



It's What's Behind The Branding Buzz That Counts

It's no secret that marketing people love buzz words. Used properly, buzz words serve a useful purpose, but are so overused or misused that they have lost any value.

"Branding" is one such word. Everyone "does branding" these days – graphic designers, research companies, advertising agencies, public relations firms, even special events planners. They all say they're "branding" experts. Rubbish.

Most people understand that a "brand" is the immediate reaction someone has when they hear a company's name or see its logo.

In the automotive industry, for example, Rolls-Royce = luxury, Toyota = quality, Viper = thrill. It would be extremely difficult to find anyone who disagrees with those characterizations.

That's the power of a "brand."

"Branding," on the other hand, is a process easier said than done.

In our view, you start by understanding the current brand perception amongst key stakeholders, then define what you want it to be, build a roadmap to bridge the gap, and execute a series of integrated programs to achieve the desired end.

The key word here is "integrated." Logos, research, advertising, public relations, social media, etc., are simply tools employed as necessary. Deciding which tools to utilize, and deploying them effectively and efficiently, is what separates true branding practitioners from the myriad of firms and sole practitioners that are merely trying to expand the range of what they can sell to clients.

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Working Smarter AND Harder

By: Jamie Flinchbaugh

These days more than ever, smart companies look for ways to improve in every area of their business. On-going efforts to foster creativity; improve product / service quality; increase through-put; and find efficiencies are as numerous as they can be effective.

"Lean" is a discipline that serves as the common denominator for many successful companies. At its heart, it is an approach and way of thinking that harnesses a company's greatest asset—it's brainpower.

This is a timely topic and so for this issue, we offer the following reprint of an article by Jamie Flinchbaugh, a recognized expert and leader in this field.

This article was originally published in the November 2008 issue of Assembly magazine.

Perhaps the most often used phrase in association with lean is "work smarter, not harder." The concept has been true virtually forever. Moving huge blocks of stone across the desert to build a pyramid, getting the most crops out of an acre of soil, and making more shoes from a day of labor, are all problems solved best by ingenuity and innovation.

Lean is no different. Why push when you can roll, or lift when you can lever? We should certainly be using our brains, finding ways to get more output from the available resources. The key to productivity, quality and profitability is indeed working smarter. In fact, one excellent way of eliminating waste is by eliminating un-



Jamie Flinchbaugh

smart hard work.

The most common approach used by organizations not using lean is just working people harder, faster or longer. I would argue that working faster is perhaps the most popular solution to barriers that exist today. Whether we owe a report at the 11th hour or are late for work, speeding up is an everyday solution. We clearly know the flaws in this approach, hence the need to "work smarter, not harder." As often as that phrase is used, I feel it ends up delivering the wrong message.

Lean itself is hard work, and a truly lean organization works hard. In fact, Toyota's roots are in a region that is rural, entrepreneurial and hard-working. That regional culture was recognized as a part of its success, and is embedded quite naturally into what we now call the Toyota Way. Lean is about working hard.

The work of improvement itself is hard work. Many of you have probably been

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Case Study

Cerion LLC

Marketing Strategy:

Building an Integrated Communications Foundation to Support Marketing

Communications & Public Relations

Cerion LLC was formed in December 2008 as a manufacturing holding company. Management was focused on quickly building an organization by acquiring good companies that have found themselves in poor cash positions as a result of the downturn in the automotive industry.

The challenge for Cerion, and for P2R Associates, was to help knit and unify the cultures; articulate a strong and positive investor brand, and differentiate Cerion operations in the marketplace as well as from private equity companies. Given the timing of high-profile bailouts and ongoing economic distress in the automotive industry, customers have a low opinion of private equity's history of flipping businesses they acquire. So P2R worked with Cerion to research, develop and employ a strategy to reassure customers that Cerion was a viable firm that held a long-term view of manufacturing.

In addition to developing the overall communications strategy, P2R created an integrated marketing and communications program that began with key messages for each stakeholder group. These programs included:

- **Media Relations:** P2R Associates developed Cerion's initial media kit, which included a corporate backgrounder, an executive Q&A, corporate fact sheet and bios of key executives; P2R also announced three separate acquisitions, developing all media materials, letters to employees, customers and suppliers, and distributing the announcement press release to targeted media; In addition, P2R handled media inquiries as Cerion integrated companies into its organization
- **Websites:** P2R Associates developed a Cerion corporate website, from architecture and design to writing all content; P2R also worked with our strategic web development partner to create a template approach that will allow Cerion to efficiently develop individual websites for its family of companies
- **Communications Plans:** As part of its overall strategy to develop an integrated corporate communications program, P2R Associates developed three separate component plans: a crisis communications plan that accommodated manufacturing and administrative facilities; an employee communications plan with town hall meetings as the centerpiece; and an external stakeholders program that addressed a range of interested audiences, including customers, suppliers, plant communities and government regulators
- **Sales & Marketing Collateral:** P2R Associates worked with our strategic graphic design partner to develop a range of sales and marketing collateral, including presentation templates, investor relations brochures, sales flyers and other material; the collateral was designed to be consistent with, and supportive of, the Cerion corporate website

In addition, P2R Associates worked on a variety of strategic marketing initiatives, including brand planning exercises for the corporate parent and for acquisitions that Cerion was considering making. Our work helped create a market-facing company from what had been an "on paper" holding company while providing the marketing communications foundation for a successful, new, billion-dollar-plus auto supplier.

New York Times Hardcover Business Best Sellers - December 2009

1. SUPERFREAKONOMICS, by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner. (Morrow/HarperCollins, \$29.99.) A scholar and a journalist apply economic thinking to everything: the sequel.
2. OUTLIERS, by Malcolm Gladwell. (Little, Brown, \$27.99.) Why some people succeed — it has to do with luck and opportunities as well as talent — from the author of "Blink" and "The Tipping Point."
3. TOO BIG TO FAIL, by Andrew Ross Sorkin. (Viking, \$32.95.) The 2008 financial implosion on Wall Street and in Washington, by a New York Times reporter and columnist.
4. THE SELLOUT, by Charles Gasparino. (Harper Business/HarperCollins, \$27.99.) How Wall Street's love affair with risk (and enormous profits) and government mismanagement caused the global economy to implode.
5. JIM CRAMER'S GETTING BACK TO EVEN, by James J. Cramer with Cliff Mason. (Simon & Schuster, \$26.) The "Mad Money" host offers advice for investing in a changed market.

Effective Communication Requires Discipline, Practice and the Ability to Listen

The majority of us spend our waking hours communicating with others.

Whether we're running companies, leading sales and marketing teams, or working in public relations agencies or corporate teams, communicating with a range of stakeholders is a fact of life.

But, how can we ensure that we are communicating successfully?

Effective communication requires discipline, practice and most importantly, the ability to listen. The following six-step approach to effective communicating can help you streamline your thoughts, words and actions and help to become a more effective communicator in the spoken, printed and electronic communication world.

1. What is your purpose for communicating? Define it. Ask yourself some basic questions. Are you only sharing information? Or do you need action? If so, what action and by when? Or, do you have intent, such as a call to action?

2. Respect for your audience. Understand your audience. Are you being clear and concise? Are you avoiding industry jargon that may confuse your recipients? Are you pushing information, i.e., "selling and telling" or pulling information, i.e., "asking and engaging?" For example, do you give others a chance to join your conversation? Do you listen? Do you want to listen? Do you really hear?

3. Simplicity. Evaluate whether your message is easy for your audience to access. For instance, can people simply skim your email messages to find the key information, or are they faced with a "wall of words" that they have to sort through? Are your messages timely? Do people know how to get in touch with you for more details or where to go for more information? Are you making sure you're not contributing to the problem of more information overload? Take a look at what you're posting on Twitter and social networking sites, and ensure that you're revealing inappropriate personal information to business contacts.

4. Be a credible source. Are you portraying through your oral and written communication that you are to be believable and trusted? Are you doing what you say you will do? And, are you doing it consistently?

5. Provide value. Make sure to communicate the topic in a way that appeals to people's interests. Are you giving them just-in-time information that will help them do their job or solve their problem? Will they know how to act on the information?

6. Have fun. After all, communication is about exchanging ideas, learning new things, meeting new people. All of this should be fun. If communication ceases to be fun, then you are not communicating effectively.

Working Smarter AND Harder

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part of some continuous improvement workshop or kaizen event that went well into the evening or night. It was done because that was what was required to meet the deadlines and the goals, and people's energy drove them towards that. Anyone will testify that they're outright exhausted at the end of these events.

Furthermore, lean requires the use of creativity before capital. We can't buy ourselves out of waste, because that would only replace the waste. The only way to really eliminate waste in a lean way is through creativity. New ideas help us solve clearly identified problems. But creativity is hard work. As problem-solver extraordinaire Thomas Edison stated, "Genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration." Anyone who has overcome a tough problem knows exactly how that feels, and it continues to be true no matter how many times we experience it, whether or not we have the brainpower of Thomas Edison.

Lean is also a battle of willpower to overcome the resistance to change. This, of course, is a battle to win the hearts and minds of those in our organization. People must ultimately make up their own minds to become committed to the journey. Regardless of the size of your organization, that is a lot of work. Stamina, persistence, creativity and constancy of purpose are required of lean leaders. Perhaps the hardest part is that no one ever says "thank you for getting me engaged." It is more likely they just act as if they always were engaged.

Finally, a lean organization pursues perfection every day. There is no rest, as perfection is not attainable. Pursuit of perfection is driven by a need to not just satisfy but dazzle every single customer, past, present and future.

The pursuit of perfection drives an organization to work hard every day. Everyone knows that this requires a great deal of work. Everyone who is committed to lean is willing to work towards this pursuit, especially including you. After all, lean begins with you.

Jamie Flinchbaugh is a founder and partner of the Lean Learning Center in Novi, MI, and the co-author of The Hitchhiker's Guide to Lean: Lessons from the Road. He shares his successful and varied experiences of lean transformation as a practitioner and leader through companies such as Chrysler and DTE Energy.

He has a wide range of practical experience in industrial operations, including production, maintenance, material control, product development and manufacturing engineering. He holds a B.S. in Engineering from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA, and an M.S. in Engineering from the University of Michigan.

To contact Jamie directly, go to the web site www.leanlearningcenter.com.

Jamie Flinchbaugh contributes a regular column Leading Lean to ASSEMBLY Magazine.

Did you know? Economic activity in the U.S. manufacturing sector expanded by 3.1% in October — the third consecutive month that the Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) reported growth, and the highest rate of growth since April 2006.

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Unfortunately, who a company engages for branding services is usually the deciding factor in what kind of program they get.

Graphic designers, advertising agencies and others whose strength is "visual" communications will want to redevelop logos, websites and ads. "New" media firms will wax poetic on how social media and web-centric activities are the key to breaking free of clutter. Public relations firms will weigh in on how marketing dollars should be allocated towards media relations and special events.

This is understandable *from an agency perspective*. Service firms usually have one "core" competency, and a major part of their growth strategy is to leverage that into a broader role with their clients.

However, unless the agency truly understands integrated communications and what it takes to develop a fully integrated marketing program, results will be incomplete and therefore ineffective.

In our view, the best branding practitioners have senior-level corporate and agency experience in aligning marketing programs with strategic business plans. They spend more time listening than they do lecturing, and recognize the importance of working closely with sales and operations teams to execute branding programs. They want to help you grow your business, not merely add another case study to their website and new business pitch.

Even if a company is in a position to throw money at marketing programs to ensure that its messages are heard (and this kind of company is an endangered species), building trust takes time.

Trust is what differentiates market awareness from market acceptance. Trust, not awareness, makes the cash register ring. Trust is what good reputations are built upon. And reputation = brand.

Too often, people who have spent their entire careers on the agency side of the table don't understand the difference, and likely never will.

P2R Associates Updates

P2R Associates Forms Strategic Partnership With Inner Circle Media

P2R Associates announces a strategic alliance with Inner Circle Media, an award-winning web development and marketing firm located in Ann Arbor.

According to Gordon Cole, president of P2R Associates, clients that need corporate identity materials, as well as graphic and web design services, will benefit from the exceptional work of Inner Circle Media's creative team. Similarly, Inner Circle clients that need broader, integrated marketing and public relations programs will be able to take advantage of the expertise and experience that has helped P2R win 14 national and international awards for its work since 2008.

"We are delighted to announce this strategic partnership with Inner Circle Media," Cole said. "We have worked with Inner Circle on a variety of projects for some time, and are pleased with the results of this collaboration. Our success is built upon a foundation of developing and executing programs that exceed client expectations in how they support their overall business and marketing plans, and it was gratifying to discover that the entire Inner Circle team shares that philosophy."

For more information on Inner Circle Media, visit www.innercirclemedia.com.

Gordon Cole Named To Michigan Business & Professional Association (MB & PA) Legislative Task Force

Gordon Cole, president of P2R Associates, has been invited to join the Legislative Task Force of the MB & PA. The Legislative Task Force works closely with and in support of the association lobbying efforts aimed at keeping Michigan legislators informed of business concerns and issues.

"I'm excited to serve as a part of the Legislative Task Force team and to help with the important work they and the association do," Cole said. "Building awareness of issues Michigan businesses face and legislative support to help improve the Michigan business environment is critical to helping our state move forward."

Cole will use his 25+ years experience in strategic marketing communications and public relations to support the association's initiatives and objectives.

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P2R Associates is a strategic public relations agency specializing in public relations, marketing communications and business development practice areas. Headquartered in Livonia, Mich., P2R provides clients with strategy driven tactics, superior service and measurable results.

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