

FEBRUARY 2014

## What Does Your Brand Feel Like?

Companies large and small often struggle to articulate the emotional aspect of their business or brand—its essence.

Brand essence can be an especially difficult concept for business-to-business (B-to-B) companies to get their heads around. In part, this is because brand essence is rooted in emotion, often a foreign idea in business marketing. Most B-to-B marketers and leaders were trained to emphasize features and benefits, which are rooted in logic. These are after all, important differentiators and provide a logical path to sales and revenue growth, the bottom line in business.

So thinking about and connecting to the emotional aspects a buyer has when purchasing tech services or infrastructure software is challenging. It might also seem unnatural or unnecessary.

### Emotions Make Your Brand Real

With the democratization of media and wide, instant access to collective views and opinions, it is more important than ever to think intentionally about your company's brand essence or the feelings it evokes. Most consumer-focused companies understand this. However, with the brand transparency created through online social sharing and the potential for rapid word of mouth, B-to-B companies have a bottom line stake in understanding and ensuring that their brand creates positive feelings and experiences. Negative buyer feelings directly affect sales and customer churn.

Understanding and defining your brand essence creates an opportunity to connect emotionally with buyers. It lays the foundation for the intentional experience your brand will deliver.

Brand essence does not have to be elusive, but it does have to be true. Defining your brand essence can start with truthfully answering two questions:

1. How does your brand make customers feel?

If your business is just launching or going through a re-brand, modify the question by asking: what feelings do you want your brand to evoke in customers?

### Executive Insights



Cheryl Isen

Brand essence can be described in few words and is rooted in emotion (not logic) and truth. Most would agree that we buy products or services that in some way enhance our feelings of self-esteem.

Consider for example, does your brand

create feelings of security, confidence or self-reliance? Does it inspire awe, peace of mind, zeal or relief? How about feelings of belonging, recognition, status or intelligence?

Understanding your brand essence is the first step. Putting your essence to work for you requires a second question:

2. What is the benefit of the emotion customers feel?

Keep in mind that emotional motivation usually operates below the surface. It would be rare to hear a customer articulate an emotional benefit if asked outright. However, emotional benefits are nothing more than "something nice I can say about myself because I use your product or service." This knowledge can be discovered by digging deep for the why behind the buy.

Probing into what customers say after they use your product or service will eventually spotlight a feelings or emotional benefits. For example: I feel secure/relief knowing that ABC company can help us solve complex IT networking problems. I'm

delighted that I don't have to read five manuals because XYZ company makes it easy to understand.

Once unearthed, these emotional benefits become the cornerstone of the relationship your brand can build with the customer.

Defining your brand essence and the emotional benefits it creates will help make your brand more real and relatable. Internally it can guide how employee's act by inspiring passion, excitement and positive energy. Externally it can infuse your marketing, expanding your brand story in a meaningful way by creating an emotional connection beyond features and general benefits.

Remember, the power of your brand directly equates to the experience and feelings it invokes. Understanding your brand essence enables you to harness the power of emotion and bring your brand to life.

This column is written by Cheryl Isen, founder of Isen & Company, a strategic marketing and public relations firm that helps companies increase visibility and brand awareness. Contact Cheryl at (425) 222-0779, Cheryl@IsenandCo.com.

Visit IsenandCo.com to learn more.