

» Reputation: brand value safeguard

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Every brand wants to be customers' first choice. The creation –since its inception– and management –towards its maturity– of a brand can play a crucial role in this respect.

The value of a brand goes beyond the corporate logo. It is shaped according to its defining attributes and, especially, through its interactions with various audiences. In fact, the brand creates and maintains its reputation, to a great extent, based on the experiences it develops with other parties. Thus, for example, customers might come to establish such strong emotional ties that the latter translate into high levels of loyalty and purchasing frequency and intensity, even to the point of achieving feelings of affection, such as those generated by love-marks.

The brand really represents what customers buy, not only a product or service that could already exist before. The success in improving the value of the brand lies in promoting its strengths, but mainly in its ability to live up to its promises and enhance them over time as well as fulfilling its commitments in a consistent manner by fostering unique qualities (authenticity), excellent service, best value, etc.

However, the other side also includes “what customers want”, their demands and expectations. In this regard, the values of the brand must sometimes meet, to some extent, these requests.

In most cases, it will not translate into a lower price or a better performance. It will be related to the actions of the companies behind the brands, as players in a society also comprised of the customers in question.

In recent times, pressure and increasing social activism, the scrutiny carried out by the media and the changes in the regulatory framework governing business activities in which, for example, consumers are receiving an increasing amount of power, have forced companies –the organizations behind the brands– to become more aware of the need to better manage their reputation. They have understood that reputation can attract and maintain the relevance and interest about the value proposition of a brand.

The customers' decisions and perceptions are nowadays based on factors that are also related to the sustainability of the business project in the medium and long-term: environment, labor, ethics, sound corporate governance, social responsibility, innovation, leadership and the services and products in question.

Once the desired value for the brand has been established and the expectations of customers have been identified, the corporation can start working on its positioning by systematically communicating the values and foundations of the brand, based on a coherent corporate performance, since each interaction must support and strengthen its positioning.

COMMUNICATING AND CONVEYING THE VALUE OF A BRAND

Consistency is linked to the need of implementing a sound communication of what companies do or what brands represent, so that the messages conveyed become what customers think of the organization and thus, contribute to its positioning and ensure that the customers' perceptions are in accordance with the brand or company.

In line with Charles Fombrun, only the brands that are able to connect their values and attributes to the expectations of their customers will eventually gain their trust: being consistent in their actions, authentic in their ways and transparent in their communication strategies. The latter is particularly important, since nowadays and increasingly so, corporate stakeholders (and among them, customers) are no longer passive recipients but have become active partners; increasing their demands for brand accountability and integrity.

That being said, reputation, the result of the actions of a brand –including its communication– in relation to the perception that customers have on the organization, is absolutely manageable and measurable; the etymological meaning of the Latin concept *reputatio* is “assessment”. In this sense, the result of this assessment is a judgment on the value of the brand, an opinion which shapes its reputation.



Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that everything communicates something, even silence. Customers form their opinions on a brand based on what they see and assess in accordance with their personal scale of values. But, particularly, through their personal interaction with the brand. These experiences, enhanced by what is being said about the brand or company (mentions) in terms of information and therefore knowledge as well as the personal assessments and credibility of the source –for example, an influent opinion leader– ultimately build the reputation of the brand. And it is in the field of mentions where communication plays a key role, precisely helping to shape reputation, which in the end is plain confidence.

Communication contributes to the management of the notoriety of a brand (awareness), to increase how much customers remember it (or any of its attributes) and its presence on the public agenda. But

communication also contributes to the management of the notability of a brand, that is, how positive or negative the brand is assessed based on what it represents or what is expected of it or, as Joaquín Mouriz says, how positively or negatively it is seen and understood.

But communication must be mainly used in a strategic manner to convey and let people know about the capacity of a brand to bring value to its customers. Despite the fact that it is not the only available solution, communication helps managing the reputational risks that a brand must face when it has not been able to meet the expectations of its customers or even disappointed the latter.

Thus, whenever a company makes reputation the cornerstone of its business model, it is also shielding the value of the brand.



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