



Insights and thoughts from our Partner Markus Kramer on core branding principles with broad applicability for any marketer, communications professional or business leader. Views are subjective and our own. April 10th, 2019. © Brand Affairs AG.

How Cult Brand Managers Manage Differently



Why is it that there is still a larger number of ‘bland’ global corporations than truly global brands? Why are these large budget companies unable to achieve the level of brand equity, despite the fact that we live in an age of democratized multichannel communications? The primary reason is perhaps to be found in the very mindset of organizational thinking; within the culture and specifically in the difference between managing a business vs managing a brand.

The Dream of Global Players

Global organizations dream of also being a ‘brand’ for all the substantial privileges and advantages that come with it. It is unquestionable that such iconic brands as Vespa, Hermès, Nespresso, Leica or Harley-Davidson occupy a very distinct position globally in the hearts and minds of consumers. Their products, services, stores and all other communicational activities speak continuity -

everything is done on brand. In addition to that, these brands are exerting cultural influence globally through soft power not only in an economical sense, but also on a sociological dimension. In other words, they've worked for their brands and now their brands work for them.

***"They've worked for their brands
and now their brands work for them."***

What do these brands do different then? Do they invest more resources in marketing and advertising than other global corporations? Do they have better managers? The answer is no. In fact, some of the global brands are probably spending less on marketing than many no-name corporates. So then, what are these transnational cult brands doing right and what are they not doing unlike their counterparts?

Setting the Right Mindset

The very mindset of organizational thinking within the internal cultures of these cult brands is set right from the get go. They don't see brand management as equal to marketing management. Public relations, strategic planning, social media management, CRM, advertising, internal culture, product development, decision-making and all other operations are seen as branches (or sub-branches) of the general tree of brand management. If branding and marketing are seen as synonymous, then they will likely join the sea of sameness amongst global behemoths.

***"The role of a brand manager
is holistic by its nature."***

Cult brands don't see brand management in a merely departmental sense. It is a systematic, constructivist, meaning-making and long-term process that is aligned, in one way or another, internally and externally with the consumer. The role of a brand manager is holistic by its very nature. Therefore, the general manager and the brand manager is either one person or two individuals that are both in sync when it comes to planning and decision making. Thus brand management is an equivalent of general management. The widely known words of Prof. Peter Drucker are: "Management is doing things right. Leadership is doing the right things."¹ So, as an addendum to his definitions, brand building then means doing the right things right.

***"Becoming a Purpose-led brand
is not a mathematical issue
– it's a geometrical one."***

The [G]eometrical Culture

All in all, a successful company can't do what a successful brand can. According to Michel Chevalier and Gérald Mazzalovo "for the corporation, the brand is an essential component of its cumulative value and its long-term strategy. It imposes certain constraints. It requires choices to be made involving coherence and consistency with specific values. It is a fundamental asset of the corporation."² In a multinational organization that hasn't achieved the state of a brand, employees usually work for the general manager and not always for/with each other, whereas within the culture of a cult brand the workforce along with the C-Suite works for the brand. This creates geometrical harmony in relations thanks to the brand culture. Becoming a Purpose-led brand is not a mathematical issue – it's a geometrical one.³ Euclid, the ancient Greek scholar known as the Father of Geometry, created an axiomatic system worth remembering. The first axiom states that when two things are equal to the same thing, then they are equal to each other. When all the individuals within a company (including the leadership) can be equal to the brand rather than the leader or the CEO, they would all be equal to each other. General managers come and go - but the brand stays. The purely rational mindset won't do because a mathematical model may be able to connect individuals, but only a geometrical model will unify them.

What is your purpose and brand model that provides the connective tissue building a strong, brand driven culture?

References:

1. Drucker, Peter F. The Essential Drucker Selections from the Management Works. Routledge, 2011
2. Chevalier, Michel, and Gerald Mazzalovo. Pro Logo. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
3. Markus Kramer and Tofiq Husein-zadeh. The Guiding Purpose Strategy. Clink Street Publishing, 2017.