



Best Practices Report 2011



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Best Practices Report 2011

The Liquid Brand Summit 2011 took place on March 1 at the Four Seasons Hotel in Palo Alto. Organized by Liquid Agency, the Brand Summit is an opportunity to discuss trends in brand marketing with the goal of identifying some of the best practices in use today.

This year's Summit was by far our most successful yet, bringing together more than 120 truly outstanding folks — brand marketers, CEOs and thought leaders — who showed up ready to share in an open dialogue and exchange of ideas.

The theme, transformation, resonated with participants who joined in ten separate table discussions on topics as diverse as building brand advocacy and culture, the new frontier of social media, design innovation, the art of telling your brand story and more.

This document provides highlights of the findings from the day, with an overview of the best practices identified by the session leaders after the discussions.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,



Scott Gardner
CEO / President
Liquid Agency



Alfredo Muccino
Chief Creative Officer
Liquid Agency

Transformation: Revolution or Evolution? By Marty Neumeier.

The theme of this year's Liquid Brand Summit was transformation. But transformation of what? Of marketing? Of management? Of business? Of politics? Of society? Of culture? What exactly is transforming, and what can we do about it?

Well, it's pretty easy to see that everything — and I mean EVERYTHING — is changing faster than we ever thought possible as we move from smokestacks and oil to information and electrons. Is this revolution or evolution? Does it matter?

The revolution-evolution question is a false dichotomy. Maybe what we're seeing is a kind of glacial revolution, slowly carving out a new paradigm as it alters every belief in its path. Or maybe it's evolution on steroids, like a Barry Bonds home run that accelerates as it disappears into the deepening sky. Or maybe it's something else — neither revolution or evolution — that we just haven't been able to get our arms around.

One thing is for sure: Business as usual is no longer working. Companies now serve at the pleasure of customers. Customers love to buy, but hate to be sold. Advertising is a victim of its own clutter, while products are obsolete before they're launched. Marketing is in the hands of bloggers, tweeters, and Facebook friends.

It's transformation. It's here. And the opportunities for both success and failure have never been so ripe.

Sincerely,



Marty Neumeier

Director of Transformation
Liquid Agency



A NOTE FROM CREATIVE STRATEGIES

Trend Insights: Introduction. By Ben Bajarin.

In the information age business' come and go, industries under go change and strategies are adapted at the speed of light. Technology advancements and innovation bring as many new challenges as opportunities. We're seeing this now, as companies struggle to navigate their way through new platforms, applications and entirely new ways of interacting with their customers. Where to start? Where to end? We're becoming all digital, all the time as newer, better, faster technological advancements offer more ways to work, play, learn and communicate. Marketers may feel like their waking up with a bad digital hangover, moaning for another bottle of aspirin and wondering, "How are we going to manage it all?"

The thread that runs through all of this remains relatively simple, though: Understanding your customer is central to understanding how and where to best communicate with them — and your customers aren't all the same. Too often I see companies make the mistake of choosing the wrong strategy for messaging and the wrong method of communicating value to their different audiences.

Key to sending the right message at the right time to the right place is understanding who your customer is and what they perceive as valuable. Each message you deliver will manifest differently depending on the medium your sending it through and the customers you're sending it to. Brands that understand and execute a commanding insight of their customer's needs and how they are meeting those needs will continue to grow and thrive, even in this new all-things-digital economy.



Trend Insights.

Each year, we intentionally choose a diverse range of topics for discussion at the Summit. Still, a few common themes always emerge throughout the day. Here are some of the key trends we identified this year:

- **You can't run and you can't hide.** Today's consumers are always connected and always on, and because of this brands have to be more transparent, honest and authentic than ever before.
- **Personalize, personalize, and personalize!** Customers expect companies to know exactly what they want and how and when they want it delivered. To stay relevant, know what your customers needs and expectations are, and then be able to deliver a completely personalized experience that's catered to them 24/7.
- **Think about why you're being social.** Stop thinking of social media as just another marketing channel and start thinking about how it can truly transform your brand from the inside out through meaningful engagement with key audiences. This goes beyond just having "conversations" and extends to true, two-way interaction and deep relationships that influence how the brand and its products and services evolve.
- **We no longer control the conversation.** As brand marketers, we have to adjust to the new reality that everyone is talking about and shaping the discussion around your brand. Brands no longer control what people are saying, but they can find the areas where they can participate in meaningful ways that add true value to the discussion.
- **Focus.** People are on information overload. To rise above the chatter, brands need to focus more than ever on clearly communicating the core meaning of who they are and what value they deliver along every brand touch point through brand storytelling, retail engagement, online experiences, social interaction and more.



The Liquid Brand Summit 2011: Conclusions



SESSION 1

Turning customers into brand advocates.

Top Best Practice:

If you build it, they will come. Before rallying advocates, you've got to first identify who they are. And surprisingly, a brand's best advocates are not always the customers who buy the most. They are the customers whose word-of-mouth brings the most profitable new customers to your door, regardless of how much they themselves buy. Identify those advocates by sending inquiries to your CRM database on their likelihood to recommend your brand. You can also scan the social web for evidence of brand advocacy — like testimonials on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other social networks.

Once you've identified your advocates, give them what they need to go out and spread the word. Keep in mind, though, not all brand advocates are alike. Some are willing to create content, while others may prefer to share offers and still others may only be willing to give a testimonial. Develop a learning system that identifies what your advocates are willing to do. And by all means, don't annoy them by asking advocates to do something multiple times they've not responded to in the past.

Other Best Practices:

Create community from within. You can't think about your customers without first thinking about your own people. Your employees are your first advocates and the best marketing tool you have. They understand the brand culture more than anyone. Find ways to involve employees in reinforcing the brand through customer engagement, such as talking about the brand, catalyzing conversation and connecting with customers through online and offline networks.

Be people-centric and personalize. Find ways to identify with individual customers and their experience and build a strong sense of community between the brand and its audiences — customers, employees and key stakeholders. Reinforce the brand experience and reward brand engagement by showing genuine appreciation for the work your advocates do on your behalf.

If you want social media, have a social mission. Use your expertise and influence to push beyond the pure self-interest of the brand and focus on a social mission that complements the business model. This engenders goodwill with core audiences and builds loyalty. Within the context of the mission, define a muse and a monster — and

offer an alternative to the monster. This gives brand advocates a focus for their activities that helps to strengthen their sense of community and identification with the brand.

Transparency is key to authenticity. The growth of the Internet has given consumers a more transparent and trusted marketplace for exchanging information with their friends and peers about the merit of a product or service. Brands, then, have no choice but to be transparent in their dealings with the customers. Filtering? Come on. Your customers are already talking about you all over the Web. You can't control what they say, but you can use it to your advantage.

Embrace technology. Brand advocates have been around forever. Today, though, thanks to the growth of social networking and its enabling technologies, companies are creating brand advocate programs that are on a scale not possible years ago. A decade ago the largest programs were engaging a few thousand brand advocates. Today, they can potential involve millions. The sheer size of these programs requires companies to use new technology that helps identify, energize, and track brand advocacy results.



SESSION 2

Know thy customer.

Top Best Practice:

Walk a mile in their shoes. Before a company can understand what its customer needs, it must understand the customer's experience with its product or service, and that includes their experience along all the brand touch points.

Employees and executives alike should talk to customers on the ground, and more importantly, use their own products. Understanding how a customer engages with the brand throughout the arc of their customer experience — not just one moment in time — is essential to building strong, long-term relationships with customers. The insight you can gain in the trenches will help you to think about ways to deepen the connections with your core audience and look for new customers that you might not currently serve. It also improves employee-customer interaction and creates better products and services that meet future customer needs, wants and desires.

Other Best Practices:

Realize their expectations of you. Every customer has expectations of the brands they engage with, whether it's for operational excellence, customer intimacy, or product leadership. To understand your customer base, identify what your customers' fundamental expectations are and how you are filling their unmet needs. Those expectations may be very different than the company perceived them to be. Making an assessment helps brands to identify and better deliver their core value to the customer.

Listening like never before. Like it or not, your customers are talking about your brand in chat rooms, on review sites like Yelp, and through Twitter, Facebook, and other social networks. The good news is that word-of-mouth and social media have made listening easier than ever before. Brands can spend a ton of money on focus groups, surveys and expensive research, but why not take advantage of existing conversations in the market or stimulate new conversation that spark feedback and engagement? Listen to your customers through the channels they're already on. Develop "listening" programs that help your organization to follow what customers are saying online.

In addition, provide employees with the opportunity to listen to customer feedback through offline channels such as customer service calls routed from a call center.

Do something with what you've heard.

Be willing to adjust strategy based on feedback from the market. This may also mean finding ways of "selling" a particular course of action to the executives. Set up specific processes that allow you to pull out trends and useful data from the conversations that are taking place in the market as well as processes that empower managers to take action and actually do something with the feedback and information they receive.

Be passionate on both ends of the spectrum.

Think about this: On average, customers are twice as likely to talk about a bad experience as they are to share a positive one. Listening to the good and the bad gives brands greater insight into how customers are using their products and services and where they can be improved.



SESSION 3

Branding with innovation.

Top Best Practice:

When innovation is part of a company's DNA, it naturally drives branding. Innovation should start from within and be powered by the leadership in a company. Management must understand what it takes to support innovation activities and be whole-hearted champions for the value of design and outside-the-box thinking. As importantly, they should understand that it's a hard business to be innovative... and a very long haul. Companies that have successfully sustained innovation have done so by creating an atmosphere and culture throughout the organization that supports experimentation and doesn't punish failure. This can only come about when it's understood from top-down that innovation is a core driver of the brand. When this happens, the brand becomes deeply connected to innovation and this connection is externalized in all other interactions inside and outside the company.

Other Best Practices:

Think "hybrid." Establish a way of thinking that permeates beyond one particular department in your organization. Cross-fertilize ideas from different fields and minds. Today's innovative design is a hybrid of the traditional silos of industrial, interactive and brand design, such as when designers and engineers pair together and become aware of the power of a physical object to influence the function of the technology and how the product is perceived.

Be persistent. Thomas Edison said, "Genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration." The same could be said for the genius of innovation. It doesn't come easily. The people who push for it face internal and external challenges throughout the entire process of moving their ideas forward: time and budget constraints, logistical problems, priority shifts, management that's risk averse and more. Companies need talent that can spark ideas and also be tenacious in driving innovative thinking through to the end of the design process and all the way into the brand's position in the market.

Create compelling stories to drive the process. The process of innovation is long and as companies go deeper into it, people tend to lose

steam. Organizations need to clearly define a strategy from the beginning: Why are we doing this? Those driving the processes also need to find ways of supporting that strategy along the path. Do this by creating compelling stories that reinforce the reasoning and help build on incremental successes along the way. Those stories can also be used down the road to connect the brand back to innovation.

Define innovation according your culture.

Innovation means different things to different people. If you are defining your brand by innovation, then do it according to your own terms — what does innovation look like for your company? Its meaning to a furniture maker will not be the same as for a mobile phone manufacturer. This relates back to the idea of innovation being part of a brand's DNA. When the process of innovating is organic, it spreads naturally throughout the culture and there is more flexibility in the areas where the brand can compromise on certain aspects of the design and still remain on the right path.



SESSION 4

Is social media manageable?

Top Best Practice:

Find a thread and crystallize it. Social media is an online conversation, or rather many conversations, among your most important people: customers, employees, competitors, partners, industry colleagues and more. It's not a conversation brands can control or organize. It's too organic and complex for that. So stop thinking about "managing" that conversation and start thinking about how you can join and nurture it. Give your customers tools to discuss the pros and cons of your products and services. This amplifies what's being discussed and engenders more respect for the brand among key stakeholders.

The sheer size of what's being talked about can be overwhelming, so look for commonality, synchronicity and what is meaningful and relevant to your brand, and then crystallize those discussions into a conversation thread that can be leveraged to promote the brand.

Other Best Practices:

Set Expectations. What is the purpose of your social strategy? Identify this ahead of time and set clear expectations for each channel. Social tools can be a powerful way to gain clarity, but you have to identify what it is you are trying to achieve. Get buy-in from the top and make sure everyone in the organization is in alignment. Once this is established, form a communications team and discuss the overarching strategy and how it will be delivered by each team member. This may involve one person managing multiple accounts or many employees updating individual accounts.

Seek quality over quantity. Build meaningful relationships that are based on the synergy between your brand and the individual or organization you're reaching out to. Don't try to be all things to all people. Even within the umbrella of the "meta-brand," it's important to have different voices that speak to different areas of interest. You may need to utilize several accounts that represent different perspectives. Determine the value of a particular community or network and what the brand is getting out of it. Is it worth participating? This helps in filtering out the clutter.

Be human and be creative. Engage in conversation as a person that works for the brand (not as a brand mark). Don't talk like a corporate shill. This

makes the conversation more authentic and you more relevant to it. Entertain your audience. The viral spreading of Tweets works best when people are creative, so use creativity in hashtags and headlines and push the envelope — for example, one of the most popular hashtags on Twitter comes from Snoop Dog: #shitthatshouldhappen.

Go to where your people are. It's difficult to try and start your own conversation from scratch. Make better use of resources by finding out where your audiences are and by identifying the influencers. Then, participate in and listen to those conversations. Follow what's trending and read what's being discussed in your industry and about your brand. Use Twitter as a real-time thread to connect the various conversations that are taking place on different social networks.

Rethink why you're being social. Stop thinking of social media as simply another marketing channel and start thinking about how it can transform your organization's anti-social behavior. The power of social networks is that brands can use them to connect and engage with their audiences in ways that bring real meaning to the organization, whether through customer feedback that influences product development or a more efficient means of customer service and response.



SESSION 5

Brand 1 + Brand 2 = What?

Top Best Practice:

Plan your work; work your plan. It's been said that of all the assets exchanged during a merger or acquisition, the most important is that of the brand and culture, yet most companies underestimate the challenges involved in capturing the value of these things for each organization involved in a brand integration. It's no surprise then that research shows only one in every five mergers and acquisitions actually succeeds. The few that do say a key factor of the success is having had a clear brand integration strategy ahead of time that outlines expectations and guidelines and has leadership sign-off. In addition, the CMO, CEO and other executives need to create and support a clear organizational structure and system of brand management that shores up the strategy and brings all the stakeholders in line with the objective of fostering long-term brand building for the newly formed entity.

Other Best Practices:

The type of merger does matter. The complexity of the brand integration process depends on the type of merger that takes place. Was this the acquisition of a startup, where the acquisition was part of the business plan and employees benefit financially? Will the new owner make major changes to the organizational structure or leave it alone? Or, is the merger comprised of two well-established companies that could result in culture wars and power struggles within the organization? Each of these scenarios will require a different strategy and approach to integrating the brands, and organizations should consider seeking outside resources and experts to help their teams define the appropriate strategy for integrating corporate cultures and communicating internally about the changes taking place.

Why did we do this? To get employees and stakeholders behind a brand integration, management must help them understand the reasons for the merger or acquisition and the value it represents. Will the integration result in better technology, more talent or more customers? Will it block competition, enable expansion, or create more brand equity for the overall business? How does the integration solve their problems and what are the benefits to each of the key stakeholder groups?

Communicate. Communicate. Talk to employees and other stakeholders and let them know what to

expect and what is expected of them. Avoid surprises at all cost. Make sure everyone understands the strengths, weaknesses and differences of each brand and how they work together to create a stronger, more powerful organization. Clearly communicate the new brand architecture, showing how all the pieces fit together: the master brand, sub-brand, and associated product and services.

Respect the culture. It's important to understand and communicate the compatibility, differences and similarities of the individual brand cultures involved in the merger or acquisition — where they naturally align and where there may be issues. New processes may be instituted on a schedule, but attitudes and behavioral norms will not change overnight.

Think of your customers first. When companies get involved in a merger or acquisition, the employees can get so caught up in the complexities of the event that they forget about the customer. To avoid this, brand managers should keep their focus on the needs and expectations of the customer above those of the brand itself. As early as possible, combine customer databases and conduct the necessary research to gain a comprehensive understanding of what the new customer segments are and how each brand and the overall brand portfolio can deliver value to them.



SESSION 6

Celebrity endorsement: The road to fame?

Top Best Practice:

Authenticity trumps celebrity. Celebrity can certainly amplify a brand, but using celebrity simply for the sake of their fame is not going to give your brand long-term value. Collaboration with a celebrity should be viewed as a strategic partnership where the association between the brand and the celebrity is authentic and relevant. That authenticity will be truer when the brand appeals to a celebrity's passions.

Your customers aren't stupid. So don't treat them like they are. They will see through anything that's inauthentic. The success of celebrity collaboration also depends heavily on the compatibility between the brand and the celebrity in terms of identity, personality, positioning in the market (of the brand and its competitors) and lifestyle. Will the relationship make sense in the consumer's mind? The best collaborations are symbiotic, providing value to both parties. This builds relevancy and ultimately long-term value.

It's a tool but not the only tool. The more narrowly you get associated with a single celebrity, the more you put the brand at risk if something goes wrong. Celebrity endorsement is not a panacea. It's one branding tool and it should be treated as such.

Other Best Practices:

You're buying their whole life, not a moment in time. The fireball that was Tiger Woods' career post-exposure of his affairs shows that when it comes to celebrity, you have to look at the whole picture. Famous or not, they are just people and that means celebrities can misbehave. When you align your brand with a celebrity, you're aligning with the entire person and connecting your brand to their whole life, not just where they are in the moment of signing the endorsement.

Expand your mind. Traditional means of branding with celebrity have gone out the window along with Madison Avenue-style advertising. The ubiquitous nature of digital content and the fact that brands are having to generate their own content online and on mobile means that companies should be thinking beyond plain vanilla endorsement deals. Throw out pre-conceived notions about how the relationship should or can work and by all means don't lock into one concept. If you do, you could be missing out on other potential channels or unique content arrangements that could be very successful in amplifying the brand.

Think about the ways you can leverage your celebrity relationship to extend content ideas. Things like YouTube videos and documentaries that suggest

a celebrity's relationship to a brand ring more authentic than a direct endorsement.

Take Flight on Twitter, Face-Off on Facebook. The growth of social media has dramatically changed how celebrities interact with their fans. Data from Nielsen Media Research indicates that it's not only the celebrities themselves that are valuable to campaigns, their online fans and followers are significant assets as well: 64 percent of adult U.S. internet users who follow a celebrity also follow a brand. Celebrity fans are also more likely to offer advice and opinion to fellow online consumers and fans, and were significantly more likely to comment and post on social networking sites (86 percent more) and view consumer-generated video. This is a rich audience that, if ignited by celebrity engagement, can quickly amplify your brand message.

Lawyer up. It goes without saying: When you're making the deal, get the agents and lawyers in the room. This is absolutely essential to protecting the relationship and the brand against negative publicity should the celebrity's conduct or public image turn sour. Draft effective, air-tight endorsement contracts, keeping in mind the possibility for any unforeseeable negative events. And set the tone of negotiations from the beginning: We will give money for charity but not cash, for example.



SESSION 7

Retail: The new experience centers.

Top Best Practice:

Creating a compelling retail experience requires focus on the “experience.” The idea that retail is the place where you go to buy stuff is obsolete. The growth of e-commerce has changed the nature of shopping. In order to be relevant, retailers need to do more than stock the shelves with products. Today’s retail environment must be part theater, part family room, and part laboratory. Retail needs to transform itself into a place where consumers go to learn, be entertained, connect with others, share ideas or experiences, solve issues, try out new products, take advantage of special offers and more. Creating compelling and unique experiences will go a long way to help retail become once again the place where you buy stuff.

Other Best Practices:

Retail extends well beyond the store. Retail today extends far beyond the physical space into an ever-expanding digital world of mobile apps, social media channels and other online experiences. Retailers and brands that embrace the new way people communicate and share information have an opportunity to stimulate traffic, increase sales and improve the shopping experience.

There are many touch points, and they are all different. In today’s complex marketing environment brands have to be everywhere and be consistent across all their customer touch points. Yet, they must leverage the potential of each touch point and take advantage of the experiences each can create for consumers. For example, in an online environment it is easy to set up comparisons with other products in a matrix where one can compare features and benefits. However, being able to hold the product in your hands or talk to a friendly and helpful sales person with expertise can be pulled off much better in a physical environment.

Not every customer is the same. Personalization has replaced “one size fits all.” It’s no longer acceptable to treat every customer alike. People today have come to expect a customized experience in the store as much as online — with things like exclusive in-store coupons, personal ex-

periences or recommendations targeted at a customer based on purchase history and preferences.

Pre-searched is the new researched.

Consumers have near-constant access to websites and smartphone apps that make it easy to re-search products, spot deals, compare prices, and ultimately make a purchase anywhere at anytime. Brands should make the in-store experience a continuation of the sales cycle the consumer started at home and in the digital space, focusing on creating additional opportunities for purchases through cross-selling and up-selling.

Make their in-store experience fluid and efficient. Give your customer exactly what they need, quickly and efficiently by innovating new technology, such as interactive video screens that allow customers to pay by swiping their phone at the register or kiosks that connect customers to an extended brand experience online.

Curate unique opportunities. Innovate and create new retail experiences such as live events and pop-up stores, develop proprietary content, and offer exclusive brand experiences and that can only be accessed in the retail center but can also be enhanced and extended online and through other channels.



SESSION 8

Once there was a brand...the art of brand storytelling.

Top Best Practice:

The best brand stories come from within.

To make the most of your organization's stories and use them powerfully, strive for support from the top, listen to your organization's most passionate people, and find your authentic voice. It's key to get leadership buy-in on the essential role that stories play in building brand culture and personality — and the importance of telling the stories in a strategic, consistent manner.

Find the people who have passion for the stories — that's who should be in charge of storytelling. Everyone can tell stories, but when it comes to who's in charge, look for the people who are most passionate. Ask them to participate in developing ways to protect, build and gather the story. There's no other way to do it. You can't assign it to someone who doesn't believe in it. It doesn't matter if the people with the passion don't sit in marketing, use them anyway. Most importantly, find an authentic voice that speaks to who the brand is, what it stands for, and what the values are. This should resonate throughout all your storytelling.

Other Best Practices:

Work the core. Stories can serve many purposes: from inspiring great performance to providing continuity for brand culture to helping to focus research and more. Stories influence brands the same way they influence our lives. When we tell a story, it becomes a part of who we are. It explains something about us that we can share with other people. The same goes for brands. Stories are what makes a brand unique and helps us imagine the traits that set it apart. They bring the brand and its values alive, and so the focus of every story that's told should be centered around the core values of your organization.

Let the stories blossom. Be organic in your approach to storytelling and it will naturally be authentic. Start with the brand culture, internally. Give employees the basic story and raw information they need to go out and tell stories in their own way. Giving employees a voice empowers them to help define the brand story, which then makes the story more honest and truthful in its telling.

Encourage sharing. Provide a central repository where the brand's stories can reside, give people access to it, and encourage them to make the stories their own. Each department will find different meaning in any one story and each person will

add a different perspective that gives a richness and depth the story would not otherwise have. Encourage employees to share stories in the way that best serves their goals and the needs of their customers. Look for interesting ways to tell stories again and again and ways to relate old stories to new ones. Have the Chairman tell the stories. Have the CFO tell the stories. Have the Chief Maintenance Officer tell the stories. It adds a resonance that strengthens the story and brand.

Be honest. By all means, tell the truth. Don't make things up to polish the brand or fit some pre-determined company line. The best stories are real stories. Tell a story about how your company f*&%^* up and lived to tell about it. This is the drama that life is made of — and it's what makes your brand interesting and the stories engaging. You can always change the names later if you want to go public.

Be interesting. Don't underestimate the power of good storytelling and good writing. Seek out the best writers and then let them do what they're best at. Give your writers clear guidance but also the freedom and flexibility to be creative and most importantly, to make the stories interesting.



SESSION 9

Making a brand relevant...again.

Top Best Practice:

Be relevant by being personal. Mass communication is dead. Today's technology has ushered in a new age where customization and personalization are the defining elements in a customer's experience with a brand. Smart companies will look to use the knowledge they have about their customers — their interests, preferences and passions — to customize the brand experience and make it relevant and sticky.

Knowing what your customer's needs are and how you are meeting them is key to delivering a tailored experience that will build brand engagement and strengthen long-term relationships with customers.

Customization is already taking place in things like emails, ecommerce and direct marketing, but more and more brands are delivering a tailored experience throughout the entire arc of customer engagement, including in-store coupons and discounts, personalized recommendations and customized web page views.

Be careful though. Don't over personalize to the extent that customers feel you've invaded their privacy, and always ask for permission. We all prefer to control what's being served up to us.

Other Best Practices:

Simple is sometimes better. Every brand has an existing level of brand equity with their customers. Massive, unnecessary overhauls that ignore that equity can be dangerous and could potentially damage the brand to the point of no return. Sometimes, renewal can come with just a few simple changes that reposition the brand, still focusing on the core values while adjusting to the dynamic needs of customers.

When it's time to change, just do it. Customers change and markets evolve. Brands must be able to evolve as well. Staying relevant to your customer base means not being afraid to embrace change when it's appropriate and makes sense. Have the courage to let go of products, services and even customers that no longer make sense. Innovation is critical for growth, but it should be done thoughtfully, in ways that support the core value the brand is delivering, meet the needs of the customer and are consistent with the brand experience.

Don't try to be everything to everyone. Brand relevancy is intimately connected to the expectations of your customers and how the brand is meeting those expectations — what is the unmet need you're addressing? Identify that, carve out your space, and own it. Get very clear about the

personality of your customer base and focus on serving each audience's needs. This is more difficult than it sounds, as many companies try to be all things to all people, which often results in a company delivering a product or service that is too broad to appeal deeply to any one segment, preventing a brand from truly taking root. Build from the core and grow from there.

Control what you can. Many factors will influence the perception of how relevant a brand is, some of which are controllable and some of which aren't. Though brands can try to influence what customers hear from their peers, in the market and in the media, the speed with which information is transferred today and the interconnections of people make it impossible to have complete control. Instead, brands should identify and focus on the areas they are able to control such as the brand experience, customer engagement, in-store and online interactions, customer service or the quality of the product or service.



SESSION 10

Building brand culture.

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 Best Practices:

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 employees 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 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 and 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.



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In the spirit of continuing the dialog started at the Brand Summit, we certainly hope to be reading your feedback and ideas on our blog. Just visit www.liquidagency.com/blog and search under the Liquid Brand Summit category.