

In 7 Steps towards Your New Brand Positioning



Der rote Faden in Ihrer
Unternehmenskommunikation

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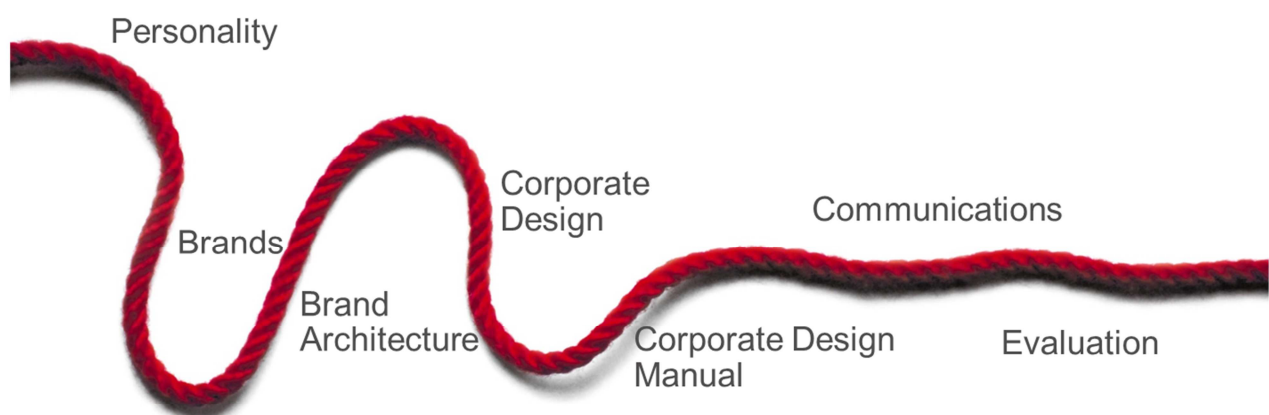
After a successful start, some B-to-B companies develop into fast growing, international groups, that are present in more and more countries and markets with business areas and subsidiaries. Their technologies are very often difficult to explain and the value added chains are complex. Most of the times, they are not the only supplier for their products on the market. They therefore have to differentiate very clearly from their competitors. Furthermore, as a result of the company growth more and more target groups are getting relevant for the company. As a consequence, the possibility that those target groups receive very different information and impressions of the company is increasing. This can lead to major irritations and in the worst case the loss of trustworthiness.

In particular in times of increasing size and complexity companies should develop and keep an integrating element and communicate it to the market: a strong, differentiating corporate identity that among others gets visible in a strong brand. An identity and brand that identifies the company internally and externally showing what it is: a very special company!

So, how do you make it easy for your customers, partners, potential employees, market analysts and the media to perceive and understand you, and perhaps like you at the end of the day? How do you make it easy for every division in the company to feel a real part of the Group?

Those are the 7 steps, that will help you find your corporate identity, to express and position it on the market.

7 Steps towards brand positioning



1) How do you find the personality of your company?

Together with your employees and your management team you develop through surveys, questionnaires, and workshops the guiding principles characterizing your company best and express the special value of your company. It helps to know how for example customers perceive your company, to figure out how big the gap between self-perception and perception of your target groups is, however, the importance of this check is very often overestimated. First you have to know how to position the company. For this you have to identify the real values which match the corporate culture and business strategy. Here, the elements that make a company special, and differentiate it from the competition, need to be worked out. In doing so, you state who you are and through communication you will later on position yourself with your products and services on the market (both visibly and audibly) to create your company's personality. You will express this through a brand promise that you will have to live up to. The brand promise contains the functional and emotional aspects of your brand. It shows to your customers and other target groups what they can expect from your company. By living and communicating the brand promise you position your company where you want it to be. You do brand positioning.

It should go without saying, but it is always worth to remind people of this: the values and the brand promise are not only the business of your marketing department. The values and the brand promise are developed and lived up to by the whole company with focus on your target groups – in particular on your customers. The brand promise concerns the controlling, sales, and logistics department just as much as your call center and reception desk. What has been developed under the guidance of marketing, and by involving numerous representatives of the company will be the guiding principle for all parts of the company.

2) Analyze the brands in your company and the corporate design

Various business areas, daughter companies and subsidiaries in the countries probably developed an attractive design, name and logo by themselves. However, if you take a look at them in their entirety, in the brochures, leaflets, websites, advertisements and internal magazines where they all appear, you would never think that they stem from one single company group. Irrespective of the company or subsidiary concerned, your company group might look like a wild conglomeration of colors, shapes and names, which have not very much in common. This makes it difficult to recognize your company group for what it is, and to understand it.

Collect all collaterals you can get hold of. Take the business cards and even the 10 year- old company brochures. Check for every single letterhead you find, if there is a particular reason for the positioning of the address or other information. Many details were just a matter of taste and had to be decided. However, some have a special reason behind or are even legal requirements. This should of course not be ignored.

If you have a variety of brands in your company, you have to check the individual meaning and importance of those for your customers, employees and other target groups. In how far does the brand support the company identity? Is the brand worth more as a single brand than as integrated part of the company brand? What are the interrelationships between those multiple brands?

3) Develop the brand architecture

The brand architecture shows your company with its various parts under a particular light, strengthens your brand, and gives it more presence. It creates a common bond and helps customers, business partners, journalists, analysts and new employees to understand what your Group is all about. It is not random, but follows a specific path of decisions in its design and use. The brand architecture describes the structure of a brand portfolio and the roles the individual brands play in it. It clarifies the interrelationships between the brands and the rank assigned to them within the company. Check and decide if you for example want to position your corporate brand in the center, if you want to focus more on the product brands, or if you want to introduce system brands. Make sure that all brands fulfill (and with this support) your company values in their individual way. Each of the individual product brands uses its personality to breathe life into the corporate brand. Also make sure that you have for each brand very clear and consistent rules and decision making processes to interpret it into the brand architecture. This is because nothing is more tiring than having to negotiate with all people concerned all the small exceptions in the brand integration, if – for example – a new company or brand has been acquired.

4) Define a new corporate design

Develop a corporate design that fits your company, that differentiates you from the competition, will be applied to all communication ways and means, includes the logo as the entrance gate into your company und has therefore – with each contact – a high recognition value.

Corporate design is much more than just designing a business card or creating pretty images for presentations. It goes several steps further, and takes account of the images and tonalities that you use to describe your company. Corporate design includes all descriptions, measurements and templates for all internal and external means of communication, including style, colors, font type, logo, picture and word style. Don't start from zero, unless you really start a new company or need to completely re-position your company. Even if you've never defined a corporate design for your company, you've certainly found in your analysis certain elements that worked well, are already positively visible on the market and can be easily integrated into your new corporate design.

5) Development of the corporate design manual

The corporate design manual includes all descriptions, measurements and templates for all internal and external means of communication. These specifications are binding and are to be complied with at all times throughout your Group. The corporate design manual is a living document and will be updated on a regular basis. This means that as soon as you develop new or additional means of communications for company use, those will be added to the manual.

The switch to a new corporate design can be expensive. In particular b-to-b companies do not very often require a "big bang" that makes the company shine under a completely new light. You can take a pragmatic approach to this, and communication material such as business cards, letterheads and so on, that still have the old corporate design on them, don't need to be thrown away, but can be used up until a predefined deadline. In contrast, all new material produced has to be based on the new corporate design. I advise that you produce central communication

materials with a high visibility – such as employee magazines, company brochures, and your internet website– with the launch of your new corporate design. That gives people an anchor point and a vivid impression of the new corporate design. It makes the corporate design manual easier to understand. Make the manual available at a central point. Even in times of the intranet it makes much sense to send small, easy to use hard copies to all business areas and daughter companies that have to work with the Corporate Design.

6) The communication strategy and implementation

Develop an effective communication plan that makes your brand and corporate identity visible to your internal and external target audience so that you can position your brand. Start your communication with your employees. They are your most important ambassadors of the brand. They have to identify themselves with your brand promise to be able to experience the brand promise as well. Consider organizing workshops in the countries, the daughter companies and in single business areas and departments. In those workshops people can work out what the new corporate identity and the new corporate design mean for the single areas. If you have a medium and large sized company you might want to appoint brand ambassadors that help by answering employees' questions about the new corporate identity, training and motivating them. Otherwise your corporate communications department will be capable of taking this role. Make sure that your introduction strategy fits the existing corporate communication plan and make use of the existing communication tools. Vice versa the existing communication strategy and plan have to integrate the messages and tonalities of the new corporate identity. Accompany the introduction with additional communication means, such as articles on the intranet, a special issue of your company magazine, a small give away in the new corporate design, etc.

7) Evaluate the success

Evaluate the market penetration of your brand. But do make sure that you give yourself a few years to work on the penetration. To keep it simple: if you yourself cry out loud when you hear your brand promise for the – what feels like the – millionth time, you might have a chance that your target groups recognize it for the first time. Celebrate small successes, such as the repetition of your brand promise in an article in the media, or a customer, who gives positive feedback on your brand efforts. Surveys among employees, customers, suppliers and journalists as well as the analysis of your press coverage will finally give you a concrete idea about successful brand positioning.

Dealing with criticism

During your project you will be confronted with many supporters, but also with people who don't like re-branding itself – they might not see the value of it – or just the way it is done. Try to find a broad positive basis for your project. After all also the most negative people want to identify themselves with the Corporate Identity. Take their suggestions and comments seriously and integrate those as far as possible into the definition of corporate values, brand architecture, etc. Rather go for one alignment meeting since details might count very much here. Critical comments will also help you to determine the intensity and tonality of your communication efforts for the

introduction of the new corporate design with all its aspects. However, keep in mind that not everybody will be thrilled by what you are doing. Just take a very structured approach during the project and avoid questions of taste. You don't need to discuss, if the internal magazine is nicer in light blue than in dark blue. Your concern is that the – whatever kind of – blue is consistently used in all communication materials and becomes therefore a point of recognition for your target group. Later on you will find out that even the most negative colleague will recognize the structure of the new corporate identity and design and will figure out how much easier this makes his and his target groups' life.

About Laube-Unternehmenskommunikation

Laube-Unternehmenskommunikation (Laube Corporate Communications) offers consultancy and interim management in the areas of corporate communications and brand management. The experience and knowledge required for this have been acquired by Tanja Laube for example in leading international positions at Philips, NXP Semiconductors, Tchibo and VTG. Being located in Inning a. Ammersee (near Munich) she offers consultancy to particular b-to-b companies. She supports companies in the development of a clear positioning, a communication strategy that makes sense, effective communication measures as well as a strong organization. Her portfolio includes: development of corporate positioning and corporate values; development of the brand architecture and Corporate Design; development and implementation of a communication strategy, plan as well as measures; development of messages and themes; building up or structuring the corporate communications department; accompanying or executing the agency selection processes.

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