



BRAND LEARNING

Are You Wired For Insight?



An appreciation of the value of insight continues to be embraced by the commercial world in many industry sectors. However, the desire to embed greater customer understanding and bring competitive advantage by enhancing customer value is far more complex – it affects how an entire business is set-up and organised, and a culture centered around the customer is cultivated. Marketing Capability Director, **Craig Scott**, pauses to consider how you re-wire a business to be truly customer-centric in order to bring the outside in.



A few years ago the US agency, Teague Design, did a commendable thing; they flew around the world, in economy, over 18 days; a total of forty-five thousand miles, 25 take offs and landings via 16 different airports. The point? They had been asked by Boeing to understand the passenger experience better as they developed their new passenger jet, the 787 'Dreamliner'. Whilst this is absolutely the right kind of activity, in today's world it might not be enough to just do an isolated piece of work to get closer to customers. In today's world you need to do more than walk the talk; businesses need to be organisationally 'joined-up' around the customer.

Brand Learning believes that a business has to be wired to embrace insight and customer-centricity across six critical organisational components:

At the centre of the wheel are **Business Objectives and Strategy**. Like the North Star the objectives should offer a constant, fixed point of reference defining what an organisation is trying to achieve. Those financial objectives should always, always be translated into a set of relevant customer metrics and the strategy should lay out the agenda of how the customer behaviour will be influenced to ensure the business objectives will be achieved.

Moving from the centre of the wheel, **Process** is, by definition, systematic. You have to challenge if an organisation's processes are wired for systematic customer understanding and are those processes current? For example, does your business have a strategy that is systematically wired to understand and connect with customers in an integrated way on the exploding social media landscape?

THE BRAND LEARNING WHEEL™





Are you processed to systematically listen to your customers? Are you evolving your market research methods or recycling old methods?

Honda Europe has embraced the latest thinking from neuroscience to understand their customers better and be more insightful about how and why their customers decide what to buy – insight, it is hoped, that will help increase sales. That has led them to an appreciation that the brain, first and foremost, reacts emotionally prior to rationally. Something the advertising industry has intuitively understood for a long time and has called for greater emotional measurement to more accurately understand customers. This appreciation has a profound effect on how you market a car that traditionally focussed on rational messages as being the most persuasive.

“We now know the brain takes an emotional response _rst before rational evaluation, and we’re uncovering lots of learnings within the car buying process from that. We are also measuring the physiology of the body as opposed to just understanding what the outputs are - getting the principles of neuroscience, science and biology to test our hypotheses.” Ian Armstrong, Global Communications Director, Jaguar

“It is terribly important for businesses to develop skills to be able to work with data. You have to bring that information, which is the voice of the customer, into where decisions are being made - the boardroom. There is a danger that we know more and more about less and less. I have seen mistakes made with the best of intentions where people read a piece of data, then drew a

It’s well known that one of the biggest concerns of senior business leaders is developing systematic processes for managing the explosion of customer data that is resulting in a state of snow-blindness, of being unable to see what’s important. As Terry Leahy, outstanding former Tesco boss said recently, “There is a danger that we know more and more about less and less.” From a process perspective for the customer experience to be embedded, a business has to be cross-functionally joined-up and integrated to ensure the



Cisco is a powerful example of a highly customer-centric business. They have clear processes around the management and use of customer information – for example, they have created a central view of customer data to ensure a complete understanding of the relationships. Other processes around their customer satisfaction survey ensure concerns are swiftly transmitted around the business ensuring solutions can be developed quickly, and results from the CSS are fed into individual and functional annual performance reviews.

Many **Organisations** claim to put their customers at the centre of their marketing efforts but the reality is that some do and some don’t. Some are simply not designed to. The US electronics retailer Best Buy is a great example of a company that re-wired itself to focus on the customer. Originally organised across product lines, Best Buy CEO Brad Anderson shifted the focus to the customer and created customer segments that better represented how customers think and shop. The pilot generated an average sales increase of 9%. On the surface this may seem an obvious, even superficial, organisational change but the re-wiring was far more fundamental. What were competing product silos became tied together with mechanisms able to support the organisation cross-functionally. In short, Brad Anderson designed and enabled the organisation around the customer with them genuinely at the centre of what they did.



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Arguably the most important driver of true customer-centricity in an organisation is **People**. Creating the right cultural environment for insight and having the right people starts with recruitment. The Virgin Group has an inspired approach to their people and their brand in that they believe their people are the brand. Their belief is such that the primary focus for the Virgin brand is recruiting the right people, in effect, they believe the rest takes care of itself. What they are looking for are people that are "... honest, cheeky,

questioning, amusing, passionate, intelligent, restless...Virgin people are smart." That description goes a long way to describing the Virgin brand promise and you can begin to see how HR is joined-up to marketing to drive their brand. You can also see that someone who is questioning, passionate and intelligent has the right personality ingredients to begin to understand and naturally empathise with their customers. They are better wired for it to become their cultural DNA. As the world evolves, the marketing Skills of people also need to evolve. The marketing toolbox has got bigger and marketers today need more capabilities in that toolbox than their predecessors. There are two routes to achieving this; recruit those skills in (as Virgin do) and invest in building individual capabilities as managers. As today's economic tide is out, it's more likely to be the latter.

Marketing Research is a case in point. The traditional skills needed to be effective are no longer enough and the palette of skills needed has never been wider. The expectations of a great market researcher now are not only to be numerate but also to be a creative, engaging, story-telling change-agent who is as comfortable with a statistic as an emotion and who can move from building rapport with the CEO to a consumer.

All the above combines in the outer-ring of the wheel, Culture, or, to use our preferred definition of culture, "The way we do things around here." This is soft-wiring. It's intangible, unseen, difficult to describe but informs everything a company does and how its people behave. It is very, very powerful – having the right culture that includes customers at its heart leads to the right results.

The fast moving consumer goods sector has pioneered and championed the need to get closer to consumers and build a culture that encourages exactly this. Their efforts should be celebrated and their example followed. P&G are rightly famous for it. Former CEO and Chairman Alan Lafley himself would spend time in consumers' homes on his



knees under their kitchen sink pulling out bottles of detergent and bleach asking them why they had bought a particular brand. What Lafley sent was more than a very strong signal that this was okay, but that he expects the same energy and curiosity to engage and understand customers better from everyone in the business. By building a customer-led culture into P&G Lafley doubled the company's sales; his legacy is one of an externally focussed company that is curious, insightful, customer-driven and whose marketing plans are truly customer-centric.

The best marketing strategies begin and end with the customer. Investing in customer-centric capabilities across all elements of the wheel can deliver competitive advantage and market share growth. But to create the conditions for success, an entire business must be wired and designed for the customer.

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For further information:

BRAND LEARNING
Burgoine Quay
8 Lower Teddington Road
Kingston Upon Thames
Surrey
KT1 4ER
UK
Please contact us on **+44(0) 20 8614 8150** or team@brandlearning.com