

Embedding Brand Promises: Strengths and Gaps

Original Report: *Translating Brand Promises into Employee Behaviors*

SUMMARY

Organizations that excel at Experience Management (XM) use their brand as a blueprint for how they treat everyone who interacts with them, including customers, employees, partners, and even prospective customers. A successful brand emphasizes the mission of the organization and aligns everyone in it around a common purpose. To embed its brand into its culture and processes, an organization needs to translate it into a clear set of promises and then use these promises to shape every experience it delivers. Use this worksheet to help you identify existing gaps and strengths in your brand promises and brainstorm ideas for delivering on compelling brand promises.

THREE STEPS FOR EMBEDDING BRAND PROMISES ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION

A organization's brand comes to life through the experiences it creates. Organizations often articulate their brand through a *set of promises an organization is committed to delivering to everyone who interacts with it*. This set of brand promises must be aligned with the organization's broader mission, vision, and organizational values and should not only inform the design of all its products and experiences, but should also guide the decisions and behaviors of employees and leaders around the business.

To ensure the organization is living up to its brand promises, it must explicitly translate these promises into appropriate organizational behaviors, which can be embedded in its customer, employee, and product experiences. There are three steps an organization should follow to construct and carry out these promises:

- 1. MAKE promises.** Before an organization is able to fulfill its brand promises, it must first formally define and share these promises across the organization. This requires more than just an academic exercise that results in a superficial rallying cry for employees and management. Instead, this process must deliver strong brand promises that are easy to remember and capable of guiding individual and organizational decisions every day (see page 3). These promises should be clearly communicated both internally and externally to set appropriate expectations and should be infused into new hire onboarding.
- 2. EMBRACE promises.** To bring these brand promises to life, employees and leaders must first understand the individual role they play in fulfilling the promises and then receive the training and support necessary for allowing them to deliver on those promises within the context of their work. The organization should embrace promises by translating them into specific employee behaviors, training middle managers on how to reinforce brand promises, incorporating them into leadership competencies, and embedding brand promises into HR processes.
- 3. KEEP promises.** Simply understanding the brand promises is not enough; an organization must hold itself accountable for living up to those promises during every single interaction, whether it's with customers, employees, prospects, partners, etc. To ensure it consistently keeps its brand promises, the organization needs to continuously track and review its goals for keeping promises, ask the people it interacts with about how well its delivering on its promises, align incentives for employees with the promises, and infuse brand promises into company processes, such as marketing communications, new product development, and innovation efforts.

HOW TO USE

To help you identify current strengths and existing gaps in brand promises, you can use this tool in a number of ways:

- + **Self-evaluation.** Fill out the worksheet on page 2 yourself by first marking existing strengths of your organization's approach to brand promises, then identifying areas needing additional investment and work.
- + **Group discussion.** Use this tool in a group exercise. After each individual completes both the worksheet, discuss the current strengths and gaps you each marked as well as areas of agreement and disagreement in the results.
- + **Action planning.** Develop plans for leveraging strengths and closing gaps in your brand promise efforts. Use the characteristics of a strong brand promise described on page 3 to identify opportunities for improving your existing brand promises or defining new brand promises.

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First, in the “strength” column, check off the activities that your organization is already consistently strong at. Then, in the “gap” column, mark practices where your brand promises require additional investment and work. For ideas on how to create new or refresh existing brand promises, use the advice provided on page 3.

		STRENGTH	GAP
MAKE PROMISES	Brand promises are clearly communicated and highly visible across the organization		
	Brand promises are written in a way that establish clear expectations for customers and employees		
	Brand promises are consistent with and linked to the organization’s values		
	Brand promises are made with executive and employee input		
	Brand promises are a critical component of new hire onboarding		
EMBRACE PROMISES	Brand promises are translated into specific behaviors for employees across the organization		
	Managers across the organization are expected to help their teams embrace promises		
	Leaders regularly discuss brand promises at internal meetings		
	The behaviors needed to keep brand promises are incorporated into leadership competencies		
	Performance management systems assess how well employees keep brand promises		
KEEP PROMISES	Employee recognition and celebrations reinforce the behaviors needed to keep brand promises		
	The organization includes keeping brand promises within its corporate goals		
	The organization asks customers and employees to provide feedback on how well it delivers on its brand promises		
	Organization processes are examined and changed to support keeping brand promises		
	Leaders make trade-offs to deliver on brand promises even if it negatively impacts financial results		

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Characteristics of a Strong Brand Promise

Before an organization is able to deliver on brand promises, it first needs to formally define and share those promises inside the organization. Here are some characteristics of a strong brand promise to keep in mind as you go about formulating or refreshing the promises of your organization.

Strong brand promises:

- + **Align with the organization's mission and values.** Promises should support what the business is trying to achieve and how it wants to be perceived in the market.
- + **Incorporate input from key segments.** Brand promises must reflect what is most important to your target customers, employees, partners, etc. Incorporate quantitative and qualitative insights from these key segments as well as feedback from your frontline employees, who are in the best position to translate these promises into what will work in 'the real world.'
- + **Are easy to understand.** Promises should explicitly communicate what types of offerings and experiences people can anticipate from your company. Clear brand promises will attract target customers and employees and set their expectations appropriately.
- + **Provide meaningful value.** Promises should help people successfully accomplish their goals with the organization, help them calibrate how much effort they should be putting into interactions, and should generate the appropriate positive emotions during each encounter with the organization.
- + **Offer clear direction to employees.** Employees across the organization need to understand what the promises are and how they should be bringing those promises to life within the context of their individual role.
- + **Are actively endorsed by executives.** If executives do not actively talk about the brand promises and act in ways that support the promises, employees will view the promises as empty marketing messages and won't change their own behaviors and practices.
- + **Are incorporated into the company's strategy.** An organizations should demonstrate its commitment to keeping brand promises by incorporating them into its goals, plans, and investments.
- + **Are periodically reviewed and updated.** Promises should be regularly revisited and updated to ensure they still reflect the organization's strategies and priorities and are delivering the desired experiences.