



# Conference KeyNotes

KEY ISSUES | BENCHMARKS | ACTION PLANS



## The 2010 Corporate Image and Branding Conference: Emerging Opportunities in the Era of Social Media and Global Competition

As a community of business leaders, The Conference Board convenes senior executives to share cutting-edge ideas and best practices. These *Conference KeyNotes* summarize the discussions held by approximately 100 senior executives that attended *The 2010 Corporate Image and Branding Conference* in New York in January 2010. The views expressed are those of the presenters and participants of the conference.

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- Build a brand that speaks to people
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- Competitive pressure most important driver for brand investment
- Bulk of companies allocate little marketing budget toward digital channels
- Companies can improve how they measure/optimize marketing investments
- Strategic and operational risks pose greatest threat to reputation/brand

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What Conference Participants Plan to Do Differently

- Social media
- Grow the brand



# KEY ISSUES

Just like the military can't fight a new kind of enemy with old methods, traditional branding models need to be put to pasture. Today's business world is global, connected by social media networks and driven by consumers. Therefore, companies and their brand strategists have to plan for engaging and interacting with consumers instead of simply selling a product or service. They need to think outside the box in terms of both offerings and marketing strategy to stay ahead, as well as use their own employees to be brand ambassadors. Conference attendees and presenters discussed related topics, including embracing social media, enlisting consumers and employees to be brand ambassadors, changing your priorities, and building a brand that speaks to people through empathy.

## Companies Need to Change the Way They Think

Staying competitive means changing the way you plan, budget, and prioritize. Marketing has changed from merely pushing information to orchestrating customer engagement. Even though there are a growing number of channels for marketing to address, it's not always about adding more content; it's also about thinking differently, from cost models, to applying staff and resources, trusting employees in a social media world, and getting multiple business functions to work in tandem.

### Embrace social media

- Embrace the notion of consumers taking part in your brand by giving them the capability to market for you and realize their own identity through your brand. One financial services company empowered consumers by inviting them to its website to vote for their favorite charities, with the winning organization receiving a donation. The campaign connected customers to the brand in a way other than simply using a credit card.
- Take traditional print and television ads (also known as push marketing) to the next level by sending consumers to a "microsite" (pull marketing) where they can fill out a survey, get a free sample, and see the specials you are running. When people fill out the survey, you can collect information on them, classify them, and then strategize on how to reach them using empathy.
- There is no longer a discreet difference between B2B and B2C marketing. You market to a mindset, not an operations sheet. When companies engage in business-to-business transactions, they need to realize they are selling to the people who represent the business, so it's about cracking the code of what matters to those people. They need to reach the influencers, not the people who sign the contract. B2B companies also need to be open to bringing the consumer space into their marketing plans, since social media feels like a consumer area.
- Companies need to trust that their employees will act responsibly in the social media sphere. If you are concerned about what employees may say, you can't necessarily prevent them from participating, but you can give them guidelines to consider. And if a particular post is likely to generate a lot of attention, such as a blog, the company can create a social media editorial review program. One telecommunications company has a designated group of people to review such posts with a one-hour turnaround time; if there is no reply after that hour is up, then that means there is complicit agreement.

### You are your own publisher

- In today's world, a massive amount of content is being created for each step in the buying process. As a result, you are now in the media and publishing business whether you want to be or not. If your company's staff hasn't already started, then you need to get them on board creating concepts, writing content, collecting and aggregating information, as well as producing videos.

- Adopt the publishing factory notion that costs will get reinvested. It's not about spending money on "working media" such as paid advertising spots. Instead, spend money on "earned media" like widgets and content that enables your "event" to go viral. And use the money you save from placing fewer paid advertising spots to hire additional "publishing group" staff to create the content. The financial services company (mentioned earlier) spent money on the web content for its charity campaign and the tools to manage it, but it did not pay for television commercials. Instead, CBS News found out about the event and covered it, which resulted in free publicity.
- The best way to get executives to buy into placing more resources on earned media is to start with a pilot program directed at a specific geography, audience, or product. Once it's profitable, you have the proof to show that it could work on a larger scale.

## Eliminating silos

- Breaking down silos allows companies to be more innovative in their marketing approach. To have "big thinking," multiple departments need to work together to source new ideas, evaluate them, and create and execute a strategy. You need to have operational alignment to have operational excellence.
- Companies need to orchestrate their web, marketing, and sales forces to get them to all deliver the brand together. For example, customers fill out an online survey that is designed by the web and marketing teams, the marketing department captures and analyzes the information and then feeds it to the sales force, which follows on leads with perfect relevance. The publishing department writes the sales and promotional materials.
- Create an enterprise brand council that meets monthly to promote cross-function collaboration on the brand. Create a charter, and make sure it contains a clause stating that the corporate brand strategy is to be supported above and beyond individual departments' and units' agendas.
- Form a partnership across the business to find brand ambassadors to communicate the brand internally. These are people who are natural communicators who can share messages. Get employees to talk to each other and share their views.

## Build a Brand That Speaks to People

A company's brand is the "sweet spot" where its highest ideals meet a cultural reality, and its brand image is more than just a tag line, slogan, or logo. It's about finding out what customers want, breaking the brand down to its core attributes, and then communicating to consumers how your brand fits their needs by using empathy to create an emotional connection. People who bond with a brand are more likely to buy it or use its services. Creating new products, implementing user ideas, and enlisting customers as brand ambassadors also helps create loyalty.

- A successful brand creates loyalty, and having empathy is the key to loyalty. Attaching your brand to something bigger than yourself that is going on in the world today builds empathy. For example, a company that manufactures routers and switches uses imagery in its television commercials to show how its products enable telepresence – a form of video conferencing that gives the appearance of everyone in the same board room – and how this is a good way for distant offices to collaborate during a recession.
- Create a "beacon" for your brand that drives all brand transactions, and make sure it will translate globally. For example: "simple, easy enjoyment," or "changing the way we live, work, play, and learn." Everything else, from the tag line to logo to marketing strategy, will stem from this beacon.
- Focus on similarities among your customers instead of the differences between them, to help cultivate a solid brand message. For example, emotions are the same everywhere.

- Decide which brand personality you want to use to communicate your message: emotional? Humorous? Serious? Green? These will change with the times. For example, during a recession people may not be thinking about being green when they are concerned about their job security, but using levity to speak to them may brighten their day.
- Consumers should never see the brand's beacon – they should experience it. A fast food company can illustrate “simple, easy enjoyment” through restaurant design, décor, and product packaging along with customer service. And it can be tailored by market. European consumers don't find American cafeteria style eating and bright colors to be “simple easy enjoyment”; instead, one major fast-food chain uses natural materials and fashion-forward furniture design to make the experience more “enjoyable” for its European customers.

## Plan for the future

- Create a brand vision for the long term, with a brand message that is aligned with market realities. As culture and life changes over time, keep apprised of what is happening so you can keep up with your customers and their needs, and then communicate to them how you fill that need. When it became evident that the internet was changing the world, the router company focused on the “Power of the network,” and then later, as Web 2.0 exploded, it said “We welcome you to the human network,” in its television spots.
- Create a single cultural initiative. Your culture and mission statement need to align with the research you find out about the brand and its ability to meet customers' needs. Create an insights team to gather information about customers, formulate that information into a strategy, and then execute it.
- Use predictive modeling to secure long-term support, even in a time of reduced budgets. Have a third party predict how much you'll make if you spend a given amount over a given period of time. If you can show that you've exceeded that target, you'll have an easier time securing resources. It takes years to successfully launch a brand, so this is a good way to do it incrementally.

## Build brand awareness, value, and *loyalty via passionistas*

- Launching a brand begins with creating brand awareness. Advertise what customers care about, not what you're good at. Show them that they can trust you.
- It's not so much about simply using social media as it's about an integrated campaign. Do things to make customers lives easier and empower them to make good decisions. For example, an insurance company helps customers by providing apps for mobile devices to look up information on specific new and used cars and then compare them, start a claim after an accident, and find agents.
- Generate genuine word of mouth. Do this two ways: Find the unadvertised element that surprises and delights the user and show that idea in a different context. One automobile company generated a buzz about a new car model by loaning cars to 100 people for the six months before its official release and then asking them to tell their stories. People became endeared to the brand before it was even officially released.
- Social media also increases the different ways a brand's value can be communicated. It's not just about dollar value; it's also about getting on the short list for consideration. Ask: “Does our value put us in the consideration space?” For example, a telecom company known for providing phone service also wants to be considered as a cloud computing and telepresence company.
- Deliver your brand promise. Consumers will be forgiving of your brand if you acknowledge that you made a mistake, apologize for it, and then do something to either fix it, compensate for it, or make up for it. People realize we are human and will make mistakes. The question is, “Now what will we do to fix the mistake?”

## Think outside the box

- Brands need to engage in forward thinking to stay competitive. They can stay current by challenging assumptions in both their marketing approach and the products themselves. For example, one skin care product used real customers for its billboard advertisements instead of models, and featured an interactive section on its website where women could discuss “real beauty.” Similarly, a camera company followed a customer’s suggestion and developed a camera with an LCD screen on the front as well as the back so people could see themselves when taking self-portraits.
- One way to generate creativity is to connect things that aren’t normally connected. Maybe have a child narrate a commercial for a business product. Since a child’s voice is not often associated with the business world, it will grab viewers’ attention.

## Build the Brand from the Inside Out

A company’s most important brand advocates are its employees; however, they often don’t know enough about the brand or connect to it enough to represent it to the company’s best advantage. If they don’t feel like it’s “them” or if they can’t understand how it relates their lives, they will reject the message. Therefore, a company’s best marketing strategy is creating internal passionistas and then providing them with the tools to pass the message on.

- Selling the brand to employees permeates all elements of the business. Ensure that HR processes and business processes are aligned with the brand. Define the desired qualities that an individual who will deliver the brand should possess as well as what the desired customer experience entails. Then develop a talent planning program and outline desired employee behaviors accordingly.
- Having different internal and external brand messages will not work in today’s world. The internal brand will eventually funnel externally, especially in the era of social media.
- Business leaders need to be responsible to the brand. They need to buy into the brand first, so they can model the behaviors they want their employees to adopt. If they just provide lip service, but don’t “walk the walk,” then employees will not change behaviors.
- Most companies have an unofficial brand ambassador program – it’s employees carrying business cards, participating in industry networking groups and conferences, and describing to others what your company does. But this can be taken to the next level.

## Start an internal branding program

- If your company has 65,000 employees, then it has that many potential brand advocates. It’s a matter of “harnessing” them. Your employees spend more time at work than they do at home, so the brand becomes part of their identity. Show how what they do every day is connected to the community they live in. Have them think about what motivates the “you” as person, instead of the “you” as an employee, as well as how your brand applies to their lives outside the office, to their families, etc.
- Hand pick “heroes” around the company who are willing to, have the time to, and who are good communicators to participate as brand ambassadors. Then hold a two-day workshop on what the brand is and brand positioning. Get feedback from each ambassador on what tools he/she needs to support the brand globally. Ask “What does your geography need to know about the brand?”
- If launching a new brand, share brand guidelines and standards with employees before the external launch. If you don’t have employee buy-in, it won’t work. Explain to employees why you chose a particular brand identity, what the research showed, what to expect going forward, and that everyone is part of the brand campaign, not just marketing.
- Launch the brand internally the same way you would launch it externally. Sometimes not giving advance notice is more effective. Just have employees come in one day to find new “billboards” and contests advertised around the office.

- Make brand information accessible. Having information stored on someone's hard drive is not accessible by all employees. Instead, create a self-service brand portal in a communal drive where employees can access brand strategy information, brand use information, tools, templates, and guidelines on brand voice. The portal can also contain tailored FAQs with a search function, and a place to contact the company's brand center if the answer can't be found on the portal. Build awareness of the portal by posting information online and providing notices throughout the network, as well as contests, such as a scavenger hunt for information that can be found on the new portal. Employees need to know enough about what the brand is so they can talk about it in a social media space.
- Get new geographies up to speed using brand immersion. Go to the headquarters of the new market and conduct a brand audit to see how the brand is being applied in that location – look at everything from advertising to recruiting. Set-up an in-country brand council. Work with them to develop brand filters to be sure everything is on-brand. Set up workshops to train them, and set up brand policies that are appropriate for their market.
- After a merger, introduce the new employees to your brand slowly. It's more of an evolution, where new aspects of the brand and culture are incorporated in stages.

### Hire the brand

- Hire people who are already connected to the brand. That way you'll automatically have employees who are connected to your story. When you're interviewing, ask yourself: "Will this person be a good brand ambassador?" The difference between great and good is your employees, and if they're not aligned with what you believe in, using them as brand ambassadors won't work.
- Once an employee is hired, begin building brand advocacy with the onboarding process. Include information on vision, mission, corporate culture, and what you and your brand are about. Very few companies provide this information.
- How you treat the employees you don't hire also communicates the brand message. Do you provide them with courtesy and respect by letting them know that they didn't get the position in the time-frame you promised, or do you leave them hanging on for an answer in this economy?

# BENCHMARKS

Conference participants were polled on the following questions:

Chart 1

What is the single most important issue that drives your organization to invest in the brand?

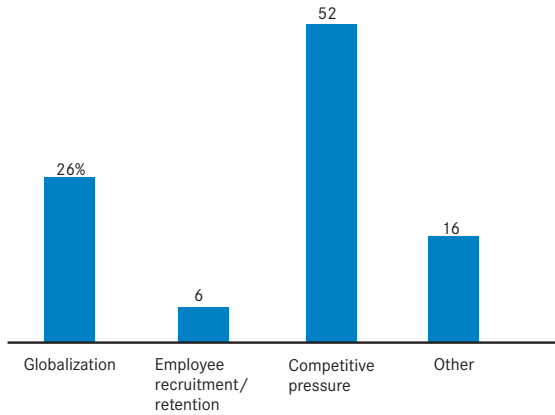


Chart 1

How much of your total marketing budget (including media and people) is focused on digital channels?

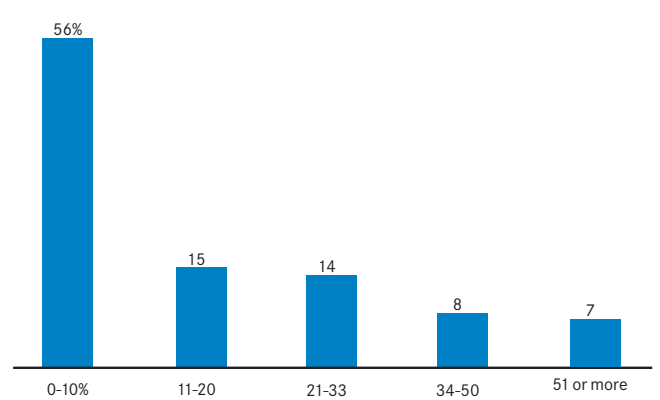


Chart 3

How comfortable are you with the way you measure and optimize your marketing investments?

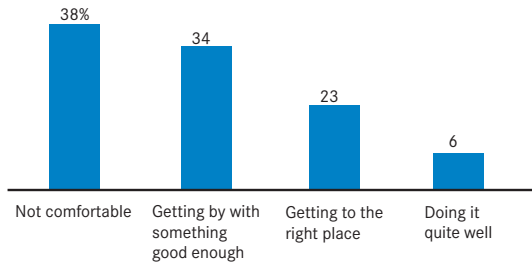
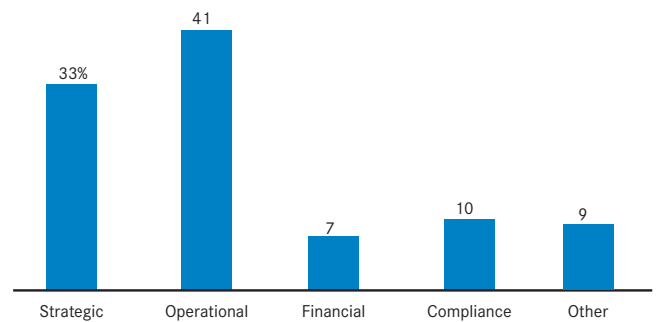


Chart 4

Which of the following risks do you perceive to be the greatest potential threat to your reputation and brand?



# ACTION PLANS

What actions will participants take after the conference? A post-conference “action survey” highlights a range of objectives.

## Social Media

- Sign up for many forms of social media on a personal level to get a feel for the different channels before commencing a presence in the business place.
- Learn more about social media and how to integrate it into our business offer to our clients involved in M&As.
- Research and implement social media communities for our audiences.
- Create/refine/implement a social media marketing plan.
- Develop an internal social media policy and procedures.
- Need to make social media usage more fresh, dynamic, and relevant to our audiences as well as ensure that it is aligned with our vision and value proposition.
- Start tracking mentions of brand in the social market place.
- Investigate mobile application for our marketing/social media messages.
- Practice multiplicity and diversity of message in several social media platforms.
- Invest in several flip phones to incorporate/produce more video communications for content on sites where our customers are. Leverage the customer testimonial video clips via YouTube/Twitter/our website.

## Grow the Brand

- Identify brand ambassadors and create/formalize a brand ambassador program.
- Develop and implement a rebounding strategy that is focused on both internal and external brand advocates.
- Develop a plan to secure executive buy-in; present to the C-suite the brand story and the opportunities that exist for leveraging it.
- Consider a brand refresh, especially icons.
- Recreate our internal branding messaging.
- Create a branding strategy website.
- Audit branding at all facilities to verify whether they have proper branding, especially since many were acquired and may still use old branding; implement a contest to spot old signage.
- Analyze the power of the brand, measurement, and dashboard development.
- Create better measurements for whether we are living the brand.
- Change the marketing strategy for my clients.
- Incorporate our brand into the HR function, including the interview process, denial letters, new hires, training, etc.



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## Other Corporate Image and Branding Resources from The Conference Board

### Research Reports and Executive Actions

*Corporate Brands Meeting the Challenges of Changing Times*, Council Perspectives, (CP-005, February 2010)

*Social Networking: How Companies Are Using Web 2.0 to Communicate with Employees*, Executive Action A-0315-09-EA, November 2009

*What Others Think of You Matters: Manage and Boost Your Corporate Reputation Using Social Media*, Executive Action A-0251-07-EA, November 2007

### Conferences

*Corporate Communication and Web 2.0 Conference: New Approaches, New Techniques that Build a Dynamic Organization*

May 20 – 21, 2010, New York, NY

*Communicating Employee Benefits Workshops: Creative Strategies to Maximize Communication Effectiveness*

June 17 – 18, 2010, New York, NY

### Councils

Asia-Pacific Communication and Marketing Council

Council on Corporate Brand Management

Council on Corporate Communication Strategy II

Council on Corporate Communications Strategy

Council on Marketing Research

Customer Experience Council

European Council on Corporate Communications

Polish Council of Marketing Executives

The Council on Marketing Research

### The Conference Board Council Program

For more than 80 years, The Conference Board has organized small, intimate, cross-industry networking peer groups that bring together executives in a specific function to share information and best practices. These highly interactive members-only networks facilitate ongoing interaction, communication, and benchmarking among leaders from the world's top companies. Each group is a unique member-driven forum enhanced by the vast resources of The Conference Board, including our research, economic forecasts, conferences, Research Working Groups, webcasts, and special events. Periodic face-to-face meetings help to foster the strong personal relationships that make council participation such a powerful ongoing resource for today's busy executives who need a source of immediate and trusted feedback.

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