

Model: Stages of Internal Branding

Type of model: Brand model (process model)
 Author(s): Marc van Eck, Niels Willems, Ellen Leenhouts
 Domain: Internal branding

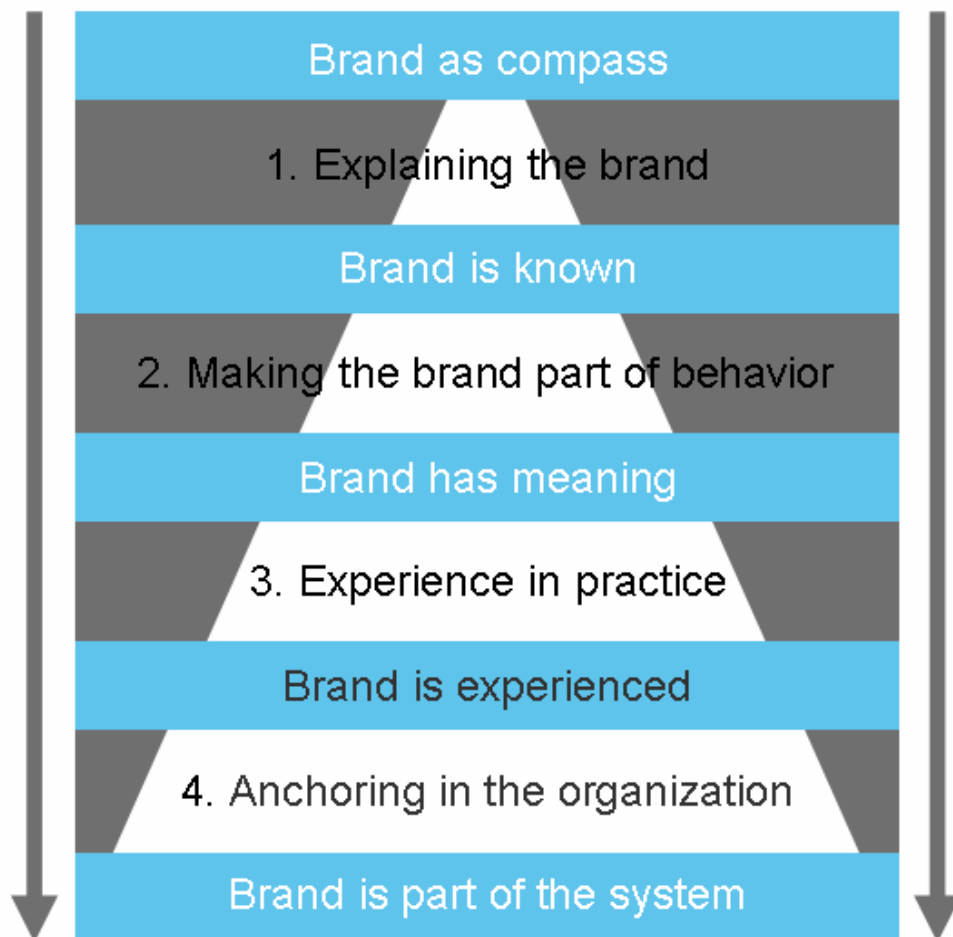


Figure 1: Stages of Internal Branding according to Van Eck, Willems and Leenhouts

Van Eck, Willems and Leenhouts' model 'Stages of Internal Branding' pinpoints five stages on the way to anchoring a brand in an organisation. They start off with a zero stage, and subsequently describe stages 1 through 4. The zero stage involves defining what the brand stands for, and basically constitutes choosing a brand's positioning in the market. The subsequent first stage of the model sees the brand's values explained to employees. In the second stage, employees are asked to put their finger on how the brand's values affect their work, or could affect. In the third stage, employees will try to incorporate the

points they identified in stage two into their actions. The fourth and last stage then becomes the time when the brand is actually anchored in all sorts of systems, such as management and HR systems (in the latter case in review systems, for example). We will further delve into the five stages in the following.

Stage 0. Defining. The starting stage, or 'zero stage', consists of defining the brand's/organisation's place in its environment. Ideally, this involves mapping the values shared by the people that make up the organisation. It is, subsequently, advisable to also map external factors affecting the company. This can, for example, include things like developments in the competition arena, consumer trends and/or customer needs. Based on the internal and external information gathered, a vision or ambition can be formulated for the brand, from which a brand promise or brand personality can subsequently be derived. The authors refer to that as the 'brand compass'. They go on to state that brand positioning always has to be relevant to the customer, in line with the corporate identity (authentic) and differentiating in relation to competitors. When formulating brand values, they should not be overly socially desirable. Overworked qualities, such as integrity, commitment, respect, trust and teamwork, should be avoided.

Stage 1. Explaining. At this stage of the process, the brand is explained to the company's own staff. This will have to be done in such a way that employees actually understand what their brand represents. The proof of the pudding here is that employees can explain the brand essence to others. That means it should not be an overly complicated story. It has to be simple and to the point in its formulation and/or representation, with an eye to inspiring people, arousing their enthusiasm, and finally to getting them to buy into the story. The brand story also has to be told in such a way that employees understand that it is meant to drive sustainable change, and is not a fad. Employees also have to be told that their role in the story is a crucial one. After all, they are the ones who have to fulfil the brand promise. There has to be clarity on the fact that the behaviour and performance of employees greatly influence the image and reputation of the organisation. Because the employees will be the ones actually delivering on the brand promise. External advertising campaigns don't do that; they merely *promise* things. This strategic view should be brought to the fore unequivocally, in a lasting manner. When this stage is handled well, this constitutes, in the view of the authors, a solid foundation from which to take the next step.

Stage 2. Charging. This is the stage when the brand acquires actual meaning. The brand has to be charged with energy. Employees have to be actively involved in this process. After all, the brand has to become theirs, they will have to feel committed to the brand, and identify with it. In this stage, employees of different departments will have to be consulted in various sessions on what the brand means to or can mean for them. Employees should be asked to share how the (brand) values could enter into their day-to-day activities. The brand can thus be charged differently from one person to the next. This stage should not lapse into dictating what the brand should mean to employees. If that were to happen, the brand will never truly be their own, but always remain an imposed regimen/ guideline. The outcome of these sessions can subsequently be used by management to further formally flesh out the brand. Wherever required, the management can even adjust certain aspects of the brand on the basis of information from aforementioned sessions.

Stage 3. Experiencing. The brand only truly comes to life in the employees' daily work. The authors refer to this stage as the stage of 'experiencing' the brand. After the previous stages, where the emphasis was on raising awareness, stage 3 actually takes the brand by the horns. The main thing here is to make sure employees start incorporating the brand into their daily work. The brand should now start functioning as a guideline for employees' day-to-day actions. They will, in other words, have to 'live' the brand. Employees will have to start looking at their work through 'brand-tinted' glasses, and be aware of how the brand can lead them and help them in their work. In order to make this stage a success, it will have to be assessed how the organisation rates on the different brand values. One possible question that should be answered is: to what extent does our external position dovetail with who we actually are? The results of this assessment will subsequently have to be fed back to the different departments. It is then key to have individual employees or teams discover how the brand value and brand proposition relate to their internal values and corporate structure.

Stage 4. Anchoring. After completion of stage 3 (experiencing) employees will know what the brand means to them, and how it can help/lead them in their daily work. The key question in the last stage is: how can the brand be anchored in the organisation in such a way that the (desired) brand behaviour becomes second nature for everyone? All echelons of the organisation will, at this stage, have to start living and breathing the brand. In order to speed up the 'anchoring process' the brand will have to be made a physical part of internal company systems. That involves screening IT systems, HRM systems,

corporate processes and procedures to check whether they are brand proof. If after some time it emerges that there are processes/systems that do not entirely function in line with the brand criteria, management will have to look into adjusting these. In order to be able to effectively implement planned changes, employees will have to be involved in decision-making processes. Without employee commitment and support, brandworthy behaviour will probably be an illusion.

Reference(s)

Eck, M. van, Willems, N., Leenhouts, E. (2008), Internal branding in de praktijk; het merk als kompas, [Internal Branding in practice; the brand as compass] Pierson Education Benelux Service, Amsterdam. *

* : available in the EURIB library.