Does your definition of brand engagement include corporate responsibility? Mine does!

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LONDON, UK (rushPRnews) 08/06/10 — I possibly have a different definition of brand engagement than others, so I thought I might share my views. I'd love to hear your thoughts too!

What is a "brand"?

Unlike a person, organizations are made of many people with different personalities. What an individual and a brand do have in common is a vision, a goal and the approach to that target. The identity that is created to represent these things forms the brand. A brand comprises many aspects: look, feel and values which can be viewed as the brand's "personality".

Like people, brands represent themselves differently to the various segments of their communities. For example; a brand may be portrayed differently to businesses as opposed to individuals. Despite this, there are always basic elements that are constant.

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All of these facets of a brand are what people interact with when they connect with that brand.

This counts for:

- employees
- suppliers
- subcontractors and their employees
- competitors
- collaborators
- enthusiasts
- detractors
- physical community members

All of these are **communities** that exist around the brand.

What is “brand engagement” then?
Brand engagement is the set of activities a company is involved in to strengthen relationships with these communities.

This includes:

- internal culture
- advertising,
- marketing,
- public relations,
- sponsorships
- and last, but *certainly* not least, their **social and environmental responsibility**.

For more on brands and corporate responsibility read my interview with triplepundit here.

Why engage?

By the definition above, brands are **already engaging**. Ignoring the conversations and communities is also a mode of engagement. So it's **not a question of "should"** but a question of **"how"**? Engaging in a **constructive, unified and clear** way strengthens the organisation by strengthening the relationships to their communities. When people feel good about their relationship to a brand they are a lot more likely to recommend it

to others. **Word of mouth**, which includes social media, is still the **most effective** mode of marketing there is. So give them **something to talk about** and **make it good**!

What about "control"?

While it is important for brands to **respect** their **brand identity guidelines**, it's not realistic to think that others will. The **opportunity for "control**" here is not in keeping brand communication close to the organisation's "chest" The opportunity exists in participating in conversations. Being part of the conversation ensure that the information disseminated is accurate and reflects the brand accurately. This usually ensures that the outcome is productive for the organisation and its communities.

Great! Where do we start?

Arié Moyal

In order for these activities to be successful there must be **clarity around the brand identity itself** and **clear goals** for engagement activities. Once these are established, internal processes must be **primed for participation**, both proactive and reactive, in conversations and activities connected to the brand.

I came across a really cool example recently:
An intercity bus passenger who used the brand's SMS feedback service to tell them he thought his bus was too hot. Apparently, within minutes the passenger got a text back advising them that the driver had been contacted and that he was going to adjust the temperature. (Sure he could have gotten up and done that himself, but that's not the point!)

True or not, this is a perfect example of internal processes being properly set up to deal with issues raised by the brand's communities.

You don't have to have it exactly right to get started, especially if people are already talking about the brand online but this is really important and should

be a priority for management. In fact, if you wait for it to be perfect, you'll probably never get started!

Employees – ambassadors or enthusiasts?

Part of this is employee engagement. Keeping them happy and engaged with their work effectively keeps them close to the brand. Ultimately, done properly, it will make them all brand enthusiasts! This is not the same as brand ambassadors because effectively all employees are brand ambassadors, whether they're excited about the brand or not. Their friends and families see how they feel about their work and the way they answer the question "Where do you work?" speaks volumes about the brand to people they meet.

Next steps

The next steps are **unifiying communications** from the perspective of **established brand identity guidelines** as well as **hiring the right people** to speak officially on behalf of the brand in all channels. Personally, I believe these people should be internal as I've expressed in my previous post about the role of agencies in brand community management.

Two second takeaway:

Brand engagement is about **connecting** with people, both inside and outside organization, by **listening**, **sharing** and **responding quickly** to the brand's communities This will increase **brand affinity** which leads to increased **brand awareness** and eventually to increased **revenue**!

So what do you think? Is this brand engagement?

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