
ACTIVATION 2020:

A Marketer's Guide to Driving
Internal Brand Alignment

presented by:



INNERVIEW

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If you're reading this, you're most likely responsible for creating and launching genius marketing programs. The goal of this guide is to provide you with real strategies to ensure those campaigns work as hard as possible, from the inside out.

THE CHALLENGES BRANDS FACE TODAY

Today's dynamic marketplace has created an abundance of new challenges for communicators. Consumers spend a significant amount of time on digital platforms, meaning marketers have to spend time there as well.

Digital tools allow for immediate dialogue, so marketing departments are constantly on the lookout for which platforms are most relevant to consumers at any given time and trying to meet consumers with what they need. Once there, marketing departments can respond to concerns, keep an eye on the competition, and react to customers' shifting desires faster than ever before.

The response to those shifts happens often. **Twenty-nine percent** of companies now introduce branding or rebranding campaigns every quarter. That speed leaves little time to keep up with strategy, causing too many messages to get lost in translation and diluted as a whole.

So what is brand dilution? **Brand dilution** is the breakdown between what customers hear and what they experience — and it starts internally. A brand story starts in the marketing department, which carefully crafts the words, themes, and promises of the product or service based on research and insights. The marketing team then delivers that story to the outside world through advertising and a variety of messaging channels. Too often, though, that brand vision begins to diminish when shared with other internal teams. By the time it reaches frontline employees, the consumer might have heard an entirely different story than the one marketing worked so hard to craft. This misalignment between the external brand story and the internal interpretation of the story damages the relationship between the brand and its customers.

29%
OF COMPANIES NOW
INTRODUCE
BRANDING OR
REBRANDING
CAMPAIGNS EVERY
QUARTER.

A recent joint study InnerView conducted in partnership with FocusVision surveyed 250 senior marketing, customer experience, and product development professionals from midsize to large companies (\$250 million+ in revenue). The study itself tackled customer research, brand story/messaging, and new go-to-market initiatives and found several key results:

- Organizations are widely using customer research but failing to properly use it to craft brand messaging.
- Marketers lack confidence that their brand stories are being told properly and consistently after leaving their department.
- The speed of new campaigns, new products, and new services is a significant complicating factor.
- Consistent messaging is valued at \$10 million or more, which means brand dilution is a significant cost.

HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM?

THE TAKEAWAY

Brands have more ways to get their messages out to external customers than ever before. Marketing departments make great work of staffing social media experts to craft witty messaging and respond quickly to customer questions or complaints. In the process, they raise expectations, make promises, and ultimately create an expectation of high-quality engagement and great experiences.

However, companies are still spending vast amounts of time building brand training materials that are supposed to help frontline teams understand messaging but end up being more like an irrelevant relic from a different era. The materials might have a lot of good information, but they are not engaging the brand's employees and partners in a way that makes them want to tell the brand story.

For many companies, the current level of internal brand engagement with customer-facing teams is falling way short. **The byproduct? Inconsistency, misalignment, disappointed customers, and a diluted brand story.**

RETHINKING INTERNAL BRAND ENGAGEMENT WHOSE JOB IS IT ANYWAY?

Before addressing those problems, though, it's important to know their causes and who's responsible for improving them.

Brand messaging starts with marketing. It's the department that creates and hands off the story, information, and strategy to internal partners — training, sales, human resources, etc. But with each handoff, the messages get more fragmented. By the time it gets to frontline teams, it can look completely different.

Because marketing teams are responsible for crafting the story, they're judged on the success or failure of campaigns. In the study, 80% of respondents revealed that the success of their marketing roles was highly dependent on whether or not frontline teams effectively delivered the brand story. This fact alone should make brand alignment a top priority for marketing departments.

To see success, address this gap, and end dilution, then, marketing teams have to take on the responsibility of ensuring companywide, effective message delivery by not just communicating brand vision to external customers, but also developing internal marketing strategies and producing high-quality marketing campaigns that target internal customers.

KNOWLEDGE VS. BELIEF

The key to making this work is ensuring messaging stays consistent. Think of that old game of telephone where the message gets more and more distorted as it travels down the line to each listener. By finding new ways to ensure internal teams fully grasp brand messages, marketing teams can prevent the telephone game from dragging down the perception of their brand.

Many companies work within a traditional leadership structure where management directs staff with a top-down approach rather than opening a dialogue with them. That structure fosters dilution and hurts your brand. Instead of dictating facts and speaking at frontline teams, marketing teams can help them to understand and believe in campaigns. They can engage in a conversation about the messages and help frontline teams arrive at their own conclusions.

The best way to get started is asking staff members questions before telling them about the campaign. Questions give the other teams the opportunity to share their input and form their own beliefs, which better shapes the resulting messages and gives frontline representatives confidence in retelling it.

This approach sounds like something most brands are good at — it's called marketing!



Top-down management structure fosters dilution and hurts your brand

EXPERIENCE-DRIVEN CAMPAIGNS

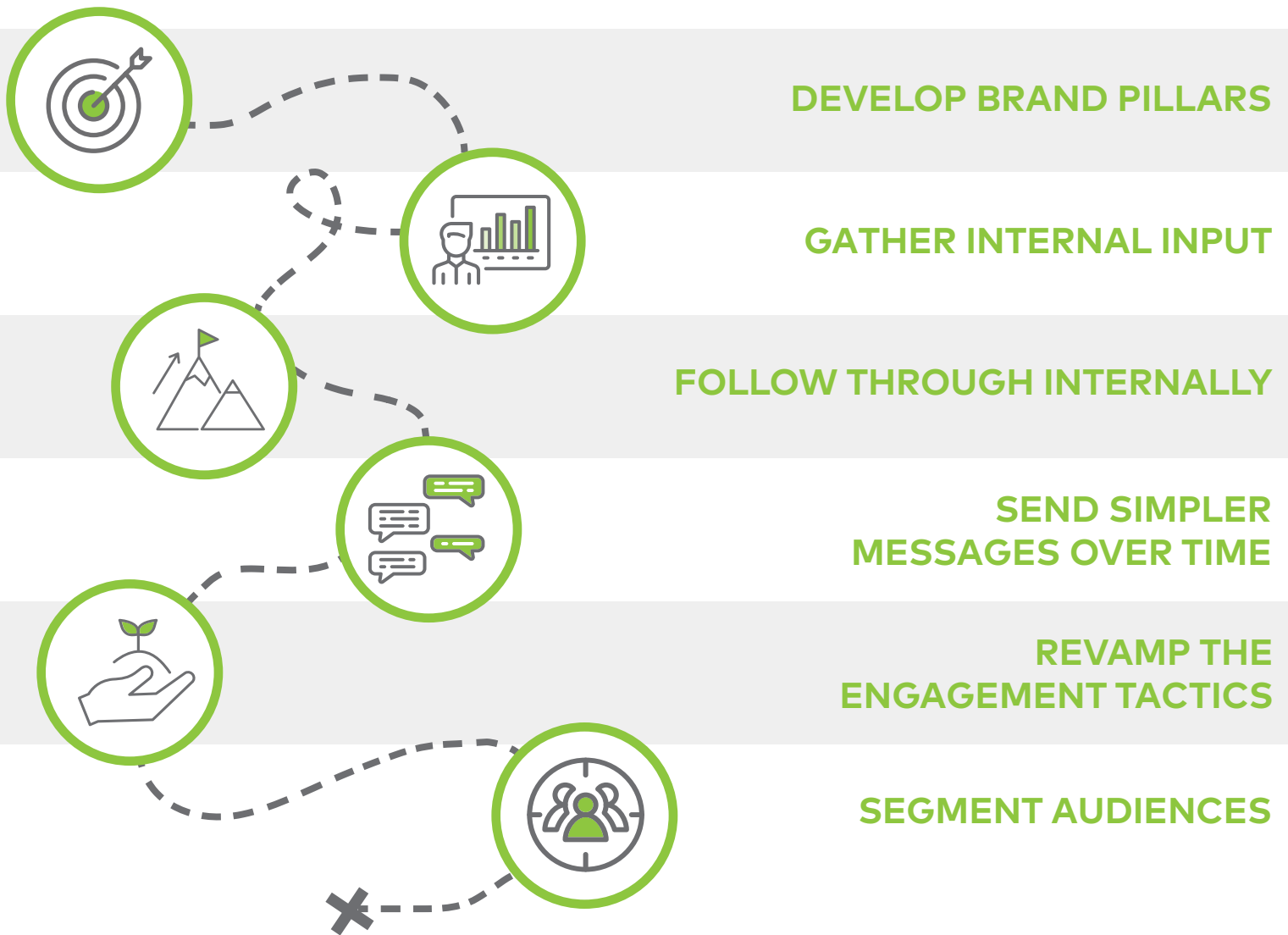
If marketing crafts a campaign that promises something to consumers, that promise needs to be executed when they walk in the store. Sadly, more often than not, marketing sees success when setting up customer expectations but loses it when customers show up to purchase the product or service and their expectations aren't met.

For that reason, marketing has to step up and work with internal departments to create an experience that supports the story rather than one that seriously falls short of consumer expectations. Marketing's job doesn't stop with getting the customer in the door. It has to follow through to ensure a purchase and, eventually, brand loyalty.

A ROADMAP TO INTERNAL BRAND ENGAGEMENT

One of the key findings from the InnerView/FocusVision study was that brands are having a more dynamic conversation with customers than ever before. For brands to build an enduring relationship with their customers, they must develop internal processes that build strength around the following organizational traits: nimble/responsive, collaborative, and innovative.

The next part of the guide will provide recommendations on steps companies can take to improve their brand alignment and their ability to serve an ever-changing customer conversation.





DEVELOP BRAND PILLARS

How do companies translate their brand vision internally and not just to the outside world? What does it take for a company to establish internal buy-in and ownership of its brand message?

Look at Subaru. The brand centers on love (a challenging brand promise to keep). It starts by defining key themes of love so employees can then apply them to their specific roles — especially the frontline teams that end up being the face of the brand.

The Subaru example proves that this can be done effectively. To establish a foundation for internal brand alignment, a company should start by addressing the following questions:

1

When customers interact with us, what are the three conclusions we want them to have every time?

This is translating your brand vision into clearly defined promises.

2

What makes these three promises unique from our competition?

3

How can we bring these three pillars to life in every interaction?

Whenever a brand concept is broad, the company has to narrow down specific behaviors that will back up the claims it's making. These become the pillars that support brand messaging in a way that every internal team member can understand and then articulate to customers. The process also gives the company a framework for launching any new product, service, or initiative. Just tell them how the promise comes to life through the new initiative.

This approach makes the company more nimble because it reduces resistance to change. It builds all new initiatives on an established and recognized brand platform.



GATHER INTERNAL INPUT

An organization can't know its problems until it starts asking the right questions. Most companies gather data and input from their customers but fail to do the same with their employees (outside of annual employee surveys).

One of the best ways to address brand dilution and determine where messages might be falling apart is to establish a methodology that measures frontline attitudes and opinions on products and services on a regular basis, using employee experience to gain insight.

This approach fosters a collaborative environment and produces two significant benefits:

1. It lets brands assess whether key messaging is getting through to consumers or suffering from misalignment or dilution.
2. Data also helps brands understand the frontline view of the customer. This is the chance to get dual brand alignment and determine whether consumers are receiving the right information and spot-on messaging. Frontline representatives collect customer insights during every interaction, all of which can be useful to marketing teams when developing iterations of brand messaging. This builds the organization's ability to respond to customer needs.

Tip: Avoid simple surveys.

They often lack the structure or rigor needed to make the data useful. Most employees disregard surveys or answer them based on what they think they're supposed to say — not what their companies actually need to hear.

BEST PRACTICES: ESTABLISH STRUCTURE

Before you get started gathering opinions, establish a structure for how you'll go about it. Consistency in how you gather input shows employees what to expect and lets you collect data that is more easily tracked and analyzed. Within this structure:

- Clearly communicate the goal upfront so employees view the task as an open exchange of information and a way to help them serve customers better, too — not as a performance audit.
- Gather data on a set schedule so employees can build it into their routines.
- Ask the same or similar questions, and track any data changes over time.
- Gather feedback from all levels, including management and the corporate suite, to allow for comparison and a top-level view of brand alignment.
- Establish a follow-up loop that contains updates and action steps to be released on a regular (monthly or quarterly) basis so employees see the results of their input. Gathering input without action is almost as bad as not asking for their input in the first place.



FOLLOW THROUGH INTERNALLY

When companies launch new marketing initiatives, they often treat that launch as the finish line instead of the start of the journey. Success isn't just bringing a concept to market. Sustained success and the brand loyalty that follows really need to be the goal.

By failing to support initiatives post-launch, organizations signal to team members that the project wasn't actually that important. And employees respond most to tasks that are of critical importance. But if there is little follow-through or poor results, their efforts will diminish with each initiative that follows.

LAUNCH IS NOT PERFECTION

This typical "launch and leave" approach assumes that frontline teams are at their peak ability to sell and support a new initiative when, in reality, they're just beginning to understand the messaging.

A launch is the first opportunity frontline teams have to convey the value of their brand offering and connect with customers, but it isn't likely to be their best. They're not the polished version. Encourage your teams to try and fail early, but also continue to support them as they improve their message delivery and perfect the story. This fosters a culture of innovation and encourages team members to explore new ways to serve customers effectively.

LAUNCH IS ABOUT MOMENTUM

The launch should be about momentum, not mastery. The best thing companies can do is rein in their expectations of what happens at launch. What are the one or two main value points? What are the simple steps brand representatives need to be ready to take? What are the first few questions they should ask a customer?

Ease the frontline team into communicating the new messaging so they can feel comfortable from the beginning and even more comfortable with time. Inundating them with huge amounts of messaging to wrap their heads around leads to too much pressure and a bad employee experience. Confused employees will be more likely to stay on the sidelines the next time a new launch occurs.

**THE LAUNCH SHOULD BE ABOUT
MOMENTUM, NOT MASTERY.**



SEND SIMPLER MESSAGES OVER TIME

The larger and more diverse the company is, the more challenges it will face when trying to get employees to embrace new ideas, products, and services. Part of the reason for this is that values and messaging from the corporate executives down to the front lines get easily diluted as they travel. But the most effective companies are **strategically aligned across all departments** and levels, and that requires specific education efforts and methods for communicating with each team.



Rarely is it effective to ask frontline teams to digest all of the information you're providing them at once — yet so many companies expect to turn employees into experts with a single demonstration or training session. But these aren't true internal branding campaigns. Considering the number of other products and services a frontline employee is responsible for representing, there's real risk that expecting too much too quickly could overwhelm employees to the point of refusing to represent new initiatives at all. They might just wait it out until the next one comes along and hope it's better.

View new initiatives, instead, as ongoing campaigns, not a single event. External marketing campaigns employ the same technique by distributing different messages that build on those that came before them, so internal marketing campaigns can and should do the same. Think about new cars. An early advertisement might contain an image designed to generate interest. When the consumer sees it, she or he looks online for more information. Marketers implement these pull strategies that layer information as consumer interest grows.

The same methodology works internally as well. Layered information helps frontline employees digest, apply, and refine in a way that allows them to build a lasting connection with the brand and products they represent. It also builds a collaborative environment where engaged employees will know what additional details to seek out rather than having it all forced on them. Organizations are better to leave their people wanting to know more than overwhelming them with too much to know.



REVAMP THE ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

Knowledge is different than belief. You can know facts but not believe in the overarching story that binds them. Think of it this way. I can provide you with the ingredients, calories, and nutritional value of the food I'm eating, but you won't share the recipe with your friends until you taste and experience it yourself.

When companies give employees the chance to experience a new product or service and form their own opinions, it shapes their perception and how they sell it to others. **The key is to offer an experience beyond just information.**

The InnerView/FocusVision brand dilution report shows that the two most frequently used methods for driving brand message alignment are product training and email communication. The problem here? These tactics are only words, details, and information. They're just the ingredients.

Employees better align with brand messaging and believe in brand vision when they experience it through events and/or peer-to-peer engagement. In these cases, they get the chance to engage with the concepts, see them, and discuss them. Hearing a colleague reveal, **"I had a customer tell me our product helped them,"** is a much more impactful form of brand training than reading an email with bullet-point features (if they actually ever read the email).

An experience makes a product stand out. Emails and product training do not. Organizations need to seek internal brand engagement opportunities and ways to distribute information that will capture their attention and provoke thought. Move outside the box. **Create podcasts, virtual reality, games, action figures, or whatever works best for your employees.** Work to tailor messages to your internal customers just as you would your outside audience.

Embrace the truth that you'll have to think differently if you want your employees to hear your messages differently. New ideas and tactics will require innovation, but they will also spark innovation as your teams look at new ways to solve customer problems.

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SEGMENT AUDIENCES

Most companies are diverse and have layers of departments that represent their brand. With so many viewpoints, it's no wonder messaging gets diluted. When internal teams are only given the campaign details and information, the individual employees are left to figure out how the information may or may not apply to them.

Just as marketers segment external audiences, they have to segment messaging for their frontline teams, too. A salesperson needs to be just as knowledgeable and able to get the customer excited about products or services as a customer service representative. Customer service needs to be able to assist consumers and address any concerns they have. A technical support member must ensure the customer has a functional product.

These interactions and touchpoints are each different, but they all reflect the brand vision. It's critical that you deliver your brand story in a way that makes it easy for each audience to retell it:



First, identify each role that has direct contact with customers.



Look at how each position interacts with customers.



Determine the opportunities each role has to reflect your brand pillars.



Build internal branding campaigns and tools that highlight these specific roles and the behaviors they can adopt to better achieve brand alignment.

This approach flexes the collaboration and responsiveness muscles simultaneously. By working to understand each internal audience — just as they do with external customers — companies are one step closer to serving up the right message and equipping their teams to deliver a high-quality customer experience.

CONNECT WITH INNERVIEW

InnerView has taken an age-old problem — brand misalignment and message dilution — and built an entirely new way to address it.

Most companies opt for information-driven solutions designed to help employees understand the key points of a campaign. But when companies fail to complement their brand messaging with a way to build employee belief, confidence, and pride in the brand story, dilution and misalignment occur.

As it becomes more difficult for brands to stand out from the crowd, it becomes even more important that companies build their brand passion from within.

At InnerView, we treat frontline employees like they're the customer — the internal customer. We want them to be convinced of the compelling nature of their brand so they can represent it with passion, conviction, and consistency. Our experience-driven approach is designed to involve employees in the process and shape their attitudes and opinions so they can truly believe in brand messages through strong internal branding activities.

Our proprietary **Brand Transfer Score™** helps marketers measure the success of their internal branding efforts and understand where their messages are breaking down internally and why. As a result, they can translate knowledge into action and create strategic internal messaging that resonates with brand representatives.



Contact Information

InnerviewGroup.com
info@innerviewgroup.com

