

## POWER TO YOUR PEOPLE

FONDA

How many people are in your marketing department? 'However many people we employ', is the smart response.

But in devising marketing messages, how much care do you take to ensure that everyone in the organisation is equipped to be 'on message'; particularly those the field, or your volunteers.

Here we examine the importance of your brand messages and suggest four steps you can take to ensure they are delivered effectively by the 'folk in the field'.

All of us in marketing spend considerable **time crafting brand messages** and developing vehicles to deliver those messages. Integrated campaigns extend the brand message across a wide array of outlets and media, in our search to make a meaningful connection with stakeholder audiences.

However, in this increasingly complex mix of media there is one communication channel that is often overlooked – **the brand messengers**. The brand messengers are the people personally delivering your brand message to your key audiences – your supporters, customers, and stakeholders. The people interacting with your customers every day are your salesforce.

The point of contact with a customer is the critical moment of truth when the brand promise either **comes to life or falls flat**. Nothing will derail a great brand campaign faster than a person in your organisation offering up a totally different, or even contradictory, message.

**Winning at this point of contact** (what we call ‘the last mile’) with audiences is an absolutely vital component for any successful branding effort. Many studies have shown that brand **decision making and loyalty is driven by the field** – generated at the point of contact with a customer and afterwards.

However, this point of contact is often where the **brand messages get compromised**. We’ve all heard the stories of the well-intentioned fundraisers or volunteers (and they can be the same people) who develop their own materials because they don’t feel the marketing materials truly address their own customer’s needs.

Of course this causes problems for the brand message. Material produced by volunteers may be inaccurate and dilute the brand. So how can **brand marketers ‘turn on’ this channel** for delivering the brand message?

**1 Include as many as possible in the brand message development:** The first course of action is to involve the 'folk in the field' in the creation of brand messages. They can help you quickly figure out how your brand is best positioned against specific, local needs. Their ability to be effective in their market depends on drawing meaningful connections between a customer's pain points and your organisations product or service.

Marketers often do talk to the customer when developing brand messages but people closer to the ground can often provide the between-the-lines nuances.

Tap into your volunteers to get to the heart of the messages that will resonate with customers.

**2 Get more specific with your brand messages:** The one-size fits all brand message may work for marketing low cost, ubiquitous consumer brands but when the product becomes a more considered purchase, or a complex service, the brand message must get more specific to be useful to your field 'sales force'.

Of course, this means an increase in the number of messages that need to be developed and managed. Developing and managing this inventory of messages will require an organization matrix. Messaging matrices are best organized to highlight the value intersections between the specific customer requirements and the relevant brand feature.

Marketing can collect these value intersections and deploy them through a brand messaging platform and collateral system that your volunteers can use.

**3 Extend the brand message deeper into the sale:** In a classic business-to-business selling environment the tools used by sales people toward the end of the buying process are vital to help close the deal. Buyers need to be assured they are making the right decision and hard working materials such as case studies, detailed proposals and highly specific presentations are needed to persuade them.

For Third Sector organisations people on the ground can often be left to their own devices because the marketing materials are often not suitable when the conversation gets down to brass tacks.

Marketers need to consider re-allocating their budgets and extending the message into materials that extend deeper into the sale. In this way the brand message can be consistently reinforced from the first impression it made on your website right through to the proposal that ultimately closed the agreement/partnership/sponsorship/sale.

**4 Make your people in the field a primary audience:** Most marketing plans detail the various audiences a programme will reach. The better ones will include specific tactics for each audience. Few, however, include your field sales force (either direct and/or indirect) as a discrete audience and fewer still make a primary audience.

Selling a brand to your customers or supporters often begins by engaging these people. Consider the added potential of getting your brand message through when you 'turn on' what is effectively your sales force and have those front-line resources become your strongest brand champions. So as you tinker with messages and media, have a thought for your people in the field and make sure they have the resources – be it knowledge or collateral – to be effective megaphones for your brand messages.