Why In-House Communications Teams should have the Advantage, But Usually Don’t

By Nick Rice

Most medium sized businesses have a few people on staff full-time for the purpose of communication and design. And most of the time, these people stay pretty busy. It may be one person or you may have multiple teams assigned to the various design disciplines of PR, Marketing Communications, Corporate Communications, Advertising, Industrial Design, Packaging, Art Dept, etc... depending on your size.

More often than not, these teams do not work closely together; nor do they work closely with the executive team. This is a shame since all of them are all responsible for the external image and presentation of your company. Your customers don’t care that different teams designed your web site, spec sheets, press release, packaging, TV spots, and sales tools. But they sure feel the confusion if it’s not done properly - and sooner or later you will too.

These internal teams have a distinct advantage over outside vendors because they sit down the hallway from you. They live and breathe your business every day. They hear your value proposition directly from senior management and hopefully see it in action. There is no learning curve, it’s inherent. Your culture oozes out of them. It’s built into their daily lives.

Unfortunately, most of these in-house positions are filled with junior level professionals. Typically there is not a good long-term career path for “creatives” in business. How many of your senior managers came from the Art Department or Industrial Design or the PR team?

Your brand image & message has to be on target. It has to accurately reflect your values, aspirations, and your customers. It’s your stake in the ground. It’s what makes you different than your competition. It’s what engages your customers to buy. It’s too important to leave to people that aren’t the best available.

If you do not consider design a core competency, I contend that you should be working with valued outside partners. A good agency will be stocked with people whose lifelong goal is to be the best designer they can. People whose sole desire is to communicate your value proposition effectively - not move up the org chart or jockey for the next promotion. They want to help you put your best foot forward.

You don’t want junior staffers at the agency working on your account, so why would you staff your internal teams with them? Your marketing staff needs to know how to work with outside partners effectively. Partners are not vendors and should not be treated the same.
Find a partner that can translate your offering into messaging and visuals that resonate with your customers. Something that makes prospective clients stand up and take action.

In-house teams should have the advantage, but most do not. Most are overburdened with small projects that will not amount to a hill of beans at the end of the quarter. They never get a shot at the big projects that could make a dent in your objectives.

In a marketplace, where brand is #1, who do you trust with the image of your firm?

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