

The Danger of 'Fat' Words

By Colin Bates

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When you are building your brand, an obvious key to success is being very clear about what it is you are trying to build. And when there is a team working on your brand (and there usually is), this clarity is even more important, as a basis for the consistent behavior that moves you towards your desired brand.

The first step is to put pen to paper, and to define the desired brand you are trying to build. Unfortunately, language sometimes hinders rather than helps achieve a common understanding amongst a brand team.

Even when the words are down on paper, what people understand by the words can be very different.

Explore the meaning of words...

Words can be broad in meaning, mean different things to different people, or change their meaning, as social values change.

Consider a word like 'authoritative' (a good word, the type you might find in a 'desired brand' statement!). But what does it actually mean, and how would you express authority in what you say and do? A leader of a street gang, or a corporate CEO? They both have authority, but it stems from different sources. It's important to get behind a word, and agree what it means in terms of behavior and experience. Only then does it become a basis for consensus, rather than confusion.

And there are lots of words like this. Your brand is a leader? So what. How does it lead? What kind of leadership behavior does it exhibit? Is it a tyrant or a patriarch? (or a matriarch?!).

You think your brand should be 'innovative', but in what ways? What will you actually do, to be innovative? Don't assume that everyone in your team understands the word in the same way you do.

It takes time to explore the meaning of words with your brand team, but it is well worth the effort.

It may allow you to focus and craft your desired brand statement, into something more distinctive and motivating.

It will also save you time and money when it comes to implementation, because you'll have

achieved greater clarity and consensus in terms of the behavior and experience required to build your desired brand.

So, take a look at your desired brand statement...

Ask yourself:

Does everyone understand our 'brand words' in the same way I do?

What do they actually mean, in terms of behavior?

Is there consensus within the team to that behavior?

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