

**THE RISE AND RISE OF THE B2B BRAND**

“ More and more industrial companies now see strong brand management as key for standing out from competitors, expanding into adjacent markets and acquiring talent.”

## B2B BRANDING OVERVIEW

### WHAT B2B BRANDING MEANS

B2B branding involves rethinking how a B2B company is viewed by a range of stakeholders—not just customers, suppliers and investors but also potential acquisition targets and future employees

Leading industrials are starting to practice many of the elements of B2B branding, from identifying the key audiences for their messages to ensuring that their approaches to branding align with their business strategies

### WHY B2B BRANDING IS SO IMPORTANT NOW

B2B organizations need robust, coherent brands if they are to grow as fast as they tell shareholders they will

Their conventional marketing and communications efforts often seem ineffectual next to the ebullient messages and often larger marketing budgets of their customers

Their trade-show booths and trade-magazine advertising do more to reinforce existing perceptions than to help position B2Bs for growth in new areas

In the face of greater competition from B2Cs and other “appealing brands” (Google, Apple), branding provides differentiation for B2Bs and a vehicle for attracting talent.

### WHAT TO DO TODAY

Lead the effort from the top. The CEOs at brand exemplars such as General Electric and Apple are unabashed and very visible brand cheerleaders

Focus on the key issues first: Who are the audiences you need to influence, and how do you want to be viewed by those audiences?

Keep the brand strategy simple and clear. Most people remember only a few brand values, so don't dilute your efforts by trying to “get all the key themes in”

Express the brand experience consistently across all key “touchpoints”—the most important points where customers interact with the brand, from brochures to after-sales service

Instill employee pride in the new brand strategy with a well-planned launch; make sure employees start and keep “living the brand”

Take the long view. Yes, it is possible to design a new logo in a few weeks, but a commanding brand grows from many repeated experiences over time

# The Rise and Rise of the B2B Brand

BY RICK WISE

Many leading industrial businesses are rethinking how they are viewed by a range of stakeholders—not just customers, suppliers and investors but also potential acquisition targets and the employees of tomorrow.

As such, these businesses are starting to practice many of the elements of business-to-business (B2B) branding—from identifying the key audiences for their messages to ensuring that their approaches to branding align with their business strategies. And perhaps most important, they are now willing to give brand strategy quite a bit of their time and energy.



Before



## THE LANGUAGE OF BRANDING

**BRAND IMAGE:** The complete bundle of thoughts a customer has in his or her mind about a company, product or service developed through communications and experience, including the distinguishing “human” characteristics of a brand personality (e.g., warm and friendly, strong and reliable).

**CORPORATE IDENTITY:** The visible elements (name, logotypes, symbols, signs, offices, factories, advertising, trucks, packaging, letterhead, business cards, etc.) that can be used to identify a company.

**BRAND STRATEGY:** The long-term plan for the brand including a determination of key audiences and an understanding of what those audiences need to know about the brand and its corresponding experience.

B2B companies in fields as varied as mining, chemicals, plastics, and metals fabrication are finding the standard array of management tools insufficient to tackle the challenges they now confront. Their conventional marketing and communications efforts often seem ineffectual next to the ebullient messages and often larger marketing budgets of their customers. Their trade-show booths and trade-magazine advertising do more to reinforce existing perceptions than to help position their companies for growth in new areas. And in the face of greater competition from B2Cs and other “appealing brands” (Google, Apple), they are looking to branding both for differentiation and as a vehicle for attracting talent.

### JOHNSON CONTROLS SHIFTS ITS APPROACH TO BRANDING

In the middle of this decade, the diversified industrial company had maintained a track record of turning out stellar financial results and winning award after award for everything from quality and innovation to supplier diversity and clean air performance—much as it had been doing for over 120 years. But the Milwaukee giant had a problem. Even though mid-decade saw Johnson Controls (JCI) extend its 30-year-plus streak of dividend increases—and even though it topped \$20 billion in revenue and forecast further double-digit increases in earnings growth—the company was not positioned the way its leaders wanted it to be. Wall Street financiers and other stakeholders still viewed the company chiefly as an automotive supplier with little recognition outside of that industry. And while that perspective didn’t dent Johnson Controls’ new product pipelines or sour relations with current customers, it had the potential to drag down market valuations, hurt the company’s long-term business opportunities, and make it harder to recruit top-notch talent.

Johnson Controls’ strategic positioning had been based on “exceeding customer expectations”—a theme that was difficult to understand, hard to measure, and even harder for employees to act on. As the company began to articulate a new vision of “a more comfortable, safe and sustainable world” to better reflect products ranging from advanced building-security systems to comfortable car seating, its business leaders began crafting a positioning that would reflect this revised vision, apply equally to all three of Johnson Controls’ key businesses, and communicate the “smart environments” concept. At the same time, it had to be relevant to growth opportunities worldwide in order to support Johnson Controls’ focused push into emerging markets.

The consequent rebranding initiative, debuting in the fall of 2007, involved a revamped, recruiting-oriented slogan—"Ingenuity welcome"—along with a reinvented visual identity and advertising campaign. The slogan is geared toward helping Johnson Controls become an "employer of choice" as it continues to grow. As part of its visual identity, the company adopted a colorful "open globe" logo, symbolic of its energetic shift in direction, in place of its previous, technical-looking logo. This redesigned visual identity is being applied to many of Johnson Controls' flagship product brands, calling attention to the company's breadth of capabilities and strengthening the ties between its products and the corporate brand.

Perhaps most important, Johnson Controls' leaders made sure that their employees understood the rationale of the brand roll-out months ahead of its public debut. Indeed, the company devoted the bulk of its "Vision Week"—its annual employee gathering—to the brand. Specifically, leaders linked the branding initiative to the 10-year outlook for each of Johnson Controls' business units, providing a framework of accountability for the new direction and activating internal communications teams worldwide to spread the word about the revised messaging and train employees in its use.

Johnson Controls is a fair proxy for most industrials these days. B2Bs are learning the value of striving for brand exemplar status. They are becoming savvy about leveraging their corporate identity systems—their logos and other visible elements—not as "lipstick" but as important indicators of broader long-term changes in how they are perceived by a range of constituencies.

Brand-aware B2Bs are also learning that much of their brands' leverage lies in the hands of their employees. They grasp the importance of key brand "touchpoints"—the points of contact between company and customer that matter most. (See: "UMW: Turning employees into brand champions.") Put simply, true brand transformation means understanding the importance of "walking the talk," putting the bulk of brand investments not into new ads but into the many factors that influence how the organization behaves daily with its customers, employees, investors, and other stakeholders.



Before



## UMW: TURNING EMPLOYEES INTO BRAND CHAMPIONS

New brand positioning cannot take hold unless the workforce understands it, buys into it and “lives” it. That was a realization that executives at the UMW Group took to heart when the diversified industrial rebranded recently.

UMW, one of Malaysia’s leading companies, has seen spectacular growth in core businesses such as oil and gas equipment manufacturing and services, auto parts production, and distribution and service of heavy industrial equipment. To position itself for global expansion, the company had developed a fresh brand theme—“Beyond Boundaries”—and a colorful and distinctive new logo that communicated fluid movement and a vibrant corporate character while still conveying UMW’s stability and leading status.

But those brand elements alone did not guarantee that the new positioning would take hold. After mapping the most promising brand alignment initiatives—the moves that would have the most impact for the least resources and effort—UMW’s leaders opted to put their energy into communicating the new positioning to employees and transforming employees into brand advocates. Their priorities ranged from having executives convey the messages personally to junior employees to taking this messaging out to new hires to recognizing employees who were “going above and beyond” to support the new brand as its roll-out gathered momentum.

The employee-engagement activities began with four-hour interactive training sessions that encouraged acceptance and understanding of the UMW brand model as well as the adoption of “our way” behaviors. The activities included “train the trainer” sessions, supported by tools such as detailed workbook guides for the trainers to use. Other elements included a well-planned internal launch of the new positioning—led by a presentation from UMW’s CEO and group managing director Dato’ Dr. Abdul Halim bin Harun and supported by a poster campaign—and a tabletop information campaign in employees’ cafeterias in order to build buzz prior to the introduction of the brand to the outside world. The next steps: a “brand spirit” book for all employees, along with wallets containing colorful, credit card–like reminders of the “Beyond Boundaries” theme, the brand promise, UMW’s strengths, and its success measures.

UMW also understands that the energy of a new initiative can quickly dissipate, so it has introduced a “Brand Champions and Brand Heroes” program to keep momentum going by enlisting employees and celebrating on-brand behavior. For instance, all employees are honored as “Brand Champions” upon completion of brand training, and a Brand Champions leadership team has been set up to recognize “our way” behaviors and celebrate brand successes. And the company is now designing the “Brand Heroes” component of the initiative to recognize and reward extraordinary “our way” efforts.

Specifically, those brand-aware B2Bs are reassessing the strength of their brands with the following business objectives in mind.

### Strengthen and expand current customer relationships

- Ensuring that their names are always on customers' requests for proposals (RFPs)
- Getting onto customers' preferred supplier lists—and capturing more of their “share of wallet”
- Making it easier for customers to say “yes” in closely fought bids

### Support growth beyond existing opportunities

- Winning “permission” to add more value in existing roles and to enter adjacent markets
- Moving more easily and efficiently into those new markets
- Raising their profiles and control relative to those of increasingly powerful business customers

### Create audience alignment

- Aligning goals and objectives across disparate business units
- Winning the war for talent—with existing employees as well as future recruits
- Winning more investor confidence—increasing their stock multiples relative to competitors

### **DRIVING BUSINESS OBJECTIVES**

There are no mysteries about why business-to-business companies need to bring every available management weapon to the battle. In sectors as varied as construction equipment and chemicals, competition is more intense than ever. Recent waves of mergers have created super-competitors in mining, petrochemicals and OEM auto parts, to name a few. Pity the mid-sized mining players that now must go up against BHP Billiton or Vale.

In short, B2B organizations need robust, coherent brands if they are to grow as fast as they tell shareholders they will. To begin with, brand means more automatic placement on customers' RFP lists. Recall the old saying that "nobody ever got fired for buying IBM"? Now imagine your brand in place of Big Blue's initials, and you can see how a strong brand can get the company name firmly on the bid list. A strong brand can certainly help sway a bidding decision in tight cases, even if doesn't generate the levels of incremental revenue that, say, the Starbucks name does compared to the regular coffee shop down the street.

For many industrials, revenue growth means moving into adjacent markets (and succeeding there) as many once-core product lines mature. But companies must have strong brand names to ease their access to these markets. Like many leading manufacturers, Rolls-Royce has been moving deeply into service businesses; the aero-engine maker now gets more than half of its revenues from long-term aircraft engine servicing contracts. Although the company's reputation for product quality allowed it to enter the service sector, to successfully remain there, all the company's service-side employees must work to uphold this reputation.

An essential ingredient of revenue growth for any company is continued access to top talent. In some heavy engineering companies, many of the most skilled engineers are not far off retirement, prompting recruitment initiatives that have a real urgency to them. Just one example: Large global oil and gas production projects are likely to continue to endure delays due to a growing shortfall of qualified project engineering resources. Many Generation Y graduates see Wall Street and consumer-oriented companies—and increasingly, "green" businesses—as far more alluring employers that offer more interesting career trajectories than they think industrial companies can provide. Google—its first round of job cuts notwithstanding—has been the company that just about every red-blooded graduate wants to work for.

At the same time, growth also depends on steady productivity gains and employee commitment at all levels. A strong brand can do much to maintain employee morale and productivity during trying times. At GE Plastics—now SABIC Innovative Plastics—the challenge for employees came

from GE's pending sale of the business, the loss of a globally known name and their move to a new corporate parent. It was critical for leaders to clearly define what the new business would stand for to prevent any talent loss, buoy employees' enthusiasm, and give them the tools and information to help them correctly deliver the new brand. One employee put it well: "I liked being part of a company with such a great brand name; that was a major reason why I'm here. Going forward, we need to keep the good things but add some new aspects, like having a more flexible business mindset to drive speed and responsiveness." The company's customers were also anxious for staff continuity through the acquisition: Said one: "GE brings up good people. As the business moves forward, I hope the people I deal with stay with the company."

And a great deal of attention has been paid recently—not least to distribution channels. With aggressive rounds of consolidation in retail channels as well as in industrial distribution, many B2B suppliers have found their corporate and product brands eclipsed by those of their downstream partners. Over the last decade, retailers have been particularly bold about adding to their line-ups of store brands.

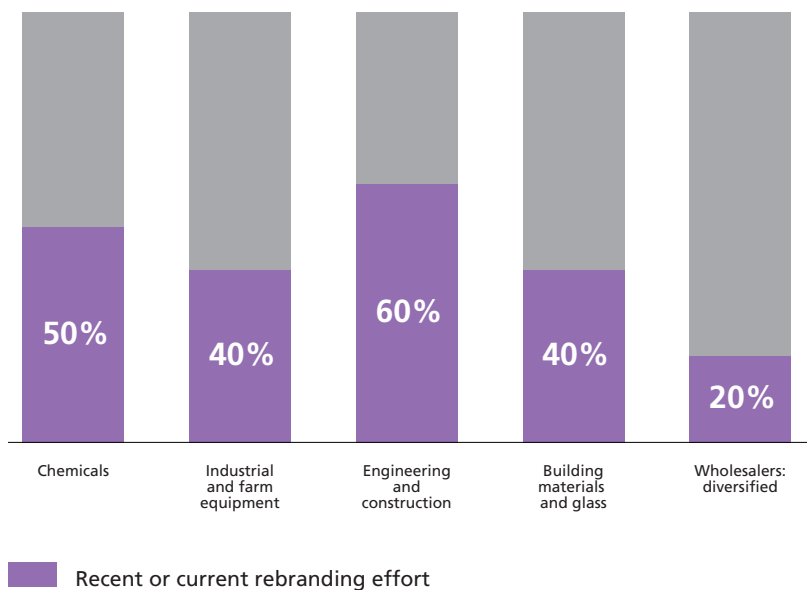
A few leading B2B companies have decided that the downstream "shadow" detracts from brand equity that they can bring to the market, so they have been stepping up efforts to brand directly to end customers. For example, Johnson Controls is starting to put its corporate stamp—"By Johnson Controls"—on the VARTA batteries that are a major brand in Europe. General Electric has aimed ads for its Ecomagination "green" initiative toward the public at large rather than to its buyers of locomotives and aircraft engines. Similarly, United Technologies Corp., with such well-known subsidiaries as Sikorsky helicopters, Pratt & Whitney jet engines and Carrier air conditioners, now promotes its own corporate brand in the trade media and general business media such as *Fortune* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

Nor is the B2B world immune to factors that afflict consumer markets. The growing range of communications channels and vehicles—think streaming video and virtual worlds, iPhones and e-conference rooms—is forcing industrial brands to work harder to break through the clutter. And the emergence of e-marketplaces makes for easier benchmarking of criteria such as product features, functionality and prices. As a result, even the most informed business decision-makers are increasingly relying on "softer" characteristics such as experience and reputation—or brand—to make their decisions.

But what about persuading investors that brand can contribute to growth? Lippincott's research indicates that superior brand strength can help strengthen performance in good markets and stem some of the losses in economic downturns. Our research also reveals a clear correlation between rebranding initiatives and financial performance. Public companies that have rebranded have outperformed their industry indices by more than 15 percent—and the S&P 500 index by more than 20 percent—in their first three years after rebranding.

Indeed, Lippincott's research shows that, in the chemicals sector, for instance, fully half of the top players in the *Fortune* 500 are launching or have launched rebranding campaigns in the last two years. About 60 percent of the top players in engineering and construction are doing the same; in industrial and farm equipment and in building materials and glass, the figures are around 40 percent. (See chart)

#### THE LARGEST INDUSTRIALS ARE FOCUSING ON THE BRAND



Source: Lippincott analysis, *Fortune* 500, 2007 edition

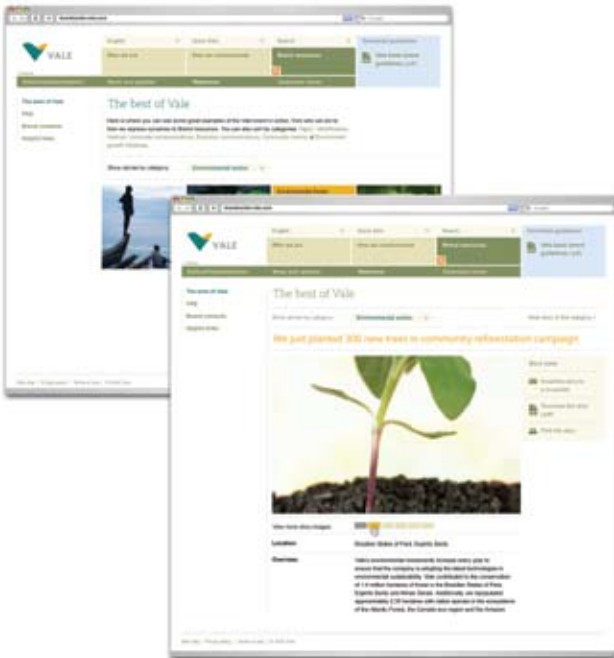
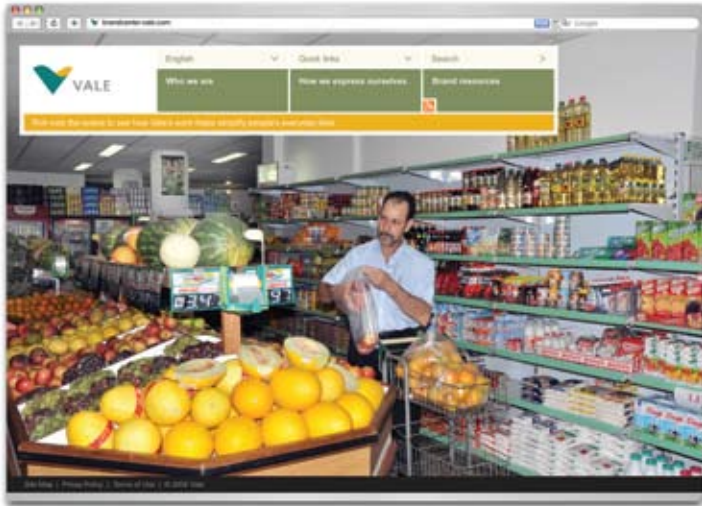
## VALE: REPOSITIONING A BRAND FOR GLOBAL GROWTH

Unlike many players in the mining industry, Vale's leadership recognized that as part of their global growth strategy, they needed to clarify the brand's positioning and communications. Its executives also were alert to major industry trends—among them the need for product diversification that was driving mergers and acquisitions and the rush to meet sharp increases in demand—that increasingly put a few giant companies in competition for the same customers, resources and human capital.

To have the public better understand their company's role in peoples' lives, the executives decided to create a differentiated brand to help explain Vale's contributions and ommitments to society—one that would reach out as much to the public at large as to investors and customers.

Key to the new positioning was a different visual identity. Vale's linear, black-and-white logo drew praise for its clarity, but critics felt it reminded them of Brazil's state-controlled era. Moreover, competitors' logos were unimpressive, and it was clear that there was plenty of room for Vale to stand out with a unique, ownable mark. The rebranding designers got to work on shapes, symbols and colors. They soon leaned toward metaphorical marks that would support evocative positioning rather than announcing the physical or functional aspects of mining. The execution had to be modern, confident and energetic. It had to align with the company's modern positioning and revamped image attributes and be globally appropriate without abandoning Vale's Brazilian roots.

The result was a simple V shape next to the company name in a contemporary and distinctive font that suggested many positive attributes—a heart, the blending of elements of the earth, and the valley the company originally came from. The redesigned logo then became the basis of a company-wide visual identity roll-out that was expanded to sales collateral, business cards, stationery, and vehicle and building signage. The company's new brand strategy and identity quickly won plaudits and buy-in from employees worldwide and have since garnered widespread acceptance with external stakeholders.



Before



## MYTHS THAT PERSIST

Brand is still a tough sell in most B2B circles. The concept is bogged down by many persistent misconceptions. Here are some of the most common myths and the truths behind them.

**The myth is, it's just a new logo, right?** This is perhaps the most difficult belief to unseat, because very often a new logo design is the visual representation and rallying point for a much deeper and broader branding initiative. Yet it doesn't take much insight to realize that unhelpful customer-facing employees in the B2B world, or contract snafus that aren't easily resolved, can have lasting corrosive effects on the supplier's brand. It's also typical to think of branding initiatives as short-term projects, after which everything goes "back to normal." That may be true when the initiative really is limited to a new brochure, but it's far from accurate in light of the non-stop effort to sustain and improve brand equity that is typical at the B2B brand exemplars.

**The myth is, it's not an issue for "rational" business audiences.** The traditional wisdom says B2B companies are speaking to audiences that are focused only on the "measurable" parameters. Yet industrial workplaces comprise ordinary people who are no different from anyone else in how they make judgments, have arguments, fall in love, or dislike people and things. Subjectivity is as much a factor in business-to-business decisions as it is in the consumer-facing world, and it feeds the word-of-mouth recommendations that are direct expressions of brand strength.

**The myth is, we don't have the ad budgets that the consumer companies do.** In brand budget discussions, antagonists immediately focus on the large numbers that B2C companies set aside specifically for advertising—numbers that B2B companies generally can't match, at least not at a budget line-item level. Yet the industrials typically do have the funds dispersed among different functions and business units. B2B companies are typically more sales-oriented and have more decentralized organizational structures, meaning that budgets are spread across many efforts and departments, often entailing some duplication of efforts.

**The myth is, with better salespeople, we can crack these problems.** Sales staff are notoriously resistant to outside influences that might affect their relations with their customers and prospects. They are invariably among the most skeptical when rebranding initiatives are being discussed. What they don't see is the wide range of other touchpoints that help to shape customers' and prospects' opinions—and that can help make their jobs easier.

**The myth is, we'll make it a marketing mandate.** When B2B business leaders do sign up for rebranding, some believe that it's just a matter of the marketing department rolling out the new concept, and then watching as employees fall into line. In practice, resistance can surface much more readily in B2B companies than in most consumer-facing environments—among influential managers as well as front-lines employees. Even when leaders conduct careful communication and consensus-building about a new branding initiative, industrial companies can struggle to master practices, such as developing brand performance metrics or training staff in branding principles, that are common in B2C situations.

## **GETTING B2B BRANDING RIGHT**

There is no one course of action to take to launch, let alone sustain, a successful B2B branding initiative. But there are several characteristics that are common to all:

### **The branding effort is led from the top.**

The leaders at brand exemplars such as General Electric and Procter & Gamble are completely clear about the business value of strong brands. As such, they are unabashed and very visible brand cheerleaders. Dow CEO Andrew Liveris has been in front of his company's soft-sell "Human Element" campaign, which is designed to forge a close connection between the chemicals giant and its 2015 sustainability goals. The campaign's emotional pull presents a much more personable face in an industry that has long drawn the wrath of environmental activists.

### **The branding program is focused.**

Often, once the decision has been made to focus on the brand, leaders feel an urgent desire to solve everything—preferably all at once. Our experience shows that those who succeed start by focusing on the key issues first: Who are the audiences they need to influence, and how do they want to be seen by those audiences? That is how executives at Brazilian mining giant Vale (pronounced "Vah-Lay") approached their brand repositioning. (See: "Vale: Repositioning a Brand for Global Growth" on page 5.)

### **The underlying brand strategy is simple and clear.**

Recognizing that most people remember only a few brand values, the best brand players avoid the inclination to "get all the key themes in," which typically dilutes the power of the new brand. For example, with its on-premise security systems, Johnson Controls has gone from relatively opaque references of the value its systems provide to describing "smart environments" cleverly and clearly, showing the impact that the brand has on consumers' daily lives.

### **The change is signaled through a corporate identity refresh.**

One of the most powerful ways to communicate a change in brand direction is to update or redesign the visual identity. While such an activity requires careful and thoughtful planning, it will instantly telegraph the brand to all audiences, internal and external.

### **Each branding effort is consistent across the company—and over time.**

The brand leaders pay close attention to how consistently a brand is expressed. And they are attuned to the brand experience across the key "touchpoints"—the most important points at which customers interact with the brand, from their earliest awareness through a brochure to long years into after-sales service, for instance.

### **Employee pride in the new brand strategy is instilled through a well-planned launch.**

Creating the new brand is just the beginning; bringing the brand to life for employees is critical. At Johnson Controls, for instance, extensive work went into determining the right ways to convey

the overall brand goals to employees in the context of the company's long-term business objectives, to explain clearly the employees' roles and responsibilities as brand ambassadors, and to give them a shared visual and verbal vocabulary for the revamped look. Some companies have used celebratory internal launches to introduce their redesigned brands successfully and catalyze employee alignment.

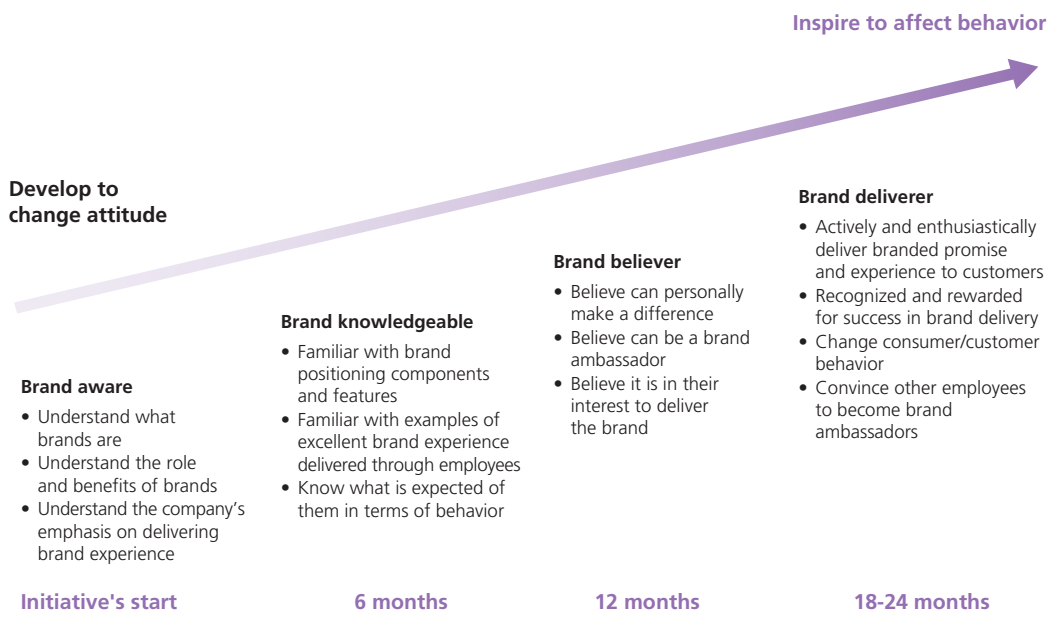
**Brand ROI is measured continually.**

Payback and performance of brand and marketing investment are rigorously measured, and corrective action is implemented if necessary. The metrics go well beyond simple and conventional gauges such as levels of brand awareness: instead, they are weighted toward the relevant customer touchpoints.

**Brand development requires the long view.**

Yes, it is possible to design a new logo or produce a brochure in a few weeks and to roll out a nationwide ad campaign in a matter of months, but to build and sustain a commanding brand takes years. An effective brand experience is built on many repeated experiences over time. That is as true for potential hires as it is for customers. Lippincott envisions the necessary transition taking place in four distinct stages, from early levels of brand awareness to "brand deliverer" status. (See graphic below.)

**STEPS TO IMPLEMENTING A NEW BRAND STRATEGY OVER TIME.**



Short term buzz and one-time initiatives (e.g., one isolated event or internal communication) won't achieve this magnitude of change

### **“CALL TO ACTION” QUESTIONS**

Here are the kinds of brand questions that demand answers from your top team now:

1. Does our reputation immediately put us on our customers’ mental short lists for their next big orders or programs? How do we know one way or the other? If we don’t know, how do we plan to find out?
2. Are we on our customers’ preferred supplier lists? If so, where do we place, and how does that compare to our place last year or two years ago? If we’re not on the list, why is that, and what do we expect to do about it?
3. Does our brand help us to hire world-class talent? What does our brand stand for with potential recruits? Do we even know? For that matter, what do our employees think about our brand—or about any of our product brands? Are they proud of the name—or ashamed of it? Do they encourage or discourage others to join the company?
4. Could our brand help us win a bid if reputation were the deciding factor? If not, why not? Why might our competitor’s brand help them win the bid instead?
5. What does our brand say about us to potential new customers? Does our brand give us entree to expand into adjacent markets? To take on higher-value-added roles such as consulting services? Or are we forever painted as one particular kind of company, unable to do anything different?
6. To what extent is our brand being eclipsed as our big customers or channel partners consolidate and become better-known to end customers—and to Wall Street? What do we need to do to keep our brand from “disappearing”?
7. Do investors really know us? How does Wall Street describe us? How does that square with how we see ourselves? To what extent do we think their impressions affect our stock multiple?
8. Do we have the right mix of brands to go to market? Do our brands fit together logically? Are we supporting and spending on the right brands?
9. How smart are we about our own brand? What should our brand stand for? Can we describe our brand strategy in the proverbial 20-second elevator ride? What’s different about it? What does it contribute to the bottom line? Which customer “touchpoints” make the biggest difference to our brand?
10. Are we actually “living” the brand? Do our employees know how to “deliver” our brand? If so, do they have the tools to really do so?

#### WRAP-UP

It is time for B2B companies to step up their brand management activities. None of the issues that they confront is about to get any easier. Many of those companies are too quiet for their own long-term good: Customers may know them only by what they buy from them, not what they *could* buy from them. The quiet companies can't easily cross-sell or up-sell—or maximize economies of scale with suppliers. And it's hard for them to create cohesive, contemporary impressions of themselves that woo new recruits.

Decades of branding experience in consumer-goods sectors have armed Lippincott with the knowledge of what works and what doesn't. The examples set by leaders such as Johnson Controls and Dow show us all what can be done in B2B industries. And there is no shortage of talented and available brand managers, many of whom are veterans of B2C markets eager for new challenges.

Brand has entered the popular vocabulary. So when will it become part of the vernacular at your company?

## ABOUT LIPPINCOTT

Lippincott is a leading brand strategy and design consultancy. The firm was founded in 1943 as Lippincott & Margulies and pioneered the discipline of corporate identity. Lippincott operates globally from its offices in the United States, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Recent clients include American Express, Citigroup, Delta Air Lines, ExxonMobil, Goldman Sachs, IBM, Mashreq, McDonald's, Nissan, Samsung, Sprint, Vale and Walmart. For more information, visit us at [www.lippincott.com](http://www.lippincott.com).

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