan marketing, but the campaign hasn't been effectively communicated to employees beyond their four walls. I had an associate phone some Nissan people to see if they understood what "Shift" meant-if they were able to articulate the brand promise and crucially, deliver it.

They weren't. The receptionist at a local dealership answered that "Shift" meant "Shifting gears-I believe it's just like standard and automatic gears." A salesman at the same location advised "We're not running that ad anymore. But 'Shift' means getting into gear with Avenue Nissan." A call to the "customer satisfaction" number posted at nissan.ca was another wrong number. Literally: "To be honest sir, I'd be guessing to answer that for you. This is Nissan Canada Finance. Nissan Canada Inc. can answer that for you."

Nissan has great products. And great ideas. The crucial missing piece is CBO-inspired leadership.

To all the talented marketing managers out there: This is the kind of stuff that makes you insane. You just don't have the leverage to drive on-brand behaviour throughout your organization. Only the CEO has the weight to do that. Convince him or her to accept the responsibility for doing so. Because you'll only get the help you need when your CEO becomes a full-fledged CBO.

That's when your job will get truly exciting. Instead of butting heads on the loading dock, just imagine transport-or finance, or purchasing-coming to you and asking "how can we help live the brand?"

TED MATTHEWS is brand coach and managing partner of Instinct Brand Equity Coaches. He's also the author of the upcoming book *BRAND: It Ain't the Logo (It's What People Think Of You)*

