

# Managing Your Brand

Differentiating a brand in today's market requires expanding brand management from a traditional Product, Price, Place and Promotion focus to include Experience as well. A brand that stands out is one that delivers its brand and customer promise in the context of the full customer experience—whenever and wherever the customer interacts with the product or service. Proof of success is a brand that gains new customers, keeps existing customers, gets more wallet share from existing customers and forges bonds with all customers to create passionate advocates.

**Managing a brand for success requires commitment to a brand promise built around the way the customer experience affects customer behavior. Delivery of the brand promise must be both unique and consistent against the touch points that drive customer behavior. Why do customers buy? What is the influence of POS and the sales person? What is the balance between the cognitive (product features) and the emotional (peace of mind) in customer decisions? In this new flavor of brand management, marketing needs to take a lead role to drive or influence the management of the customer experience across an organization.**

Think about how you experience a product or service as a consumer—from decision through

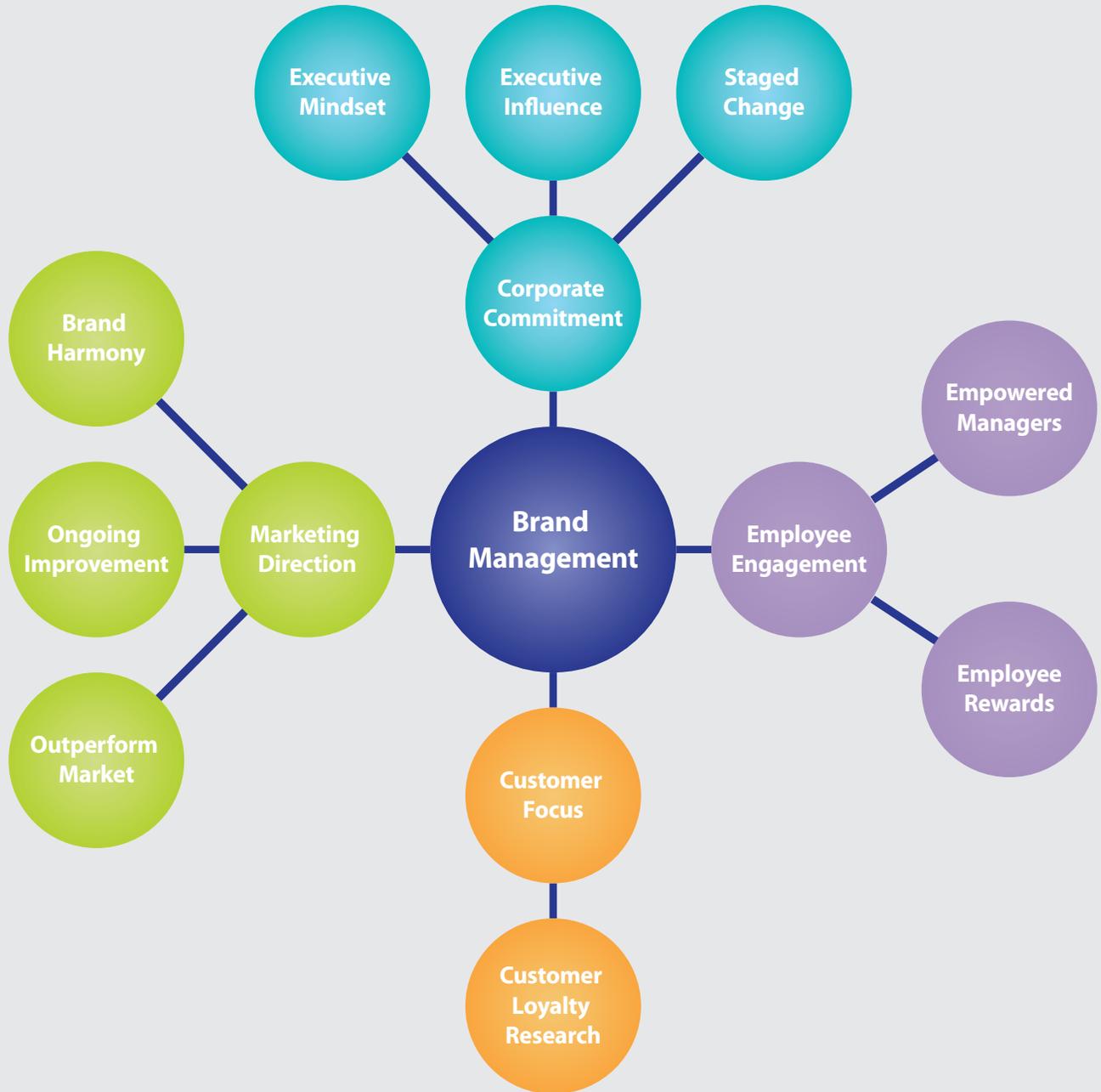
purchase and beyond to customer service. You may start by seeking information online, from friends, acquaintances, or publications. Possibly you monitor ratings and discussions on Amazon.com or eBay. When you decide on a company to buy from, you like what they offer, what they say and what they stand for. Their image is complementary to your image of yourself. Perhaps you receive a membership or special offers along with your purchase. During the purchase process, you like the way you are treated; and if you deal with customer service, they impress you with their skill in answering your questions and going to the next level, possibly to suggest additional uses for the product you bought or additional ways to achieve your goals. This is the totality of the brand experience. Traditional marketing communication is just part of the full picture.

Successful companies realize a lapse at any point in the customer experience can send the customer in search of a different brand. Successful companies define the touch points (current or potential) and identify the drivers of behavior, distill how each touch point reinforces the brand essence and determine relative influences on behavior and advocacy. With all this in place, successful companies manage their organization to deliver on both the drivers and the brand promise.

Consider Whole Foods and their extensive and growing customer base. Whole Foods focuses on food, health and the environment and, ultimately, sustainability. Their brand promise and the touch points that drive customer advocacy are harmonious with what Whole Foods represents. Consequently, potential customers are attracted and become long-term customers as well as advocates for the brand. Delivering the brand as an essential element of the customer experience necessarily differs from company to company, but strategies to consider include:

**Corporate commitment:**

- Start with a strategy committed to an entirely new course that defines the brand according to a total experience dedicated to customer advocacy. The online store Zappos is a good example; rather than defining themselves as an online retailer of shoes and accessories, the executive team built the culture based on the mindset that they are a customer service company that happens to sell shoes.
- Use influence of the executive suite to coordinate improvements across functions. Customer advocates are built through consistent brand performance—not by an isolated positive experience.
- Stage organizational change. Reduce priorities to a manageable number—for example, three key points per communication.



**Customer focus:**

- Conduct customer advocacy research to identify advocacy drivers and determine improvements according to high impact drivers.

**Employee engagement:**

- Empower front-line managers with meaningful direction. Focus the entire organization on priority brand and advocacy drivers. Engage employees across all levels to be accountable for what happens when they interact with customers.
- Provide feedback. Reward individuals and groups of employees who “live the brand”.

**Marketing direction:**

- Create harmony across the brand and customer strategies. Match brand and customer strategy with business strategy. Again, think of Whole Foods and how they demonstrate who they are.
- Make delivering the brand an exercise in ongoing improvement and differentiation. Don't get caught napping after the initial success.

- Run the business to outperform the market. Integrate brand and customer advocacy into business results. Brand promise is the differentiator, but the consumer experience must be consistent from touch point to touch point. Unless all aspects are in sync, marketing dollars are not well spent and might even result in negative equity with a failed promise that could mean customer backlash. You get to decide: Whole Foods or Yugo.

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