

The Brand Connection - The Link Between Corporations and the Executives that Lead them.

By William Arruda

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In this day of celebrity brands, and branded cities, it is not only becoming common, it is becoming essential, for senior executives to build and communicate their personal brands to expand both individual and corporate success.

Executive Branding - What It Is and What It's Not

Just as with corporate brands, an executive's brand is his/her promise of value. It separates executives from their peers and allows them to expand their personal success while building greater success for their organizations. Executive Branding is not about building a special image for the outside world; it is about understanding an executive's unique combination of rational and emotional attributes - his/her strengths, skills, values and passions - and using these attributes to stand out.

The Communications Agency's Role in Executive Branding

Communications companies are taking on a more pro-active role in nurturing corporate brands. And they can be more successful in building a corporate brand communications strategy if they include senior executives in the mix. It goes way beyond mentioning executives in press releases, quoting them in corporate communications, announcing their promotions and having them appear at press briefings. It means having a thorough understanding of executives' brands. Knowing what makes them unique, interesting and differentiated. And understanding how to use that to build a richer landscape for communicating about the corporation.

Christophe Ginisty, Founder and Managing Director of the IT Communications Firm Rumeur Publique, says "Buyers are putting their trust not only in a company, but in the leaders of that company. It is important to ensure that the leaders are an integral part of the corporate communications strategy and that their personal Brands are clear, consistent and accurate." He added "Communications companies who look at their clients' brands holistically will be more successful in creating a rich, relevant and compelling story that will over time build brand value and the associated customer confidence and loyalty."

IT Companies are Leading the Revolution

And although this executive Branding trend is visible in all industries, it is most apparent in the IT

industry. According to the Ad WEEK CEO Image report, "CEOs are more critical in tech markets than in most other industries. They're a vital part of communications to opinion leaders and key decision makers." And IT CEOs and other executives have taken on almost celebrity status. Look at Carly Fiorina, Michael Dell, Steve Jobs, and Bill Gates. These executive Brands are so closely associated with their corporate Brands that they almost become one in the same. Nancy Merz, an IT market researcher and President of Knight Market Research in Boston said "In every IT focus group I have conducted, when asked to describe the Microsoft Brand, the first two words out of the respondents' mouths are Bill and Gates. She added, "This is even after Steve Balmer took on a more active role in the company."

Building an Executive's Brand - Easy as 1-2-3.

An accurate and relevant executive Brand can be built and nurtured using modified versions of corporate brand evaluation and positioning. The first and most important step is unearthing the true brand. This includes using coaching skills to work with the executive to understand his or her true promise of value. From this, you can define personal brand positioning and distill key differentiators into a one-page brand profile. The second step is development of an executive communications plan within the context of the corporate communications plan. This means weaving the executive's brand into the corporate communication plan and vice versa. Lastly, you need to work with the executive to manage his/her brand environment. This means ensuring that every aspect of what surrounds the executive is on-brand. This includes image management, building brand tools, providing required training - like communications skills training or media training - and developing a plan to diminish any negative brand attributes.

Yield Maximum Brand Value

So to develop and implement communications plans that nurture corporate brands, it is essential to have an in-depth understanding of the personal brands of the company's leaders and to develop a seamless communications strategy that takes the greatest advantage of all the corporate assets to deliver Brand value. This opens up new avenues of communications and ways of building relationships between a company and its clients. The successful communications company of the future will seriously take the lead in corporate Branding and will understand executives' roles in supporting their corporate Brands.

About the author:

For nearly 20 years, William Arruda has been working with some of the world's most valuable Brands, including KPMG, Lotus, IBM, and Primark Corporation. Combining his brand experience with his passion for people, William founded Reach (www.reachcc.com), the world's first brand management company for organizations and individuals.

A member of the International Coach Federation (ICF), William holds a Master's Degree in Education, and has lent his expertise to audiences around the world. He has published articles in publications ranging from the Wall Street Journal to brandchannel.com and is the author of two upcoming books: *You: Brand New - Three Steps to Successful Personal Branding*; and *Health Without the Health Club*. You can reach him at williamarruda@reachcc.com.

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