Practice papers

ABC — Anchoring the brand concept

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Abstract
A successful website requires the creation of new customer experience that takes advantage of the unique capabilities of the Internet. In spite of the unprecedented opportunities provided by the digital media, only a handful of organisations have achieved significant visitor conversion rates. Growth in the number of repeat visitors is the lifeline of successful Internet marketing strategy. The word of mouth nature of the Internet means it’s very costly if customers have a poor experience on your site.1 Customer experience is the key to creating perceptions in the digitised world. From the user’s first click on the website to the point when a user experiences site loyalty, customer experience changes over time. To create the desired customer experience, the need for constant quick learning at all levels of the organisation is crucial. The organisations that will truly excel in future will be the organisations that discover how to tap people’s commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organisation.2

The internal brand proprietors or the employees are the driving force creating the gravitational pull to attract the target customers and appropriately position the brand in their minds. Each one of the internal brand proprietors needs to be aware of the ‘total customer experience’, which is responsible for creating customer perceptions.

Creating a strong brand internally is as important as it is to create a strong brand externally. The system of anchoring the brand concept (ABC) provides a set of ongoing brand audit audits to ensure optimal customer experience. Proper application of action learning set principles3 can weave the ABC brand audit into the daily fabric of the organisation. Ongoing ABC brand audits become a pillar of organisational culture connecting the ‘vertebral column’ to the different parts of the corporate body. They lead to the creation of an ideal climate for development of an effective learning community and for individual learning. The role of human relations (HR) becomes interwoven in internal brand creation. HR aims to encourage employee commitment and sets performance parameters aimed at simultaneously increasing employee involvement and satisfaction. Minimum market requirements (MMR) take the form of a constantly expanding spiral, and action learning becomes a regular feature of the ABC scaffolding.

Weak links in the brand chain are the result of lack of appreciation by the employee of the pivotal role they play in realising the digital brand vision. The Internet and the intranet together reveal the crucial role the employee plays in the bigger scheme of things, and show employees where they fit in the universe of customer interaction. The ABC concept helps employees to see themselves not as helpless reactors, but as active participants shaping brand reality and creating the future.
Extensive research conducted by McKinsey & Company during the 18-month period from January 1999 to June 2000 pointed to some of the facts that led to the collapse of the dot-com boom. On the other hand, it revealed insights into why a small number of the players are garnering a disproportionate share of all revenues.

This paper outlines the concept of 'anchoring the brand' and involves internal brand proprietors in creating the four stages of a customer relationship management system. It looks at the role of organisational learning for creating optimum 'customer experiences' in the rapidly changing digital economy, and introduces the 'Kaizen' culture of continuous improvement to online brand management. In the words of Senge: "To practice a discipline is to be a lifelong learner. You may never "arrive". You spend your life mastering principles." Brand anchoring is a journey that never ends. It aims to create flexibility and suppleness within the teams and individuals required for the brand journey. It empowers the employees, evokes the proprietary attitude and ensures happy sailing in the never-ending and uncharted journey of positioning the digital brand.

INTRODUCTION

Anchoring the brand concept — baptising the internal brand proprietors with the gospel of the digital brand

ABC looks at the role of internal branding and the shift to a new corporate culture embedding the role of the brand vision in leading the organisation. In the digital world, customer experience plays a key role in creating brand perception. Customer experience needs to be understood by the internal brand proprietor in terms of how the customer perceives the interactions with the website, taking into account the entire customer experience and not only the economic transaction. The tracking of website effectiveness in terms of visitor numbers, conversion rates, average order size and purchase frequency gives us the 'content' or the 'result'. What is important, however, is to track the 'process' of customer experience rather than focus on the transaction only. The comprehensive encounter is the key.

ABC looks at the synthesis of 'inside-out' and 'outside-in' and speaks in the customer’s voice. It strives to bring the necessary proactive and flexible ownership of the brand vision that is required in the rapidly changing environment, making the concept a must for success in online branding. Speed is important in e-business because technology and competition move fast. To survive and grow, organisations need to adapt and be flexible. Like water, they need to ‘flow around obstacles and challenges, always seeking to follow the most effective path’. ABC is equally applicable to bricks-and-mortar organisations. This exploratory paper introduces the role of the ABC model in creating optimum ‘customer experiences’ in the rapidly changing digital economy.

The ABC model of branding looks at convergence in the digital economy and the role of internal branding. The rapidity of change in the environment makes this concept a must for online companies. Brands rule the world and control perceptions. Brands communicate and thrive, or they shrivel and die. Winning brands identify opportunities in the ever-changing markets and pro-act on them, long before others are even aware of these openings. Like my adaptation of the following golden