How to create an effective internal branding strategy with impact (top tips)

Category: Strategy
written by Stewart Hodgson | 7 December 2023

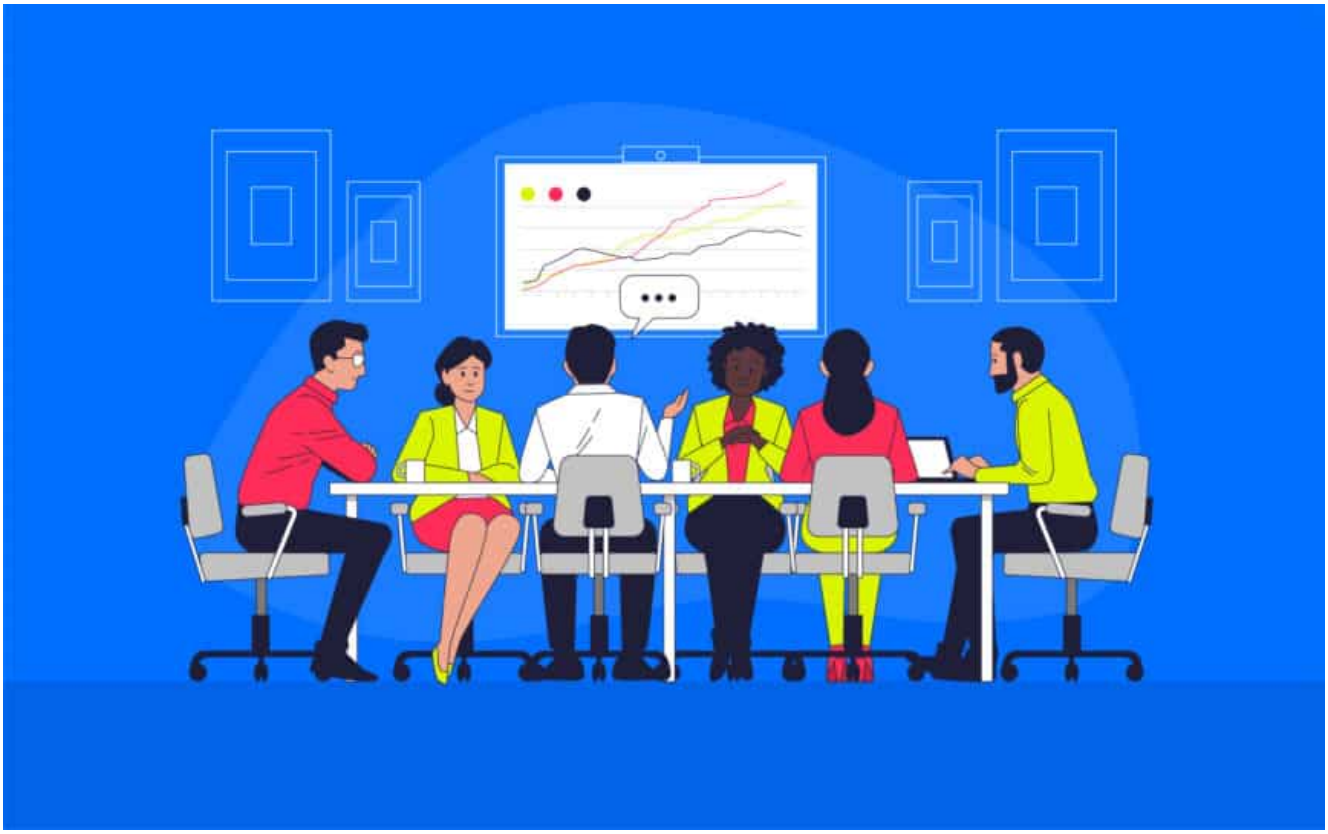
Does your business have a robust internal branding strategy? Most companies know that a solid external brand is important for conveying personality, values, and vision to your audience. But it's easy to overlook the importance of extending those branding efforts internally.

For a company to be successful, it needs to resonate emotionally with more than just consumers. Your employees and stakeholders also need to be aware of your mission statement, your company values, and how they're responsible for driving the business towards its goals.

Implemented correctly, internal branding enhances company culture, creates brand ambassadors, and boosts engagement. It also helps to strengthen the impact of your external brand. After all, your employees are responsible for embodying the unique elements of your brand.

Follow the right practices, and you're more likely to deliver an excellent customer experience, build an emotional connection with external audiences, and convert potential customers.

So, where do you get started with the internal branding process?



What is internal branding? The basics

Today, most companies are familiar with the concept of “branding”. Your brand identity is a crucial way to showcase the deeper nuances of your business to your community. It’s how you highlight the values of the brand you promote, and engage customers.

But your brand isn’t just for your potential consumers. It’s also what drives the engagement and success of your internal teams. Internal branding is a corporate philosophy, focused on aligning your employees with the culture, identity, and purpose of your company.

This is crucial at a time when 92% of employees would consider leaving their current employment if offered a role in a company with a better reputation.

Internal branding helps your employees understand the role

they play in your company, and what that company delivers to its audience. It connects staff members with the company's values, and sets the foundations for a productive, positive work environment.



Internal branding vs external branding

So, how does internal branding differ from external branding? There's actually a lot of overlap. Your external brand image, and internal identity should be aligned. Internal branding can even help to enhance external branding.

When your team members know the values and purpose of your brand on a deeper level, they can embed these insights into everything they do. This includes creating marketing campaigns, communicating with customers, and even promoting your business through advocacy.

The main difference is that when you focus on external

branding, you’re looking at how the public perceives your brand. Your focus is on how your brand colors, messaging strategy, logo, and other assets elevate brand equity in the eyes of your target audience.

With internal branding, the ultimate goal is to connect with employees, and turn every staff member into a potential “ambassador” for your company.

Internal branding embeds your brand guidelines, mission, and vision for long-term success into your internal culture, engaging and guiding your employees. It familiarizes your employees with all of the unique aspects of your company’s vision and purpose.

Without strong internal branding strategies, your employees are working without direction. Different staff members may have different ideas of what your company actually stands for, which can affect their behaviors and lead to disconnects in your team.



The benefits of internal branding

So, is internal brand alignment and effective branding actually worthwhile for a company? The simple answer is yes. The studies prove it. One Harvard Business Review article looked at how the internal branding strategy at British Petroleum affected business results.

They discovered that:

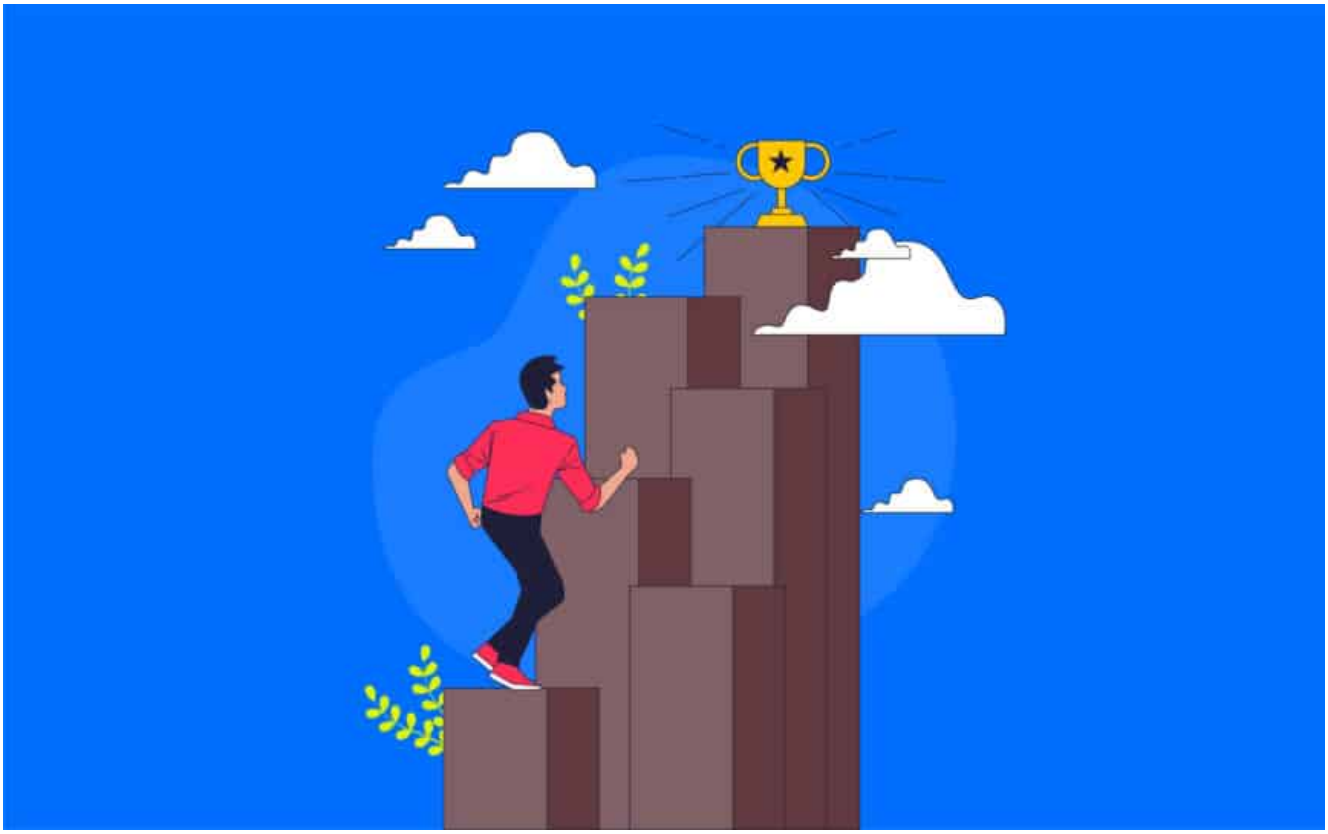
- 76% of employees felt more positive about the new brand.
- 80% were more aware of the brand's values and how to convey them in messaging.
- 90% felt good about the future of the company.

On a broad level, good internal branding helps develop strong connections between your employees and your business. It elevates your employer brand, company culture, and performance.

However, the benefits of a strong internal branding strategy can go even further, by:

- **Increasing employee engagement:** Fostering a positive work culture and defining a purpose for your employees reduces turnover and increases employee satisfaction.
- **Boosting productivity:** When employees have a clear view of missions and company values, they're more productive, more capable of coming up with fresh ideas, and more capable of performing according to the company's ideals.
- **Enhancing customer satisfaction:** A good internal branding strategy helps to provide a consistent end-user experience to customers. It ensures all employees can send the right message to your target audience.

Simply put, internal branding doesn’t just improve employee experience, it’s the key to cultivating business success on various levels.



The internal branding process: Crucial steps

Developing an internal branding campaign isn’t too different from building an external brand. If you already have a clear set of brand guidelines, you may already have many of the resources you need. Here are the most important steps involved in creating an internal branding strategy.

Step 1: Define your brand mission and values

Your company’s mission is the key to giving your employees purpose. Studies show that employees who have a higher sense of purpose can outperform their peers by up to 400%. The right mission shows your employees what’s important to your business

both now and in the future.

It helps team members understand your brand promise, and why your business exists. For instance, Nike's mission statement is to "bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete".

Your values, on the other hand, look at "how" you're going to deliver on your promises. For example, Patagonia's values focus on building the best products, and protecting nature.

These values help you to outline the best practices your company's employees should follow when sharing your brand story, communicating with consumers, and completing crucial tasks.

Step 2: Engaging your people

One of the most important, but often overlooked parts of building a strong internal branding strategy, is getting your employees involved. It's your team that drives the success of your internal brand, so engaging with them throughout the development process is crucial.

When building or developing your internal brand, collect feedback from your employees. Find out how they perceive your brand, and what they think about its future. Use employee surveys, focus groups, town hall meetings and other methods to collect insights.

Listening to your team members, and embedding their thoughts into your internal branding strategy could be the key to earning greater buy-in from your teams. When employees feel they play a part in shaping the structure of your company, they'll be more invested in it.

Step 3: Align your internal and external

brands

While your company's external brand has a different purpose than your internal brand, they should both be clearly aligned. You probably already have many of the brand assets you need to shape external perception, such as color palettes and logos.

Your internal brand should also feature these components. For instance, all of your team members should be familiar with your brand logo, what it means, your brand story, and your personality.

Make sure the values you share with your own employees are the same as those you convey to your audience. If your number one differentiator for your customers is your commitment to customer service, your number one internal brand value should be the same too.

Telling your customers your main focus is "innovation" and your employees that your focus is "more sales", leads to a disconnect that can harm your brand messages and value.

Step 4: Embed your internal brand into your company culture

Consistently communicating your internal brand and its components to your employees is crucial to keep everyone aligned. You can start with your onboarding strategy, including insights into your internal brand in the documents you give to new team members.

To ensure consistency, make sure your leadership team upholds the values you set for your team members, and sets goals for your employees that reflect your mission. You can also consider running launch workshops, training initiatives, and mentorship programs for new teams.

Think about the day-to-day activities of your team members,

and weave your internal brand into those experiences. For instance, your brand statement might appear on your intranet homepage, or at the top of your collaboration app threads.

Additionally, ensure your employees have access to the resources they need to learn more about what your brand means and what you stand for. Creating a knowledgebase with insights into your brand mission, guidelines, and other components will make it easier for employees to stay on track.

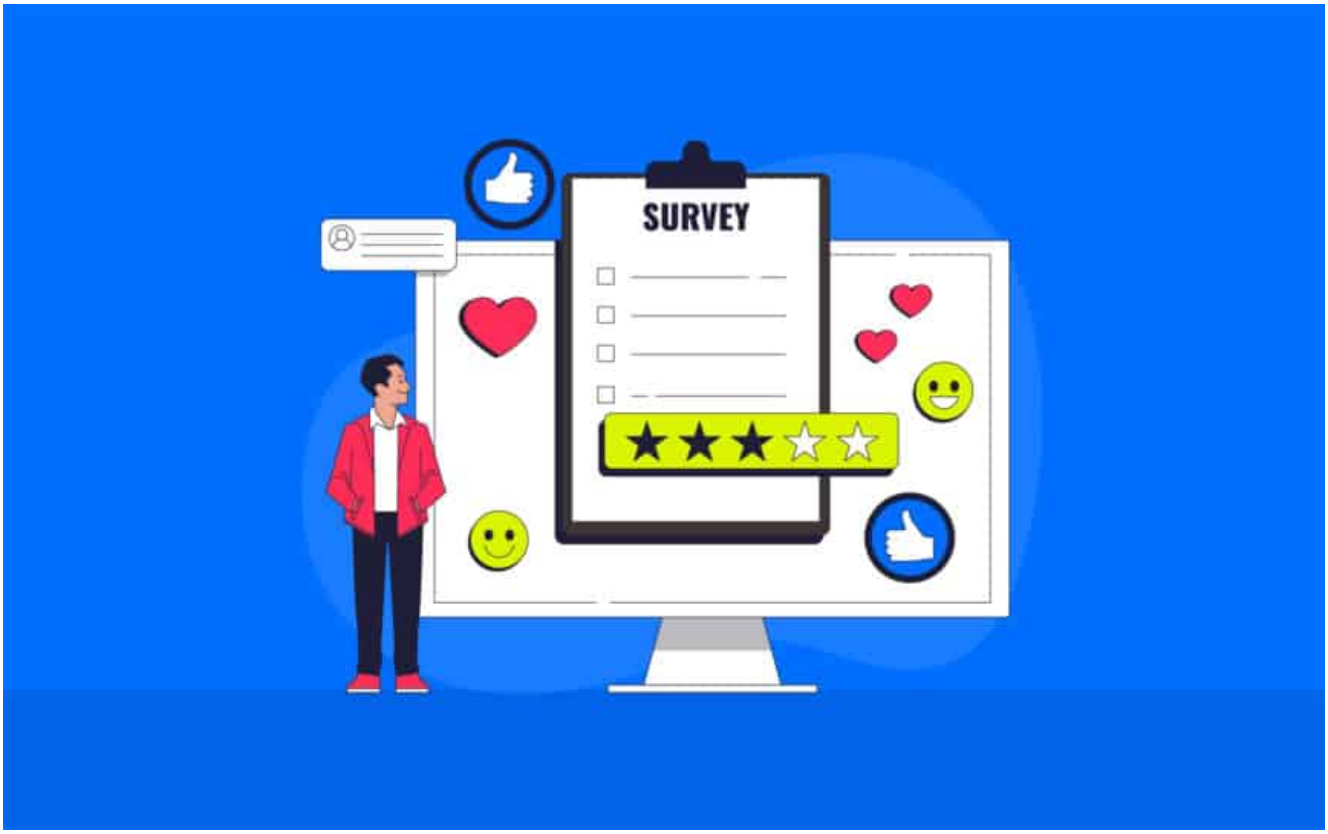
Step 5: Reward, recognize, and incentivize

One of the main reasons an internal branding strategy can fail is business leaders lose interest in promoting the brand after the initial launch. To drive the right results, you need to take a consistent approach to motivating, inspiring, and educating your teams.

Recognizing and rewarding your employees for upholding the values of your company's brand is one of the best ways to boost engagement. Use your internal communication channels to share stories about the success of your teams, and highlight their efforts.

Don't just reward your best employees when they increase sales or revenue. Ask your leaders to champion team members who embody your brand values. You can even set up incentive programs, reward programs, and competitions that help highlight your brand principles.

Rewarding and recognizing your teams helps to preserve engagement during the ongoing process of internal branding. It also improves employee loyalty, reduces turnover, and increases alignment.



Measuring the success of an internal branding campaign

Just as its important to constantly evaluate the success of your external branding strategies, it's also crucial to track the impact of your internal brand strategy. You need to keep a close eye on the results of your efforts to ensure they're having a positive impact on your organization.

Fortunately, there are various ways to track and measure your results, such as:

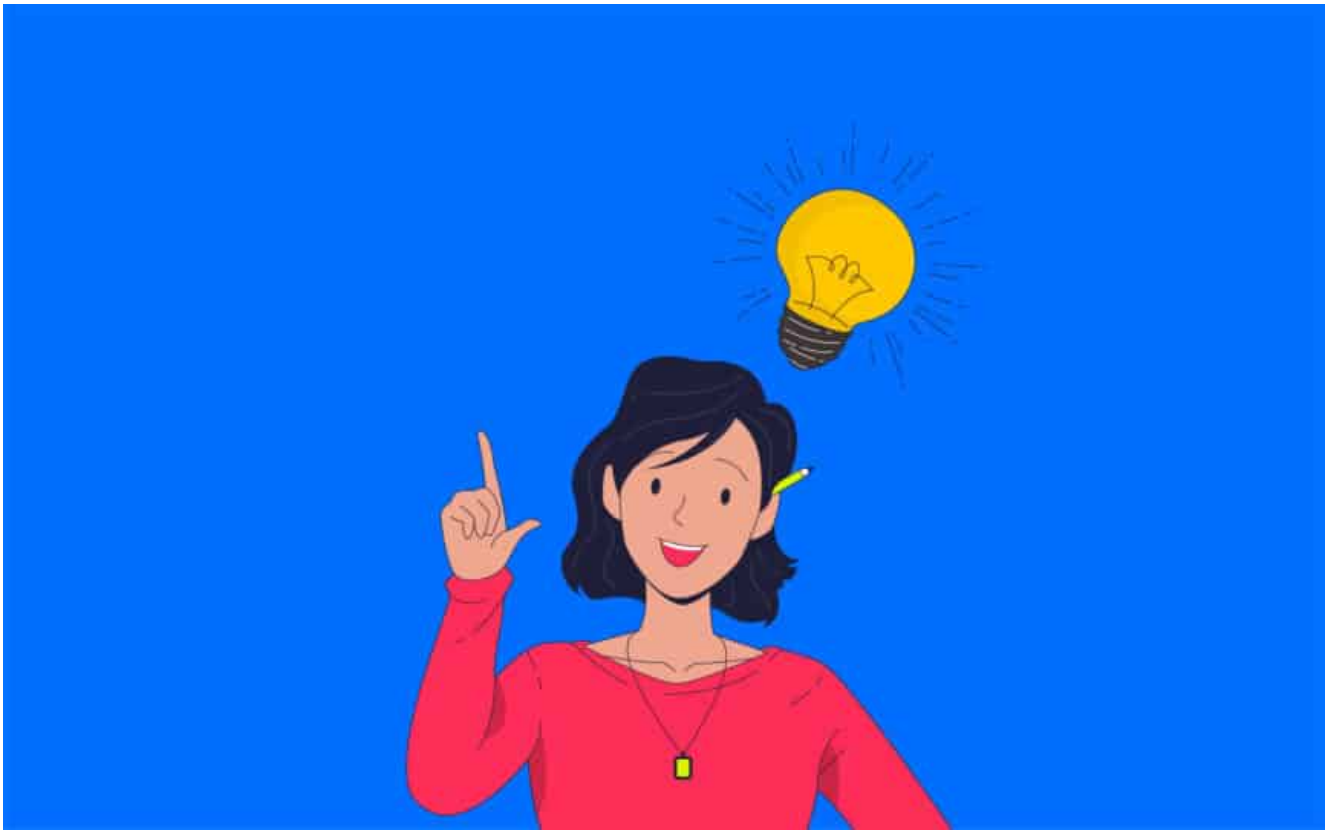
- **Conducting employee surveys:** Collect insights from your team members about their perception of the brand and their understanding of its values, and culture.
- **Tracking employee advocacy:** Pay attention to how often your employees promote your business to the outside world through social media and other channels.
- **Engagement levels:** Monitor how engaged your employees

are with your internal campaigns, and how frequently they contribute with fresh ideas and insights.

- **Training and development:** Measure the completion and participation rates of brand-related development programs, workshops, and learning modules.
- **Recruitment:** Examine how effectively your employer brand attracts new talent to your team. How many applications do you receive for each job post?
- **Retention:** Monitor how long your employees stay with your business, and how frequently they consider looking for new roles.
- **Behavioral changes:** Track the differences in processes and behaviors throughout your employees. How well do they embody your brand values?

You can also get insights into the success of your internal branding strategy by collecting stories and testimonials from staff, both internally, and through third-party sites like Glassdoor. Some companies may even see the impact of good internal branding in their finances.

A strong internal brand can reduce turnover and improve productivity, lowering the fees you pay to attract new talent, and increasing employee output.



Internal branding best practices: Top tips for success

Now you know how to create and measure an internal branding strategy, it’s time to optimize your results. One important thing to keep in mind is that an amazing internal brand, just like a strong external brand, isn’t built overnight.

You’ll need a consistent approach to updating your internal communications, conveying your core values, and attracting and retaining top talent.

Here are some quick tips to ensure your internal branding strategy pays off…

1. Get to know your employees

When you’re building an external brand or marketing campaign, you focus on learning about your target audience, their preferences, pain points, and goals. When developing your

internal brand, you need the same level of insight into your employees.

Focus on constantly communicating with your team members. Find out what they like and dislike about your corporate culture. Ask them what motivates and inspires them in your organization.

There are various ways to collect insights, from hosting open discussions and meetings to in-person conversations, and interviews. You can even send out regular surveys to measure brand awareness.

2. Create an employee advocacy program

An employee advocacy program is one of the most effective ways to not only measure the success of your internal branding, but boost your visibility online. Invite and encourage your team members to share their experiences with your brand in a multitude of different ways.

Interview new employees about their onboarding experience, and ask them to share reviews on hiring platforms. When your employees accomplish something, ask them to write about their experience and publish their insights in your business blog.

Incentivize your staff members to share good news, accomplishments, and insights into your business on their social media channels. This will make your team members feel respected and valued, and even help you to attract new staff to your team in the long term.

3. Personalize rewards and incentives

As mentioned above, regularly rewarding and recognizing your employees for their hard work and commitment to your company is crucial to success. However, it’s important to be aware of your employees’ preferences when it comes to receiving feedback.

Some of your team members might prefer to receive recognition and praise privately, while others will be happier with public announcements. Speak to your team members about their preferences for receiving feedback, and even what kind of rewards they'd like to receive.

Not every employee is interested in getting a bonus whenever they do something right. Some will be happy with more paid time off, more responsibilities, or extra training.

4. Take advantage of technology

In today's complex working world, internal communications can often suffer. Employees are working in a variety of different ways, with remote and hybrid operations growing more common. Technology can help to keep everyone on the same page.

Communication and collaboration tools like Slack and Microsoft Teams are a great way to ensure everyone can continue to communicate and collaborate in a distributed workforce. They can strengthen employee bonds, and improve alignment.

Knowledge bases and online hubs where you can share information about your company history, or brand content ensures everyone can access the same resources. Bulletin boards and email announcements can ensure transparent communication about business changes.

Remember, around 74% of employees think they're constantly missing out on company information and news, so ensure everyone feels informed.

5. Communicate clearly during times of change

Change is an inevitable part of any business. Over time, your brand purpose may evolve, your product line could change, and you may even start targeting a new customer base. These

changes can all lead to uncertainty in your employees, harming your internal brand.

During periods of change, make sure your employees have a clear view of the bigger picture, and what you're trying to achieve. Make sure you communicate clearly about your new values, purpose, or vision, so your staff members stay in the loop.

Where necessary, consider providing extra training and support to your brand advocates, to ensure they can continue promoting your business with the right messaging.



Internal branding examples: Successful campaigns

In recent years, the importance of internal branding has grown, for virtually all businesses large and small. The business world is growing more competitive, and companies know they need to engage their workforce correctly to pave the way

for growth.

Here are some excellent internal branding examples, showcasing the benefits of the right strategy:

FedEx

FedEx doesn't just have an excellent external branding strategy, it also knows how to incentivize and engage its employees. As one of the top employers in the US, FedEx commits to aligning its teams around specific values and ideals.

For instance, the company champions the "purple promise", which is a commitment every employee makes to delivering an outstanding experience. When employees live up to the expectations of the internal brand strategy, they win awards and recognition.

The "purple promise award" showcases some of FedEx's most innovative and successful staff members, encouraging everyone to go above and beyond the call of duty.

Netflix

One of the world's biggest streaming services, Netflix knows how to capture the attention of its employees, and its customers. One of the most impressive aspects of the company's internal branding strategy is the commitment to giving staff members a voice.

Netflix created the "WeAreNetflix" sub-brand, with a host of social media profiles, designed to showcase company culture and employee stories. Through this brand, Netflix highlights the successes of its team, and recognizes their commitment.

It also gives employees an opportunity to share their unique ideas. There's even a WeAreNetflix podcast, which consists of content produced entirely by the Netflix team.

Virgin Media

As one of the world's most successful companies, Virgin has impacted virtually every part of the modern world, offering streaming, phone services, and more. Virgin Media stands out not just for its great external branding, but its people-based culture.

The company consistently engages employees in all of its production and planning activities, ensuring individual team members have an opportunity to guide the direction of the brand.

What's more, it's committed to supporting employees from all walks of life. For instance, during the pandemic, the company introduced "Virgin Angels" to UK and Off-shore call centers. These "Angels" take on tasks that otherwise distract or frustrate everyday employees.

Mastering your internal branding strategy

Building an internal branding strategy is just as important as designing the ideal external brand. The right internal brand ensures current employees and new staff members are all aligned around the same values, visions, and goals for your business.

With strong internal branding strategies, companies can strengthen employee experiences, leverage the power of advocacy, and boost brand perception. What's more, internal branding has a direct impact on how successful your external marketing and branding campaigns are.

Investing in internal branding isn't just crucial for consistency; it's an essential part of ensuring your business thrives in a competitive landscape.

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