

# Using Your Electronic Brand to

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You are launching a new communications out-reach program on 'change', or, a conservation initiative, or, are in the midst of recreating your web site, and you want to secure as much customer and stakeholder feedback and positive response as possible. So just how do you go about achieving this worthy goal?

LDC's have a unique opportunity to both educate and modify the behaviour of one of your most important stakeholders: your customers, simply by 'reframing' your web communications strategy. Your customers are web savvy and utilize this 'mature' communications channel very effectively to find information, shop, book travel, etc. and, to form opinions on their suppliers. Is your web site doing all it can to provide a superior Customer Response and Customer Experience?

Does your web site espouse and promote the values and vision of your organization? Have you created an ebranding™ position for your brand? (what is it that you want your electronic brand to be on the web?) Today's LDC's, and all the other major players in Ontario's electricity production, distribution, and management business have very strong

and powerful brands in the minds of customers.

Are you using your electronic brand to its fullest potential when communicating to your customers and employees? Are you giving your web site visitors what they really want in an online experience? Only 56% of companies responding to a recent survey state that 'their organizations are quite committed to providing the best online user experience'<sup>1</sup>.

Why not take the time and energy to create a positive online user experience? Here are the top 6 benefits and Return on Investment (ROI) for companies who adopt a dedicated user-friendly approach to their web site:

1. Improved perception of brand
2. Increased conversion rates
3. Greater customer loyalty and retention
4. Increased customer advocacy
5. Increased traffic
6. Improved search rankings

Look carefully at points # 3 and 4 and you will realize that in today's age of: conservation and demand management, smart metering initiative, peak time rates,

demand side management plus the significant costs of infrastructure replacement, there is a valuable upside to creating highly targeted and effective web communications. The 'power to move' your customer from a stance of mistrust or indifference by getting them to 'reframe' their opinion of your company, can assist in transforming feelings of hostility, anger, lack of trust, or indifference, into active recognition and support<sup>2</sup>, through the online discussion(s) your company engages them in.

And what about the benefit of creating a strategically sound, user-friendly web site that communicates your organizations' strategy (values and vision) to your own staff? A recent paper by Harvard Business School Publishing<sup>3</sup> stated that 95% of workers do not understand their organization's strategy'. Further, 73% of companies that were outperforming their peers had a formal process for communicating strategy to their employees' while only 28% of 'underperformers' had such a process.

Imagine the benefits to your organization and customers, by using web channels (in conjunction with other channels) to clearly communicate your strategy to your workers via: intranet, blog, a strategy web site, newsletters, webinars, corporate web site, and customer satisfaction/service tools on your corporate web site (i.e. an FAQ engine, an issues tracking engine) etc. The provision of these online 'tools' speak volumes about your commitment to provide meaningful service and support.

Effective communications engage employees. With a clearer understanding of the organization's strategic goals and of their individual role in achieving them, employees can focus on the activities that are most important. They will also gain an intuitive sense of the right thing to do and more importantly, do it.<sup>3</sup>

#### Sources:

1. econsultancy & Bunnyfoot, May 2007, (Sample: 756 Respondents)
2. Bolman and Deal, 2004
3. Norton, D., P., Coffey, J., Harvard Business School Publishing, Balanced Scorecard Report, 2007, May - June, Vol. 9, Number 3.

# its Fullest Potential

Developing an effective communications program requires organizations to:

- Understand the unique nature of their audience(s)
- Develop the right message(s)
- Determine how they will deliver those message(s)
- Verify (test and research) what was actually communicated

This then has many of the hallmarks of an effective ebranding™ program. Does your web site 'walk the talk' that your CEO and Board of Directors have, as a vision and strategy for the success and growth of the business?

The web site for a large electricity related

client of Howe Brand (esasafe.com), now receives over 2 million unique visitors per month. While this traffic has been growing dramatically over the past 6 years, there has been an improvement in search rankings, an increase in customer satisfaction with the web site, and a decrease in call volume at the ESA call centre. Further, a significant and growing proportion of visitors are now doing business online with the client. This speeds up the process and allows the customer to control the interaction.

So when faced with that most worthy task of re-engaging your stakeholders and customers in a meaningful dialogue around *change* (the electricity industry is experiencing gut-wrenching change on many levels), reflect carefully on how, with respect and clarity, you can make it easier for any stakeholder or customer to 'do business with you' in whatever form their 'business' with you might look like!



*Gavan Howe is the president of Howe Brand Communications and its online division - ebranders.com. Howe Brand Communications has created a unique system of strategies for bringing brands to the web called ebranding™ and, with his fully bilingual team, has successfully created hundreds of terrestrial and electronic brands, web sites and risk communications programs for clients in the private, public, and commercial sectors.*

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