

Brand³: A New Dimension to the Way Marketing and Sales Leaders Build Customer Loyalty



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Adding personal brand to the mix of product and corporate brands is “disrupting” the way marketing and sales leaders are growing revenue and building customer loyalty.

By Karl D. Speak



Organizations can expand their strategic options for growing revenue and enhancing customer loyalty by integrating a business-based, proven model of personal brand into their strategies.

The challenges to grow revenue and deepen customer loyalty are tougher than ever. Many leaders are facing quandaries like these to grow their business:

- ▣ Is product differentiation waning and is it important to find ways to support and leverage salespeople’s personal relationships (personal brand equity) with customers to grow revenue?
- ▣ Are customers more loyal to a salesperson than the company, adding risk to revenue growth and possibly impeding the development of new business or marketing strategies?

- ▣ Are marketing budgets under pressure? Are the effectiveness of current marketing tools too limiting? Would harnessing the power of the personal brand equity of salespeople expand marketing strategies?

These familiar marketing challenges, among many others, will benefit by injecting a model of personal brand into marketing strategy discussions. Integrating personal brand into an organization’s brand mix is an innovative way to expand its brand power.

The remainder of this article will demonstrate how to use a personal brand-driven sales strategy in mature or commodity markets.

If I Had a Nickel . . .

Recently I was delivering a keynote speech to a large group of sales people when a spirited salesperson yelled out – “we need help, we’re selling a commodity!” He was not exaggerating, I know the company and their core service offering is mature and no longer as proprietary as it once was when the company disrupted a stodgy industry. Making matters worse their corporate brand had become synonymous with the now mature product! So this salesperson’s pain was real. However, with a change in perspective and a few new tools from marketing, his plight may be less challenging. Let me explain.

If I had a nickel for every time I heard a sales or marketing professional agonize about how the product or service they sell is a commodity, I could keep my Starbucks card filled until I retire. I know that selling a mature product or service is not easy, especially if you are not the low-price leader.

A very large share of products and services are commodities or will be soon. Every product moves closer to becoming a commodity everyday. Many companies’ “cash cows” are commodities. To say a product or service is a commodity strongly suggests it has little or no product brand power to leverage. A product may be a commodity, but a relationship can be distinctive if a salesperson takes advantage of all the brand power at his/her disposal.

Customer Loyalty Now Comes in Three Flavors

Brands are relationships. Customers can be loyal because of their relationship with a product, or their relationship with the organization that offers the product or their relationship with a particular individual that represents the company, or a

combination of all three. In “brand-speak” we call those product brands, corporate brands and personal brands, respectively. Including personal brand in the mix is a new idea and is an important point of this article.

Let’s step back for a quick moment to put personal brand into context. Brand building started as a business discipline to nurture a loyal relationship between a consumer and a manufacturer’s product. The brand discipline migrated to building corporate brands as a strategy to either elevate the customer relationship to the company level or add another tool to strengthen a product brand. Incorporating personal brand into the brand mix is changing the way organizations are developing revenue

and customer loyalty strategies. Explicitly acknowledging the role and power of personal brand is enabling a whole new perspective to managing an organization’s relationship equities.

Ignoring the important role of a salesperson’s personal brand was a fundamental flaw in developing customer loyalty strategies in the past. Certainly it was conventional wisdom that salespeople’s relationship with customers was an important

part of the customer loyalty equation. However a model of personal brand was lacking from the marketing discipline. The lack of a practical personal brand framework prompted me to write the first edition of *Be Your Own Brand*. There are a number of important practical applications that have been developed following the publication of the book. Individuals, especially salespeople, now have a practical set of learning tools for building a stronger personal brand, an important career asset for them. Another application was the expansion of the traditional two-brand portfolio to include the personal brand as the third corporate relationship-building asset. (The third primary application centers on creating internal brand alignment.)

Modern Brand Portfolio

Product Brand



Corporate Brand



Personal Brand



Traditionally it has been the responsibility of marketing professionals to develop strategies to determine what brand to lead the charge to grow customer loyalty. As an example, consumer package goods companies have focused on using product brands as their primary tool to create customer loyalty. By comparison many business-to-business organizations favor using their corporate brand as a differentiator to garner preference from their customers. Firms in the professional and financial services businesses rely on the strength of the personal brand of the service professional to generate loyalty with clients.

The acknowledgement of the importance of personal brand has enabled the creation of the “modern brand portfolio” framework and the tools to practically implement it. This new perspective on brand assets has many implications for marketing and sales professionals.

Establishing a Brand³ Sales Strategy

Successful, experienced salespeople know the value of using all three brands to differentiate themselves and what they are selling. In the best case these savvy sales professionals use all three brands in different proportions depending upon the prospect and the opportunity presenting itself. The right proportion can depend upon a number of different things, such as the strength of each brand at any point in time or the nature of the customer relationship, as two simple examples. The ability to effectively use a “multi-brand” sales strategy comes as a result of a lot of worn shoe leather, so to speak, and has been practiced more like an art than a science.

The idea of using a mix of product, corporate and personal brands as a part of a sales strategy is not the eureka discovery here. The point is the lack of practical, relevant personal brand tools and the sales training to use them gets in the way of more

salespeople proactively using a fuller portfolio of brand power. Marketers have an opportunity to extend their perspective on how brands are used and provide sales professionals with a practical set of brand tools, enabling them to leverage the use of three brands in their sales activities.

The success of implementing a Brand³ sales strategy hinges on three key drivers:

- ▣ The organization’s brand management competence and resource commitment
- ▣ Creating brand tools that are designed for salespeople’s use
- ▣ Providing salespeople the training to use the brand tools

Strong brands (product, corporate and personal) are the backbone of a Brand³ sales strategy. Therefore an organization’s commitment to building strong brands is a key success factor in using this innovative sales strategy. Organizations that have demonstrated a long-term commitment to marketing professionalism and effective brand strategies have an advantage. However it is likely many marketing-savvy organizations have under-invested in developing the personal brand competence of their sales professionals, which for some companies is the more important brand asset.

Traditionally brand has been a marketing tool. Therefore the competence to develop brand strategies and build brand equity has been the responsibility of marketing professionals. Marketing professionals use brand-building techniques to build customer relationships indirectly by using various tactics like advertising, promotion and social media tools. Sales professional’s competency is built on using direct, generally one-on-one, techniques to build customer relationships.

Brand³
is an innovative
way for
organizations to
expand their
brand power.

Brand³ is a hybrid strategy that transfers the power of brand directly into the hands of salespeople. To support this new sales strategy marketing professionals will need to take special effort to define brands in a practical way that support the sales process.

Providing sales people with the training to use a Brand³ strategy is the final lynch pin in the process. The training needs to address three key areas:

- ▣ Leveraging the principles of personal brand
- ▣ Becoming articulate in communicating about the three brands
- ▣ Applying the Brand³ sales strategy in different situations

Successfully implementing a Brand³ sales strategy will require marketers to retool their brand tools for use by salespeople and for salespeople to learn how to integrate a three brand strategy into their sales activities.

Creating Brand³ Tools

Corporate Brand

Helping salespeople leverage the corporate brand in the selling process is an under-leveraged opportunity for many organizations. All salespeople use the corporate brand in his or her selling and relationship-building activities. It is a natural part of the sales process, but like all business skills it can be improved with better tools and knowledge.

The primary objective of leveraging the corporate brand in sales situations is adding credibility to the notion that the company's products and services are different because of how the company does business. After all, a corporate brand defines

the company's "brand" (its uniqueness) of doing business. Connecting who the company is, the legacy of its corporate character, to support how it does business everyday, provides credence and differentiates the company in the customer's mind.

BRAND³

Traditionally corporate brands have been defined to support their use by marketers or corporate communication specialists.

Defining a corporate brand to be used in a Brand³ portfolio needs more detail and practical tone. Following is a set of definitional guidelines that will support salespeople's everyday use and enthusiasm for a corporate brand.

- ▣ Refine the corporate brand position statement so it is distinctive, benefit-driven, credible and most importantly, easy to say. Crafting what has become known as the proverbial "elevator speech" is very important and best accomplished using a creative writing resource.
- ▣ Define a set of brand impressions that best represents the core qualities of the brand that support and provide credence to the corporate brand position.
- ▣ Develop a "corporate character" white paper to add credibility to the corporate brand by demonstrating how the company's unique "brand ethos" has guided its success over time.
- ▣ Develop a sales training module that provides salespeople with a rich understanding of the corporate brand platform. The training should also include how to apply core elements of the corporate brand platform in sales situations. Involving the salespeople in role-playing that enables them to become confident in the language of the corporate brand platform is mandatory.

Salespeople's confidence in the corporate brand's credibility and comfort in using it in sales situations is the most effective way to leverage it as a corporate sales and marketing asset.

Product Brand

Salespeople are most familiar with incorporating product brands into their sales process. However in too many cases the product brands are underleveraged. The well-known "feature-benefit" idiom used to describe a product can have the impact of constraining a product's brand equity to its technical functionality.

Product brands defined this narrowly offer a diminishing impact as a differentiating tool. If managed properly product brand equity does not have to diminish as the underlying product matures. However if marketers don't employ forward-looking product brand strategies, salespeople will have access to one less brand to use in their portfolio of relationship equities.

Here are a few tips that marketers can employ to help their sales colleagues become more effective in using product brands in their sales process.

- Write a vision for the product brand, projecting the core technology onto other applications as well as expected changes in the behavior of the targeted customer that the current product addresses. A product with a vision and future has a much better chance to be an enduring product brand and a better story for a salesperson to tell.
- Avoid using the feature-benefit framework in defining a product brand. For an example of this "old school" way to define a product brand, think of any product brand that has been reduced to a generic descriptor e.g., Xerox, Kleenex, and possibly Google.

Be articulate about what behavior the product addresses, not the product functionality. In addition spell out how the targeted customer

will feel when the product or service is successfully used. Add a human element to the product brand relationship. This will help make an emotional connection for the brand.

- Connect the corporate character (a part of the corporate brand platform) to the product brand. This will demonstrate how the unique strengths of the corporate brand are the key drivers of the uniqueness of the product brand. Apple's connection to iPod, iPhone, and iPad makes the difference between being a famous brand and in interesting product name.
- Be sure to tell, sell and evangelize the virtues of the product brand equity in all sales training.

Building Stronger Personal Brands

Personal brand building should be given the same priority as building other brands. In some cases, like professional services and financial services, more effort and resources should be applied to personal brand building because personal brand is the most important brand in these categories. A proactive personal brand-building competency is in order for customer-facing employees in organizations.

Successful salespeople are highly skilled at relationship building and by definition have a strong personal brand. In many cases their brands have grown through intuition and the school of hard knocks. Mid-level performers and younger sales professionals have not had the same level of experience to enhance their relationship intuition and to learn lessons. Both groups can benefit from



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adding personal brand training to the organization's sales training curriculum. If you are unfamiliar with personal brand used as a business tool, more information can be found at <http://www.brandtoolbox.com/services/personal-brand-building/>.

“Personal brand building should be given the same priority as building other brands.”

Applying A Brand³ Sales Strategy

Using a mix of all three brands is the essence of the Brand³ sales strategy. The question is in what proportion and which brand takes the lead. What situations would one lead with the product brand versus the corporate brand versus the personal brand of the salesperson? Here are a few guidelines to consider:

In a nutshell, here are the basic building blocks of personal brand building for salespeople:

- ▣ Understand and leverage the power of positive perceptions.
- ▣ Develop a personal brand platform that emphasizes each person's outstanding relationship-building qualities.
- ▣ Encourage every salesperson to conduct an annual personal brand assessment to gain a fact-based understanding of how others (outside and inside the organization) perceive him or her.
- ▣ Conduct annual (maybe more often depending upon the level of the salesperson) personal brand coaching sessions to target opportunities to close the gap between how the individual is perceived and their personal brand platform as a way to leverage their personal brand strengths.

Adding a personal brand module to a corporate sales training curriculum will enable sales professionals to more quickly leverage the power of their personal brand in sales situations. In addition, if the training module addresses the power of aligning with the corporate brand, the result will be adding a powerful corporate brand-building tool with each customer interaction.

- ▣ **Product Brand.** Lead with the product brand when selling a category-leading brand, especially one that is leading the category because of its proprietary technology or other feature that has created a strong barrier to entry. Product brand emphasis is best if the new product is an extension of a very successful product brand or may be supported with a co-brand or ingredient brand.
- ▣ **Corporate Brand.** If one is selling for an organization with a world-class corporate brand, the default strategy should always be to lead with the corporate brand. Solution selling has become a popular sales strategy with many companies. The basic idea behind solution selling is to place less emphasis on selling a product and re-position the customer relationship to support higher margin sales or expand the product portfolio relevant to the customer. Leading with a corporate brand can be a very useful strategy to support a solutions-selling approach. Leading with the corporate brand always benefits selling into a new category. Whether its solutions selling or entering a new category leveraging the “brand standards” of the corporate brand is the best sales strategy. Lead with the corporate brand when a competitor owns a well-known product brand. Another situation that favors emphasizing a corporate brand is if a product brand's equity has faded or suffered a set back.

▣ **Personal Brand.** A natural situation to leverage a personal brand is if a salesperson has a long tenure in a category or related categories. Situations where the salesperson plays a significant role in the post-sale implementation or product support, would benefit from an emphasis on a personal brand. Leveraging a personal brand in establishing credibility in a solutions-selling environment and also introducing a customer to a new product or brand extension are applications for placing a focus on the personal brand.

Leveraging a combination of product, corporate and personal brands to drive revenue and customer loyalty has been practiced by the best organizations and top-performing salespeople. It's time for more organizations to integrate these best practices into their sales process. I have seen it work many times and I know that high-performing salespeople are enthusiastic adopters.

Now back to the sales meeting. At the end of the meeting I asked the audience, "Do you believe there is something special about your company?" and, "Do you believe your personal brand of selling is better than your competitors?" They enthusiastically yelled out, "Yes!" to both questions. "Are you selling a commodity?" was my next question. They responded with a resounding, "No!!"

Salespeople are ready and waiting to use more relationship equity to grow revenue. Provide sales professionals the tools to leverage the power of three strong brands and the training to integrate them into their sale process and you will be surprised at the difference it will make in growing revenue.

Whether stated explicitly or understood implicitly customer relationship equity is an important asset that can separate leaders from followers. The purpose of the modern brand portfolio is to provide business leaders a framework to

proactively and strategically manage customer relationship equity to support the business growth of their organization.

The role of personal brand is simply too important in leveraging customer loyalty to not be a part of the strategic mix. Consciously acknowledging and including the role of personal brand equity will enhance any organization's customer loyalty strategy. Take a moment and ask yourself - How is your customer loyalty distributed between product, corporate and personal brands? Is that proportion by design or default?

The modern brand portfolio framework will create a whole new world of customer relationship strategies. Are you ready to take advantage of the power of Brand³?

About the Author



Karl D. Speak is a global expert known for his pragmatic and unconventional approach to using brand as a leadership platform for gaining customer loyalty and employee engagement. Karl's innovative work on corporate brand strategy, personal brand and internal brand building has been implemented in companies in 23 countries. His best selling book, *Be Your Own Brand*, is translated into 12 languages and has sold over 80,000 copies. In January 2011 a revised and expanded version of *Be Your Own Brand* was released to leverage the global success of the first edition and the growing popularity of personal brand.

Brand Tool Box, Ltd., the company he founded over 27 years ago, is the global leader in developing and implementing internal brand-building programs. It is a unique professional services organization melding world-class brand expertise and organizational development best practices to help organizations build and nourish customer-centric culture alignment. Brand Tool Box's consulting processes, training programs and organizational development tools have been successfully implemented in companies across virtually all industry segments, non-profits and governments.

Brand Tool Box has successfully packaged its intellectual property into a portfolio of training workshops, coaching and consulting templates. The products have been used in a range of business and personal development applications, ranging from internal brand building, sales training to leadership development coaching. The product set is also being distributed through the Brand Tool Box Partner Network.

Through Brand Tool Box, Karl has implemented his contemporary approach to brand management and internal brand building with a wide range of corporate clients. Clients such as 3M, LeadingAge, American Express, AT&T, BASF, BMW, Cabela's, Cargill, Consumers Energy, EDMC, FedEx, Honeywell, IBM, ING, Mosaic, Motorola, Securian, Skandia, Sony Corporation, St. Jude Medical, Syngenta, Target Corporation, The Scotts Company, The Wall Street Journal, Toro, and Walgreens have benefited from Karl's consulting and internal brand building programs.

Karl also serves as an "expert witness" in legal cases involving matters relating to brand.

Karl holds a Masters Degree in Economics from the University of Minnesota. Karl teaches in the MBA programs at University of Minnesota, Saint Thomas University, and has been guest lecturer at University of Westminster in London, Capella University, ESADE University in Madrid, among others.

Karl's boardroom experience includes being a board member of Mesa Holdings, VocalEssence and serving as the chair of the board of The Design Management Institute.



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