



Building a brand



# GETTING THE BRAND BACK TOGETHER

It's time to stop talking about the importance of brand within service and do something about it. **Saul Sherry** looks into the tech and outsourcing implications of getting brand perception to match up to expectations



**B**rand identity has long been heralded as a key competition killer for service driven businesses. A change on the scale of transforming an entire company's approach to the way they are perceived can occur quickly, or it can happen at a snail's pace. Often the slower it happens, the more lasting the results can be. The signs of an impending revolution in an approach to service management have been appearing for a while now. While I will not refute that adopters of a more holistic approach to their service departments have already seen huge improvements, the industry as a whole has been languishing with outmoded ways of thinking. It is time to put brand identity at the top of the priority list.

Sweeping across service managing departments in the UK is a yearning for an intelligent and holistic approach to the way their department is seen within the organisation on the whole. Brand comes down to understanding the value of your business, and in many ways the best approach is to simplify this to its basic constituent blocks. At Service Management, we see the best way of going about this as to focus on interaction at the human level. Your engineers are human, your customers are human, and although it doesn't feel like it sometimes, the people upstairs pulling the strings are human. The past has been dominated by either mobile engineers who underperform on a personal level, while being proficient on the engineering side, or managers who under-utilise engineers who are more than capable of representing businesses on a personal level.

**The Modern Field Engineer**

We feel so passionately about this approach to valuing humans and human interaction, our September conference 'The Modern Field Engineer', held during Service Management Expo is dedicated to the exploration of these ideas.

Following this theme, heateam, the service division of BDR Thermea, a UK manufacturer of domestic heating and hot water products, have shown an ability to adapt in an effort to enhance the brand's value. Taking a technological approach, heateam sought a holistic way to enable their team to offer a new level of service that would reflect brand values. Partnering with Cognito, their approach involved utilising the capabilities of a Motorola MC75 to further enhance the capabilities of not only the field staff, but also the back office staff. Increases to service can be

incremental; an example within heateam's approach was to enable the field engineer to book in a future visit while on site. This enables the staff within a business: taking a process out of a control loop and trusting your engineer to control it (with help from the right technological solution). For heateam, this step builds their reputation on two levels. The first is to show themselves as a company able to respond to a customer's demands on the spot. The second is to enable the engineer to solve all of the customer's needs on site, thereby empowering customer-facing staff. This was a change brought about by implementing a unified solution including ServicePower, while integration with Infomill allowed for similar on-site ordering of parts.

Other benefits come from more obvious areas in the field engineer's repertoire. Working along the same approach of allowing your engineer to become a trusted and reliable contact, heateam use the ERP system, Movex. This set up gives on-site access to the latest customer information and corporate bulletins, removing hesitation from interactions with both customers and equipment – again casting the staff member as a credible and trustworthy specialist.

service departments, we can probably expect the slide across to a system where brand identity and service departments are regarded as two parts of the same initiative to be initiated through new revenue realisation. Regarding your engineer as your brand, and as the 'face' of your company has obvious benefits. They are the members of staff who are best placed to assess the direct and immediate needs of customers, a position any member of the sales staff would love to be in. From a thought leadership point of view, the benefits of brand identity aware engineers are manifest – but it will most likely be the bottom line that turns the tide. Jonathan Chevallier, Strategic Development Director of Cognito, sees this as a pattern already building among some organisations with service provision arms. "I think this is both because they recognise that a customer's experience of their company is a critical 'moment of truth' for their brand (potentially destroying millions of pounds spent on building their brand through advertising and promotion) and probably most significantly because companies increasingly want their engineers to drive incremental sales," says Jonathan.

Any fundamental change in an organisation, such as the one that will see

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**SYNOPSIS**

The importance of brand to service providing companies is immense, and there are technologies available to incrementally increase the way a brand is regarded, implement next-generation sales initiatives and even manage outsourced workers.

**MAIN POINTS**

- ❑ Brand identity is discussed more than acted upon
- ❑ Image of engineers intrinsic to brand's perception
- ❑ Company-wide changes mean new sales avenues
- ❑ Metrics for outsourcing

We often hear a lot of marketing rhetoric along the lines of enhancing brand value and identity that is never backed up by concrete plans and action. Moving around the industry, this schism implies more than a simple disconnect between marketing and the rest of the business. Brand identity and brand value are concepts that can only be defined and pushed from the highest level of a business. While businesses continue to think of service departments as cost centres, it will be difficult to get those big, company changing ideas to trickle down into service. Another way of looking at it is that until the boardroom start valuing service in the same way they regard their precious brand, there will continue to be unrealised potential.

Based on previous experience of change in



engineers used as a tool to initiate the sales process, will need to be brought about through alignment of goals between both service and marketing departments as well as service and sales departments. With shared values and a pride in their own work, the marketing and service link up has obvious benefits for an organisation. Marketing hinges on a brand's reputation. Different campaigns and approaches will yield different results, but only within the parameters of the public's overall view of the company. By understanding the incremental improvements to a customer's life the engineer can make per visit, they will understand the value they can add to the way a brand is seen. Similarly, by viewing engineers as the sharp end of the business (those guaranteed the most face-time), marketing departments can initiate awareness drives that take place right within the customer's home. As Editor an always searching for ground-level content, it seems obvious to me that a mobile engineer with effective communication skills would also be a great source of 'good news' customer case studies.

Where sales can get involved on this level exists as a more obvious scenario, but one also fraught with danger. With the engineer already working on premises, a lot of the set-up work is done. In a best-case scenario they are doing a thorough and efficient job, earning trust with their courteousness and diligence. They are in a prime position to recommend an upgrade on technical and non-sales terms. Similarly, they could be there simply to plant the seed of an idea to be followed up by a quick sales call post-visit. Both options clearly risk upsetting a delicate trust relationship inherent to the 'engineer in the house' scenario. The first can be disruptive with regards to the way an engineer is viewed, and the second, while being a less direct approach, can be similarly frustrating for customers. It is important to have these approaches driven by a strategy that is both clear and transparent to customers. It would be a very serious error to treat your customer as an idiot by phoning up on the grounds of a 'quality of visit' survey, only to try to

segue into a sales pitch based on the engineer's comments.

Even with a correct strategy in place, there is still plenty of room for such a dramatic shift in business to cause issues within the workforce. Mobile workers already have overarching issues relating to GPS and scheduling, feeling watched and having their freedoms impinged. The sudden addition of being involved in a subtle, targeted marketing/sales campaign may be enough to drive them to distraction. As usual, involvement will depend on having the right staff, the right training and the right expectations.

### The Outsourcing Angle

Maintaining staff morale in terms of a long-term job role is only an issue when the staff are your own. In the instance where your mobile workforce are outsourced, you become somewhat removed from that issue. Unfortunately, it also means your field engineers, those best positioned to represent your hard fought brand values to the world on a day to day basis, become one step removed from the company's vision of values. Some companies might get away with outsourcing their IT needs, but who in their right mind would opt to have a less hands on approach with their vital field workforce?

Bearing in mind the exploration of a company's brand identity above, it

a vendor assessment service frees up valuable hours spent ensuring those external staff hired to complete the tasks are up for the job. There is the added benefit of putting an organisation with an established system and track record for determining quality of workers in charge of the process.

So long as procedures are rigorous, this method of outsourcing should allow brand values to be properly communicated via external staff. SGP Property and Facilities Management's Director of Risk Management, Peter Hall, seems convinced by this approach. "We are confident that every contractor we deal with has been through a transparent and robust assessment process, pertinent to the activities they may undertake, and that they are well equipped to provide the stringent, professional standards we require," he says. SGP partnered with Altius Vendor Assessment to ensure contractors are fully assured, and it is Peter's use of the word 'standards' that should make other managers sit up and take notice. What drives a brand's identity other than its standards?

The outsourcing conundrum is an area Cognito's Chevallier has also been paying attention to "There are really two aspects to this," he says. "The first is providing the tools to support the engineer in performing their role and the second relates to the management. For both we

## By viewing engineers as the sharp end of the business marketing departments can initiate awareness drives that take place right within the customer's home

becomes clear that through clever use of data and technology, outsourcing on this scale becomes a manageable solution that could suit a great many businesses. We all know the possible cost benefits made available through outsourcing (scalable workforce sizes, reduced administration strain), but what would it take to make it feel like you could still be assured of the quality of work being carried out?

One example involves a meta-assessment of the service due to be rendered. Utilising

would recommend using the same principles and processes that you would use to manage your own in-house engineers."

In-house or outsourced, it is clear that we are in an era of service where only those who go the extra mile will stand out from competition. In line with the trend of ever more demanding SLAs, this means that getting your brand to stand out in the mind of customers will become more and more difficult.