

Brand Integrity?

By Shannon Warren for the July 28, 2014 Journal Record

Last year, roughly \$63 billion was spent on television advertising alone. According to the online service company, Marketcharts.com, this translated into about \$225 per viewer. All that money is being spent to win our trust. Is it enough?

Advertising is an effective medium for communicating with customers, but the best public relations endeavors will rely on a cohesive team that includes both internal and external resources. All of these must be effectively aligned in order to build brand integrity.

It begins with quality control because product and service reliability builds customer trust and loyalty. But, today's consumers are interested in more than that. They want to believe that they are doing business with good neighbors who are active in the community, environmentally conscious and treat their employees well. Expectations are higher than ever before, but not impossible to meet.

Each year, The Reputation Institute compiles a list of 150 American companies based on all those factors, as well as others such as good governance and innovation. Based on that data, I play a fun game when I talk to companies about ethics. Participants are asked to rank 15 well-known U. S. corporations according to their impressions of the best and worst reputations. They always get it right: Disney, Intel and Amazon are ranked at the top for brand integrity. Fannie Mae, along with Freddie Mac, at the bottom. That means customers are paying greater attention to issues involving overall integrity that cannot be conveyed through advertising alone.

Companies that succeed in achieving brand integrity avoid territorial silos by forming teams of public relations and marketing people who actively collaborate with the company's compliance and ethics specialists, legal counsel, quality control and human resources. Next, they engage in continuing, open dialogue with their employees and customers, encouraging them to share their stories demonstrating integrity at work and quickly correcting compromising issues when these arise.

Brand integrity begins as an inside job and is optimized when internal values are fully aligned before communicating externally. American consumers are too savvy to tolerate phonies for very long and a rotten core will be exposed. Creating brand integrity and credibility capital is well worth the investment if companies want their customers to trust them enough to continue buying their products.