



July 29, 2010

Dear friends and colleagues,

During the first half of 2010, I spoke with many of you on the subject of “brand planning” – getting crystal-clear on what your organization’s name realistically can, and ideally should, come to stand for... and then developing a plan aimed at getting everything the organization says and does aligned to reinforce that identity.

Many of you expressed deep frustration about your organization’s brand identity (by which I mean not your logo or name, but the associations people make when they see it, e.g., Energizer = long-lasting batteries.) In some cases, your identity is outdated and no longer reflects who you are. In others, it’s vague or generic and doesn’t differentiate you from competitors (e.g., Rayovac = batteries, period). Whatever the weakness, a brand identity that fails to set you apart in a way that matters to your target market is a waste and a drag on the organization.

Helping companies and non-profits get this right is the focus of my consulting practice. To stay sharp at it, I spend several weeks each summer absorbing the latest thinking, and re-reading a classic or two, on brand positioning. I do this at our cottage in Minocqua so I can also indulge a couple other passions -- kayaking and fishing. (Don’t hate me because I’m lucky. But do write back if you’ll be in up here soon. I’d love to take you out on the water with your choice of paddle or fishing rod.)

Because so many of you seem interested in brand strategy, I thought I’d send a few notes while I’m here to share some helpful notions I’ve come across. For starters, I want to share **four perspectives you should consider in your brand-building efforts**. The source is David Aaker, a global thought leader whose work inspired the client-centric brand planning process I use. Aaker suggests you examine your brand identity in terms of:

1. Strategic imperatives. These are strategies you must pursue if you want your brand to be known for a certain attribute. For example, Baird & Associates is a client of mine that wants to be known as a global leader in the science and technology of coastal engineering. To make this more than just a wish, Baird knows it must continually pursue strategies related to academic partnerships and publishing, top-tier talent acquisition, and selective prospecting. If an organization is unwilling to commit the required budget and discipline to consistently execute the essential strategies supporting its desired brand identity, it ought to rethink the desired identity.

2. Proof points. These are programs, initiatives and assets that lend substance and credibility to the brand identity. The Heartland Funds, another great client, wants its mutual funds to be known for buying stocks of sound companies at bargain prices. Its most important proof point is its trademarked ten-point decision-making screen for picking stocks, which is based on the principles of value investing guru Benjamin Graham.

3. Internal role models. These are people, stories, traditions, events or programs that embody and perpetuate the brand identity. Long before the term “corporate culture” gained caché, the leaders of SC Johnson instinctively understood the power of internal role models. As the newly hired head of



worldwide communication there in 1997, I was impressed to see employees show up in formalwear for the annual Profit Sharing Day program in the company gym, where the highlight was a speech by Sam Johnson recounting a familiar corporate legend on the origination of the company's "Product Plus" philosophy.

4. External role models. These are brands outside the organization that are worth studying and emulating in some respects. What brand names in your industry do you admire most and why? What do they do to "live the brand"? Which ones outside your industry might have something to teach you – either about how to build your brand or how *not* to?

Viewing your brand identity through any of these lenses could make for some great strategic dialog. Working your way through all four could set the stage for smarter brand planning.

Best wishes,

Anne

If you haven't seen the case study I've been presenting on Baird & Associates' brand planning exercise but think you might like to – or if you've seen it and would like to share it with your leadership team – send me a note and I'll follow up.