

## Summary of Branding Forum

Location: Quantum Corporation, Milpitas, CA

Date: February 22, 2000

The meeting began with welcoming the attendees. Then I spoke briefly about several topics:

The objectives of the forum - to share ideas, problems, trends in branding as well as networking with peers on a quarterly basis with rotating hosts.

Inclusive nature of the forum - The branding forum belongs to the attendees, and all attendees should feel free to provide input on the direction they would like the forum to take.

Breadth of representation - Branding consultants, advertising agencies, identity agencies, design agencies, and corporate brand managers.

Future plans - As membership grows, we could add focused roundtable discussions (e.g. brand strategy for technology start-ups), awards, a website with resources, chat room or Q&A section, recommended seminars, books, etc.

Next came the introduction of the panel members:

### **Ron May**

Director of Corporate Brand and Marcom for Quantum

20 years of marketing and corporate brand management.

### **Dave Roberts**

Principal at Strategic Marketing Communications<sup>3</sup>, a marketing and branding consultancy based in Redwood City. President of the NorCal chapter of BMA.

### **Marty Brandt**

Principal at ProBrand, a technology brand consultancy, which he started in 1993. Over 20 years experience - Sun, Chiat/Day, Ketchum Advertising

### **Dan Bellack**

Agency search consultant, formerly a principal at Tycer Fultz Bellack Advertising (later TFB/BBDO). Editor of Bellack's Ad Bulletin, an electronic newsletter on advertising and branding. Many decades of advertising experience.

### **Bob Stetson**

Director of Marcom and Brand at Compaq, formerly with Tandem Computers where he was doing the same thing at a corporate rather than divisional level. Numerous years of advertising experience before that.

Next we began topic discussions:

*Who is responsible for managing a corporate brand? The first answer to that question is everybody in the corporation from the chief executive to the receptionist in the lobby. If this is the case, how broadly should you communicate the brand strategy. How many people here can say that the person working in the front lobby can explain the brand strategy of your company?*

The consolidated answer was that not everyone in the organization does need to understand the brand strategy, but everyone should understand the core value

proposition. Besides the core value every employee should understand a (clearly defined) set of attributes and attitude for the company. It was also pointed out that the core value, attitude and attributes must initially come from the CEO and there should be an executive commitment to implementation of the brand promise. The key to building the necessary level of understanding of the brand attributes, promises, etc. are education and constant reminders. At Compaq, they have their core value proposition printed on their card keys.

*How do you get the attention and passionate commitment from senior executives when you develop a brand strategy? How do you get them to maintain that commitment six months later as a division launches a new product or the company sponsors a major event?*

The first suggestion was to show them David Aaker's ROI study. Showing executives existing research on the effect a strong brand has on sales and stock price is probably the best way to get their commitment. Research on the strength of the company's own brand with focus groups is a great motivator for executives.

The point was made that companies do not shape their brand, their audiences do.

Branding is NOT optional. It happens whether a company manages it or not.

At this point an attendee raised the point that the word "branding" gets used by so many people with so many assumed meanings that it seems like it's on its way to becoming a meaningless buzzword. The entire group agreed, and some stressed the importance of defining branding as you begin a discussion of it.

It was suggested that the Branding Forum could take on the task of creating a lexicon for branding that we could standardize.

*Joe in the Advanced Technology Division is working on a new technology that they hope to ship six months ahead of the competition. To keep the team motivated, Joe (who recently completed a commercial design correspondence course) created his own logo for the technology which he is using on t-shirts, presentations and all internal documentation. Product marketing has allocated \$50K for advertising the new technology. They plan to order pizza tonight and they're not leaving the building until they agree on a name for the product to use with Joe's logo for the launch. Then Joe will get busy designing an ad for the new product (because the agency is too expensive!). How do you effectively educate people about branding when they are generally non-captive and unmotivated audiences? How do you get people in an organization to care about the health of the forest when their only concern is the health of a single tree?*

The first answer was that Joe should be taken out behind the building and shot. The second answer to this question goes back to executive commitment and an organization that supports a strong brand and consistent treatment of brand elements. Ideally, it is best to have an officer position in the company responsible for brand and identity. Building and maintaining a strong brand should be part of every employee's performance objectives.

The noon hour sneaked up on us very quickly, and we agreed that the next meeting should be 2 hours, rather than 1 1/2 hours. The discussions were lively and the group was already talking about the next meeting.

The next meeting will be in May at the Tandem Division of Compaq in Cupertino.

Details will follow.

Those of you who attended our first meeting, thank you for sharing your insights and enthusiasm for branding. For those of you who were unable to attend, we look forward to seeing you at the next forum.