

## CEO Tip August 2013 – The CEO as Brand

by Guido Quelle

Discussions about brands are a bit like those about growth: Talk is cheap, but expertise is hard to come by. This problem becomes even more evident when it comes to the topic of "people as brands," where the tips and tricks provided by interested non-experts sometimes produce odd results. By way of example, "self-marketing" is an increasingly fashionable buzzword, but the unfortunate results of how it is practiced speak volumes.

Before we look into the subject of "the CEO as brand," let's establish a few basics: Brands with a positive image are associated with qualities like absolute reliability, a high degree of consistency, promises that are kept, high quality, high appeal and attraction—to name just a few. At the same time, leadership—a CEO's core duty—is connected to exemplary behavior and a number of the qualities just mentioned. If you are a regular reader of our articles and papers on the subject of growth, you'll know I believe that leaders—and especially CEOs—are role models whether they want to be or not. Regardless of whether their conduct seems admirable or not from the outside, they will become role models for others.

If we want to talk about growth – and brands are nothing more than a means of promoting growth—we need to recognize that it's helpful if the CEO—and not just the CEO, but every member of the Senior Management—is to some extent a "brand" of their own. At the same time, these "personal brands" have to be compatible with the corporate context in which these individuals are active. A CEO who is noted for being a hard but fair restructuring specialist will have a hard time in a visionary, consensus-based environment, a fact that is difficult to convey to shareholders and the public, let alone to employees.

Further, we have seen time and again that the press not only reports on companies as faceless entities, but are pleased as punch when there's something "juicy" to tell about a person who is responsible for a company or division and who represents a certain "direction." So where do you stand personally? What are the basic points that characterize you? And how do those points fit in the context of your company? What makes you stand out from the crowd? These questions need to be asked and answered if your goal is to establish the CEO (or further members of the Senior Management) as a brand. Note that we're not talking about setting up something artificial, but instead communicating the established facts in a more pointed way, about refining and accentuating them. Above all, it's not about stroking someone's ego—which tends to be disadvantageous for companies – but about creating a spearhead for external and internal communications, one that fits both the company's marketing image and its canon of values.

Primarily, what is needed is a good degree of self-awareness: knowing who you truly are. In this context, it is both desirable and right for individuals to shape and thereby change the company, provided the company's interests never have to take a back seat to personal ones. After all, the CEO is his or her company's greatest servant.

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