

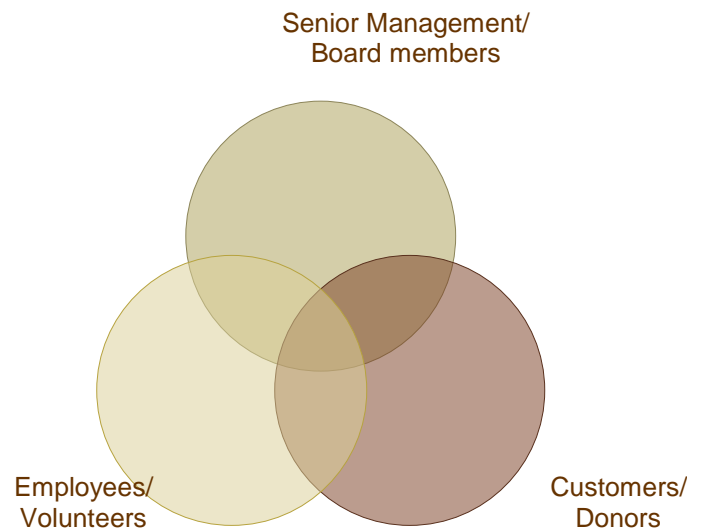
## The Importance of Internal and External Communication as a Business Process and Branding Tool

Many companies and non-profits share a common flaw; they underestimate the importance of internal branding. Everyone knows that external branding is essential to an organization's growth, that an ongoing rigorous effort to communicate with customers, media, and prospects is vital, but many do not realize that it is just as important to brand with employees, stakeholders, board members and volunteers in the same thoughtful manner. An internal branding plan or campaign is just as important as a consumer/participate branding plan and there several reasons why.

**1<sup>st</sup>** - Your internal messaging sets the tone for your external messaging. Everyone on your staff should be communicating the same message to customers. How many times have each of us experienced this: we speak to one member of an organization and receive one answer then speak to someone else at the same organization and receive a completely different answer? It's obvious there is no consistent internal conversation going on and answers are hit and miss depending on who we speak to. If your staff doesn't know what the organizational priorities and objectives are, then how will the customer?

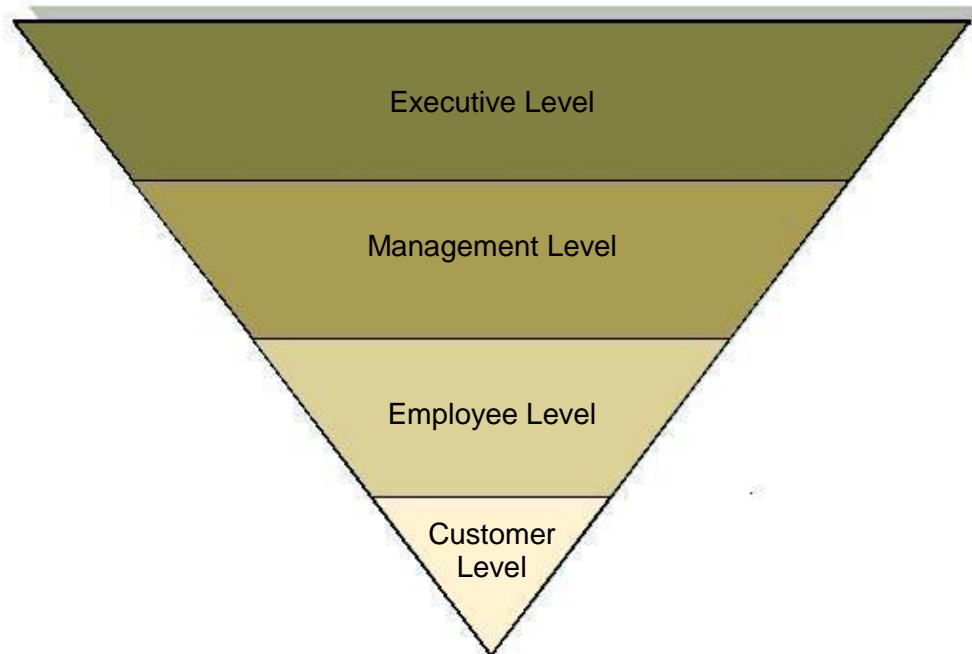
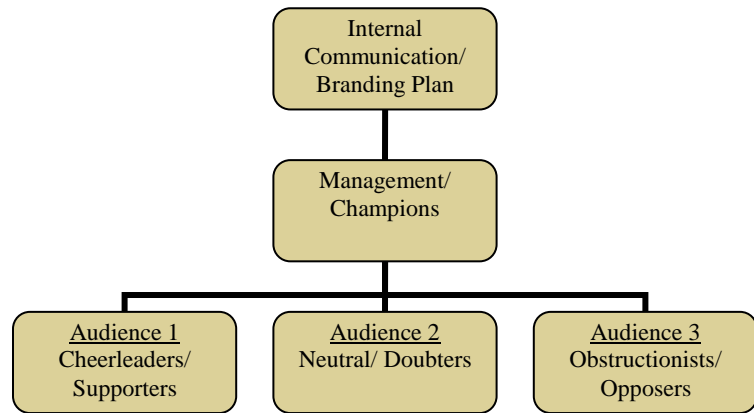
**2<sup>nd</sup>** - Employees are customers too....either currently or potentially. Chances are that your staff (prior to joining your organization) utilized its products/services, started to utilize its products/services upon hire, and/or may continue to use/refer your products/services after they are no longer employed with your company. They should be a cheerleader for your products/services. There is a lot of literature out right now about the marketing value of creating "buzz" and "word-of-mouth" referrals. You cannot put a dollar value on how beneficial and important this is to your organization. Companies spend enormous marketing budgets trying to generate "buzz" but many forget that they already have a ready-made audience.

The great thing about this audience is they are also participates and are personally invested in the success of your company. If your staff is excited and pumped about what your organization has to offer, they are going to sing its praises to every single person they know and the opposite is also true. If they are unhappy about their experience they will bad mouth your organization just as quickly. An organization's goal should be for all staff to become life long consumers/supporters of that organization but they won't do that if they feel they are in the "dark."



**3<sup>rd</sup>** - Creating a positive message for your staff also improves work performance and retention. An additional benefit is that now your staff has the confidence to be effective communicators on behalf of your organization. Creating staff buy-in minimizes resistance to organizational changes. Morale and confusion are very costly side effects of poor communication to an organization. How many times have each of us thought ineffective

communication by a senior staff member/organization to its staff has cost the organization in morale, productivity, turn-over and fire drills. If you leave your staff to discuss impactful structural changes, mergers, changes in hiring, project direction, etc. on their own they will expend a great deal of time and resources trying to fill in the blanks for themselves at the “water cooler” and chances are it won’t be good. When staff is left to their own devices they assume the worst. Can you blame them? Organizations are quick to trumpet successes to everyone who will listen. They fire out the press releases and e-mail blasts the minute they have record breaking revenues or receive a significant grant. So it is logical that during times of upheaval silence is interpreted as an admission of pending failure and instability. Your internal brand message starts at the top and should be moved down through the ranks of the organization in a strategic manner.



## How can you improve/align your internal and external communication plans?

- 1<sup>st</sup> – determine what your messaging goals are
- 2<sup>nd</sup> - identify if you have a different internal and external messaging
- 3<sup>rd</sup> - create communication tools specific to your intended audience, and lastly;  
train, train, train your internal staff to brand your internal messaging

Do not leave it up to staff to figure out or research on their own. Proper training can provide your staff with the tools and arsenal they need to be effective team members in the organization's goals. Do not underestimate the value of employee buy-in to your bottom line.

Branding is the most powerful form of marketing an organization can have. Internal branding takes the fundamentals of traditional branding inside an organization. Creating and implementing a message, service product and logo to employees fully engages them to live a brand experience. This partnership among marketing, operations and training works to make the service message front-of-mind for employees. Internal Branding is a comparatively cheaper way of branding, which is beneficial to a company's bottom line.

### **The Importance of a Focused Message**

The first element of internal and external branding is the same. There must be a focused message and goal behind all the elements of training. Focus on desired training outcomes, not financial gain. This is key. Many times companies rush to create a brand strategy and the strategy fails because it was not fully developed. It is critical to determine the goal behavior and establish measures. Just as an external brand has consistency with design and delivery, so must your internal brand.

### **Creating a Lasting Internal Brand**

Lasting internal branding isn't simply rolled out in one day; it is strategically formalized. Training programs need to be launched properly with the beginning and end in mind. Make sure there's an integrated marketing plan for the internal brand that includes the core message; discuss how it's introduced and how it's going to be maintained in front of employees after it's launched.

Managing realistic expectations is also a critical component. Like any marketing plan it typically takes up to six months to a year to begin showing results. An internal brand has a limited shelf life and without consistent updating it can become outdated and ineffective. It is critical to create a review process to make continuous improvements in order for an internal brand to stay current and have a lasting organizational impact.

### **Key Components of Developing Internal Brand**

#### ***Employee Screening***

HR can conduct interviews in which they interact with potential candidates and ask questions regarding their career prospects, their employee history, and why you would like to work for the company. They can use this information to determine if the candidate is a good fit for the company and would the potential employee promote brand integrity.

### ***New Employee Orientation (NEO)***

Orienting employees to their workplaces and their jobs is one of the most neglected functions in many organizations. An employee handbook and piles of paperwork are not adequate anymore when it comes to welcoming a new employee to your organization. The most frequent complaints about new employee orientation are that it is boring or that the new employee is left to sink or swim. It is critical that new hire programs are carefully planned to educate the employee about the values, history and company brand.

Key Purposes of Orientation are:

- To Reduce Startup Costs
- To Develop Realistic Job Expectations
- To Increase Job Satisfaction and Performance
- To Reduce Employee Turnover

### ***Employee Trainings***

Always ensure proper training of employees before they are engaged in work. Often companies have employees start a job and then six months into the job an employee deficiency is identified. This will cause the company to spend additional funds for retraining the candidate. To avoid this situation training should be conducted directly after NEO and should cover all the aspects of the business such as vision, mission, policies, procedures, and employee responsibilities.

Good branding requires constant reinforcement and skills training. Training programs need to be offered throughout the year with the year end company priorities in mind. Senior managers should consistently be evaluating their employees' skills, engagement and knowledge of the product and the services that the company offers. If the employees are not fully engaged the company will be facing a critical gap in their internal branding campaign.

### ***Policy Updates and Compliance***

Always design your policies very strategically but make them easy to communicate to multiple levels of your company. A policy should be designed in such a way that it holds good even after a long period of time. Frequent internal policy changes send a message to the outer world that the company is not consistent, knowledgeable, and reliable. It is also hard for your employees to know what the expectations are. This could lead to inconsistency in brand recognition, voicing the message, and higher compliance errors.

Creating a complete brand strategy (internal and external) consist of many aspects. Remember key elements are to have a directed vision of where you want your company to grow and go, know the skill set of your current employees, determine your key markets, and close any gaps that exist. **beBroad** has the tools and strategies to help you get to your end destination.