

INTEGRATED BRAND MANAGEMENT—OCTOBER 2014

The Solution to Marketing Communications' Marketplace Issues

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What Is Integrated Brand Management?

The 20th century marketing communications (marcom) strategy for business is all too familiar and outdated as well. As this model has become increasingly more inefficient for today's business environment, how do we improve upon the shape that marcom has taken? What tools, strategies and examples can we use to create a business model more in tune with the ideals of 21st century business? The solution is to incorporate a model of comprehensive communications integration, or integrated brand management (IBM), which is the ideal method for modern marcom—but what exactly is it in practice? The definition is fluid and does not restrict itself to the binaries that traditionally exist within business. Although there is a general formula for this tactic, IBM boasts an adaptability to its individual brand values and overall environment. The objective is to produce a company's marketing communications cohesively, holistically and proactively. Ideally employed, integrated brand management is a leadership practice that unites all communications of a company with its core values while conveying a promise to create deep, long-lasting relationships with its audiences. This increases sustainable brand value and a company's return on investment.

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Historically, companies dealt with clients and stakeholders through various and strictly individual silos: while companies may have maintained a universal logo and tagline, they communicated inconsistently through different channels with employees, customers, suppliers, government and regulatory agencies, investors and other communities. Today, these walls have been ripped down by technology and convergence within these various groups. Marketplace activism has had a great deal to do with this, as has fiercer competition between these agencies. Globally, the low rate of inflation signifies that price (or, depending on the relationship, cost) is the most influential factor. But when price is the driving force, it lessens differentiating qualities between products, creating mass-commoditization. Nobody invests in a brand to play in a commodity field. Here, integrated brand management becomes the differentiator, the thing that decommodifies the product. Backing the brand with IBM means that every communications material that speaks to that brand will signify that differentiation.

Why IBM?

In this arena, IBM also creates greater cost-effectiveness. Whether stemming from a third party like Curran & Connors or *your* internal staff, the creative function is a time-plus-materials business. Consequently, achieving scale is critical. The prevailing model does not allow internal or external groups to achieve proper scale, mostly because initiatives are pursued on a project-to-project basis. By using IBM as the new business

model for marcom, rather than continuing with this project-to-project formula, the new method is to treat all projects, holistically, under the company's brand umbrella. In a world where marketplace activism is continuing to change the face of consumerism, being proactive is key, making IBM an absolute must. Take fast-food chain Chipotle as an example. It's not enough to create sustainable brand awareness around Hollywood-style commercials and print ads. Now, the people either want calls-to-action, the facts or *both*. In an article written for Bloomberg¹ about Chipotle's sustainability practices, a spokesperson stated that because of finite resources Chipotle has never reported their sustainability efforts. With a flood of changes brought about by activist activity, the glitzy advertisements are simply not enough to solidify the company's brand in the eyes of the public. Consumers are now asking Chipotle to produce a report detailing their sustainability efforts, showing evidence that they do in fact "practice what they preach." This not only shows the need for sustainability reporting, but also the need for sustainability reporting packaged within a company's brand side-by-side with—or, better yet, integrated within the entire suite of—that company's marcom materials. IBM is about being proactive instead of reactive, getting ahead of backlash, requests and protests before they have a chance to appear.

The Curran & Connors 21st Century Solution

Branding strategy is not easily done from inside an organization that employs their marketing communications officials as a cost center. Talk alone will not drive these branding fundamentals;

you must preach these values and make them apparent in all of your communications and marketing. We know because this is precisely the thing we at Curran & Connors are hired to do every day. Our proven track record continues to address the chronic issues that face marcom today. Most importantly, we have a unique business model featuring a wide range of creative talent, disciplined management structure and efficient use of branding and design technology, all of which showcase the professional services value proposition we offer. One extremely important tool is your organization alignment, and in order to maximize it you must permanently etch your mission statement and core values into the minds of all your employees, vendors and everyone who interacts with your brand. Through Curran & Connors' professional services, we can reduce cost and improve the quality of your creative output in one of two ways: insourcing or outsourcing. With one of these two approaches, our IBM system is applied to every communications material we produce and manage in the most efficient way possible. To learn more about how your company can achieve greater cost-effectiveness through integrated brand management, let's talk.

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¹Leslie Patton, "Chipotle Asked to Produce Sustainability Report," <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-03-05/chipotle-asked-to-produce-sustainability-report.html>, (March 5, 2014)



curran&connors

Corporate Headquarters

Curran & Connors, Inc.

140 Adams Avenue

Suite 20 C

Hauppauge, NY 11788-3618

631.435.0400

Noah Butensky

Chief Operating Officer

nbutensky@curran-connors.com

www.curran-connors.com