Aaker’s Brand Identity Elaboration model

Type of model: Brand model (structure model)
Author(s): D. Aaker
Domain: Identity and image

Figure 1: Four elements of brand identity

David A. Aaker’s so-called brand identity elaboration model is intended to elaborate the identity of a brand. The idea is to convert the aspirational image a brand is to emanate into four elements: strategic imperatives, proof points and internal and external role models. That is the only way a brand identity can be brought to life. Aaker explains that this model is intended to stimulate out-of-the-box thinking and to tackle brand identity more effectively.

In the following we will further explain the four elements of brand identity:

1. **Strategic imperatives**: a strategic investment in a business resource or programme needed to achieve or maintain the required image. If a brand, for example, has to be known for its honesty and helpfulness, what systems and programmes will then have to be implemented within a company to make that happen? Aaker points out that when a company is unwilling to invest in these strategic imperatives, the time has come to reconsider the brand. A bank that places customers centre stage, for example, should at least have an IT system that allows each and every employee to call up customer details.

2. **Proof points**: programmes, initiatives and resources already available within a company that can be deployed to make the identity tangible. HEMA [budget department stores], for example, regularly reconfirms its identity
(‘good quality at a reasonable price’) by stressing the origin of its name (Hollandsche Eenheidsprijzen Maatschappij Amsterdam) [Dutch Uniform Prices Company Amsterdam].

3. **Internal role models**: programmes, events, stories or people that fit the brand identity and can reinforce it. An example is the invention of Post-it Notes. A 3M engineer who was part of a church choir needed a piece of paper that would not drop from the book of hymns when turning the page. This story became an internal role model for the innovative culture at 3M.

4. **External role models**: external role models are found by assuming a wider perspective, by looking at other brands and companies, for example. These external role models have a greater impact on the brand and stir up imagination. The story goes, for example, that when Tony Blair became Britain’s Prime Minister, he approached ‘New Britain’ as a brand (with values such as open, Europe, technology, multicultural, and female power). And he attempted to identify brands that could convey this feeling of New Britain (which included Häagen-Dazs, Twinings herbal tea and Linda McCartney meals); i.e. external role models.

Most companies will find their main challenge in the strategic imperatives and proof points. Aaker considers these ‘must dos’ and ‘must maintains’ that can be used to challenge the company. Alongside that, internal and external role models can stimulate effective programmes.

By elaborating the four abovementioned elements, a clear picture of the brand identity emerges, with clearly identified weaknesses a company needs to work on.

**Reference(s)**

* : Available in the EURIB library.