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12 Internal marketing and branding

Nonprofit marketing starts from the inside

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Success for modern nonprofit organisations in a competitive world relies upon not just effective external marketing, but good internal marketing to build a culture that underpins marketing orientation and maximises efficient use of marketing resources. This chapter focuses on contemporary academic research and the latest thinking on internal marketing and branding in nonprofits and combines this theory with practice through clear examples. Challenges of internal marketing, brand orientation and the role of internal structure are explicitly examined. A case study based on a well-known nonprofit music festival in Finland is explored and analysed to illustrate how the discussed internal marketing and branding theory inform good practice. Implications for practice are detailed.

Why it matters

There is no doubt that as charities have embraced the ethos and practice of marketing they have become increasingly sophisticated in their approaches. Nevertheless, there are several areas where cutting-edge research can help inform better and more effective practice. The internal marketing infrastructure is one such area of theory, where a better understanding of the best way to organise resources for marketing, execute brand management, manage the internal brand and build a culture that underpins marketing orientation is both important and challenging. Therefore, this chapter focuses on contemporary thinking on the issues around internal marketing and branding in nonprofits and brings together theory and practice to deliver impact. An example based in the Finnish nonprofit festival market is explored.

Internal marketing

Internal marketing as a concept has been researched for 40 years (Yildiz & Kara, 2017). For example, Berry (1981, p. 34) defined it as ‘viewing employees as internal customers, and viewing jobs as internal products that satisfy the needs and wants of these internal customers while addressing the objectives of the organization’. Most research has focused on how to implement internal marketing and the outcomes (Huang, 2020), but recently this has widened to understanding underlying concepts in sectors beyond traditional consumer marketing, such as nonprofit marketing.

Marketing has a close relationship with branding, the two terms overlapping in general usage, and this is true in terms of the internal marketing concept in the nonprofit sector.

Internal branding

In [Clark et al. \(2020\)](#) it was argued that marketing needs to start from the inside out. Internal branding has its roots in internal marketing, which builds on the idea of the employee as a customer. Accordingly, [Liu et al. \(2015, p. 319\)](#) outline internal branding as ‘an organization’s attempts to persuade its staff to buy in to the organization’s brand value and transform it into a reality’.

Internal branding therefore refers to brand-building efforts that focus on promoting a brand inside an organisation to motivate the employees to transform the brand promise into reality. Increasingly, organisations worldwide are investing significant resources in internal branding and it is evident that internal branding has become an important topic in nonprofit brand research in the UK (e.g. [Hankinson, 2004](#); [Liu et al., 2015](#)).

Internal branding is important to understand in its fullest sense, as the literature suggests that too often brand-building efforts have been limited to superficial and quick solutions, such as logo redesigns and catchy slogans. However, designing visible elements of the brand (e.g. logos, slogans and colours) is only a part of successful brand building. Internal branding, it is suggested, should precede design of any tangible brand elements and certainly any external branding (the goal of which is to communicate a compelling brand image and value proposition to often diverse stakeholders).

Internal branding is therefore critical in enhancing employees’ attachment and identification with the brand, as well as in managing employees’ awareness and perceptions of the brand. [Ind \(2001\)](#) suggests that employers should make efforts to engage employees so that they can identify with the organisation and thus become brand champions who embrace the brand. In turn, managers need to promote a shared understanding of organisational brand values by implementing ‘brand-supportive behaviour’. The concept of internal branding is therefore related to, yet distinct from, that of employer branding ([Hytti et al., 2015](#); [Saleem & Iglesias, 2016](#)).

Challenges of internal branding

However, charities face significant challenges when implementing the internal branding concept. Some of these are external, exemplified in work by the authors where a marketing manager from a nonprofit argued that ‘unlike commercial businesses, the public will question the charitable nature of our business, if we spend too much on [external] marketing activities to build the reputation of our brand’. Despite this, they felt that ‘internal branding can help us

to communicate about our brand in a cost-efficient manner, so we can devote more resources toward our charitable activities' (Liu et al., 2017, p. 4).

Challenges are also internal, however, and it has been suggested:

for most people employed by charities, branding is 'not my business' even if I realise it's important. However, for a brand to really live and grow, it has to be owned at some level by everyone who represents it. The challenge is to turn brand strategy into something meaningful for the majority of a charity's own people. It can be done.

(Grounds, 2005, p. 65)

Despite challenges, the branding of nonprofit organisations enables them to succeed in a competitive environment, and it seems that the difficulty of branding in this sector compels these organisations to develop different, creative strategies and solutions (Stuart, 2016). This emphasises the potential importance of appropriate internal branding strategies and models, and a number of areas of theory and their application are explored in the rest of this chapter.

Brand orientation

Brand orientation can logically be argued to be a necessary precursor for internal branding to be effectively implemented in charities. The concept of brand orientation refers to an organisation's focus on building and sustaining their brand promise (Ewing & Napoli, 2005) and is key to internal branding strategies and approaches.

Therefore, to implement internal branding, charities must build employees' knowledge of the brand promise, and also the important role that brand orientation and internal branding techniques fulfil (Urde et al., 2013).

In Liu et al. (2017), a positive and linear relationship between internal branding mechanisms (IBM) and employee brand-building behaviours (EBBB) was identified and assessed. EBBB refers to the concept of employees' actions determining a target audience's perceptions of the brand promise, which in turn enhances brand-building outcomes (King et al., 2013).

In this paper, interviews with senior managers in nonprofit organisations demonstrated this. One such interviewee argued that:

We constantly communicate our values [reflected in our brand] through our newsletter and meetings..., as well as our training programs.... I think that is why the people [staff and volunteers] in our organization accept and act consistently with our [brand] values.

(Liu et al., 2017, p. 8)

This supports the argument that internal brand communication activities enable organisations to build their employees' understanding of their brand promise, which in turn motivates employees to behave consistently (in terms of the brand promise) when interacting with others. This therefore endorses the positive relationship between IBM and EBBB. However, a communication director from an arts nonprofit argued that an excessive focus on brand communication can be detrimental to ensuring EBBB, because 'the staff may feel that they should not do anything beyond what we've asked them to do'.

A care charity expressed a different view that 'our [brand] messages are consistent across every communication channel we use.... For internal [brand] communication, we work with HR to integrate these [brand] messages into the staff training manuals and orientation package' (Liu et al., 2017, p. 8).

In summary, therefore, the authors in this work found that:

the development of effective internal communication tools and training programs requires: 1) the organisations' brand promise information is consistent across the various communication channels during dissemination; and 2) the organisations' development of the brand promise must incorporate the different stakeholders' (including the employees') points of view and feelings about the organisation. These findings are in line with theoretical logic regarding the relationship between brand orientation and internal brand mechanisms.

(Liu et al., 2017, p. 8)

This work clarified that organisations' investment in establishing brand orientation can underpin the development of structured external communication to help employees to articulate the organisational values and understand their roles within the organisation.

Internal structure and its relationship to internal branding

Charities vary greatly in size, but also in how they are structured. Some are highly centralised, others have multiple and highly autonomous centres. This has its own implications for the approach to and effectiveness of internal branding. Interfunctional communication needs to be carefully considered.

Liu et al. (2017, p. 8) explored and suggested a significant outcome regarding this; specifically, that 'too much communication between staff from different functional departments within the

organization can sometime undermine internal branding efforts', especially when staff are unfamiliar with the branding theory and practice. Interviewees in this paper stated that they 'must always ensure that our new brand is not being misinterpreted or miscommunicated by our staff'.

This comment implies that greater interfunctional communication creates a work environment in which employees can express and share their personal views about the brand promise. This in turn can create inconsistent information about the brand promise within the organisation.

So what can be done to mitigate this? In [Liu et al. \(2017\)](#), p. 9), results suggested that efforts to engage in internal communication and encourage

staff to share what they learn about the brand may not yield a great benefit initially. However, beyond a certain point, staff may start to come up with creative ideas regarding what they can do to help to build a strong nonprofit brand and communicate the brand promise to stakeholders. Greater interfunctional communication creates a work environment in which employees exchange their personal ideas about how to participate in the organisations' brand-building efforts in their own way.

On the other hand, when well-established IBM and greater interfunctional communication are both present, organisations become highly effective at communicating the brand promise to their employees. Therefore, IBM can facilitate EBBB at an accelerating rate. This paper, in summary, contributed to the internal branding literature by enriching understanding of the extent to which the nature of the work environment affects internal branding (e.g. [Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011](#); [Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006](#)).

The above naturally leads to the question of whether a centralised or decentralised organisation is better placed to manage internal branding. This was explored in [Leijerholt et al. \(2019\)](#) in the context of public sector organisations. They found that in nonprofits where there are related but fairly independent departments or units, internal stakeholders need to understand how the organisational and departmental brands are linked. The organisation also needs to work towards alignment in branding. Therefore, supporting efforts such as style guides, marketing support and integrating the brand into internal systems can support a level of consistency of the brand while also providing departmental autonomy. Of course, the challenge is to find a balance between departmental autonomy and brand consistency, as complete consistency may not be wholly desirable in nonprofits. Instead, departments may need some flexibility in managing their brands, although such practices may contradict traditional branding practice and theory.

However, results in this work suggested that greater freedom for individual departments to interpret the overarching brand may, perhaps surprisingly, not only ensure greater employee commitment but also improved external brand perception. There are, however, certain connection points that seem to have a positive influence on the department–organisational brand relationship. These include the core value statement, organisational branding structures and connections, and overall charity/public sector values. Combined, these connection points, and the general nature of the brand, may, if managed well, support a strong and positive brand for the organisation. Compared to branding in the private sector, branding seemingly warrants a somewhat different approach in nonprofits. Thus, this study suggests that individual departmental branding may be a fruitful path to building a positive brand for the overall organisation.

If departmental brands support a positive, and sector-relevant, organisational brand, the two brands may in fact align. This work therefore concluded that ‘such alignment can be supported through some supporting factors linking the departmental brand efforts to the organisation’ (Leijerholt et al., 2019, p. 287).

In terms of facilitating that discussed so far, internal brand management approaches need to be employed. The stakeholder environment of charities may make this particularly challenging. However Kuoppakangas et al. (2019) employed change management theory from elsewhere to increase the effectiveness of brand management in the higher education sector, in particular that of dilemma theory (see also Suomi et al., 2014).

This paper revealed that involving and empowering employees in dilemma reconciliation helped in consistent internal branding. The reconciliation of brand-related dilemmas with and by employees can be attained by engaging employees in the process of rebranding from the beginning. Indeed, this paper suggested the preparedness to detect and address dilemmas is central to successful branding. In summary, traditional change management approaches were found to produce unreconciled dilemmas that obstruct the implementation of a brand; efforts to build employee engagement in rebranding do not build employee supportiveness towards the new brand if core dilemmas are not reconciled.

Uniqueness of message

Another challenge that has its basis in internal marketing is that of nonprofit organisations finding and articulating a unique message (or USP) that all employees can relate to.

Research conducted by Leijerholt et al. (2019) suggests that struggling to identify a USP may not necessarily be as negative an issue as traditional branding theory suggests. This may be

because nonprofits can benefit from a general positive perception of the organisation rather than achieving a differentiated and unique brand. This aligns with the findings by Sataøen and Wæraas (2015) who argue that public organisations have pressure to be perceived as ‘normal’ and to conform to institutional expectations. Therefore, departmental brands should not compete with but rather support the organisational brand.

The differentiated and fragmented service offering of the organisation means that while the brand is meant to provide consistency and focus, externally and internally, the complexity of the organisation is argued to make traditional, fully consistent brand management efforts difficult. By having sector-relevant, and thus rather general, brand values as an overarching focus of the organisation, departments are able to connect to brand values that are founded in their reason for existing, ensuring societal values.

(Leijerholt et al., 2019, p. 287)

A second conclusion of this research was that in branding nonprofit organisations the values and purpose of the sector may need to be integrated into the organisational brand values. ‘Within such an environment, departments can be allowed to take greater responsibility of interpreting the brand according to their role in the organisation while staying aligned to the meaning of the brand values. With such an approach the brand value becomes a common denominator, providing a focus and direction that departments are encouraged to dock into; a compass in employees’ everyday work life’ (Leijerholt et al., 2019, p. 287).

Real-life case study: The role of a strong brand in recruiting volunteers and attracting stakeholders for a nonprofit organisation

Many nonprofit organisations face challenges in recruiting enough suitable volunteers (who the authors perceive as internal stakeholders and therefore important in the internal branding process). However, research has found that like profit-oriented organisations, nonprofit organisations’ brand image is an important variable influencing the outcome of any recruitment process (Febriani & Selamet, 2020).

This is illustrated through the example of the nonprofit festival market in Finland, highlighting the significance of a strong brand image. In addition to other benefits of a strong brand, such as attracting festival attendees, sponsors and positive media coverage, festival managers need to pay attention to building strong brands in order to ensure adequate enrolment of volunteer workers, to therefore ensure the resourcing of production (see also Luonila, 2016).

Pori Jazz is a nonprofit festival arranged in the city of Pori in south-west Finland about 240 kilometres from Helsinki. In Finland hundreds of nonprofit and for-profit festival productions produced over two million festival visits in 2019. Relative to the size of the country, Finland is a 'land of festivals', as Finns make the most of the short, but light, summer months to enjoy outside activities.

Pori Jazz is one of the oldest and most notable jazz and rhythm music festivals in Europe, and within Finland it is very high profile and well known (Lemmetyinen, Go & Luonila, 2013). It has been running since 1966, initially growing from enthusiasm for jazz music among its founders; in fact, in the early years, it was to some extent the organisers' hobby. The history of the festival is therefore an important part of its brand story today (Pori Jazz, 2021).

Over the decades, there have been thousands of musicians performing at Pori Jazz, including international names such as B.B. King, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Björk, Sting, Phil Collins and Elton John (Pori Jazz, 2021). In its founding year, the festival attracted about 600 'friends of jazz music', whereas in 2019 there were over 340,000 attendees (Pori Jazz, 2021). This made it the biggest festival in Finland in 2019 (Finland Festivals, 2021).

Throughout its history, the festival has developed a unique message with its own style, and this can be linked to its strong reputation (which of course underpins the brand). The festival organisers work hard to create media coverage and a 'buzz' around the festival to keep it vital beyond the actual festival dates (Luonila et al., 2016). As discussed, the festival has taken place annually since 1966 (with the exception of 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic). The long heritage of the festival has developed a positive relationship with the Pori city brand. This is particularly notable, as industry in the region was historically associated with manufacturing, but the city has renewed itself and built its brand as one of the leading event cities in Finland, based largely on Pori Jazz (Lemmetyinen et al., 2013; Pori, 2021). Among both Finns and foreigners, Pori is therefore now probably best known for its festival. Accordingly, Pori Jazz is an important brand for the city (see also Mäkelä, 2019). Whilst this can be mutually advantageous for the city and the festival itself, it also adds to challenges in consistent brand messaging that must incorporate the different stakeholders' (including the employees') points of view and feelings about the organisation. Internal marketing and training are key to managing this.

The organisational structure of the festival is important in understanding their internal marketing. The festival is a professional organisation, but surprisingly it has only six full-time paid employees and one freelancer employed. This obviously raises the question of how is it possible to arrange an event with over 340,000 attendees with so few employees?

The answer largely lies (in common with many charities) in the volunteer strategy. In addition to the employees, each year Pori Jazz has about 600 extra pairs of hands who have roles before, during and after the festival. Of these 600 people, about 300 are Pori Jazz's own volunteers, and 300 further volunteers come from Pori Jazz's partner organisations, for example sport clubs. Volunteers' work is mainly concentrated on actual festival days, as well as days just before and after the festival, when the festival infrastructure is being built and removed. Volunteers work in a number of different tasks which are vital for the festival, such as cleaning up litter, ticket sales, first aid, driving, assisting performers or attendees.

According to management, the programme of internal marketing activities aimed at the team-leaders is an organised and systematic process, and it comprises two-level training. All the team leaders who work for Pori Jazz participate in the initial training. This is important in establishing consistency and understanding in brand terms, and covers the history, ethos and values of Pori Jazz (particularly with regard to the environment, and which environmental management tools and certificates it employs). After this more general part of the training, each group of team leaders undergo specific training (focused on the festival sector) concentrating on how Pori Jazz wishes the team leaders to act in customer service situations to deliver consistent messages. This resonates with theory discussed in the earlier part of this chapter on the identified importance of the organisation's brand promise information being consistent across communication channels.

Typically, volunteers (other than team leaders) work in tasks that are not direct customer service situations. However, if the volunteers have a customer-facing role, they will be trained for the task. Motivation is also key as the volunteers are highly engaged, and often work in the same roles from year to year. This allows them to become highly familiar with their tasks and their requirements, and ultimately to become what may be termed 'brand ambassadors'. Before the volunteers start their work, they become members of a volunteer association. They all receive a merchandise package from Pori Jazz. The package slightly differs depending on the year in question, but typically it contains a bag, the festival t-shirt of the year and a jacket. The volunteers use these branded clothes during the festival (and they do not return them afterwards). Further, materials to underpin internal marketing are produced: all the extra pairs of hands receive a leaflet containing important information about policies and procedures in different situations. This ensures that processes are clear not only for the core team at the office but also for all the team leaders and other volunteers working in various tasks in festival production in different locations in Pori. This activity is therefore the underpinning of internal branding and is important to external perceptions and brand experience. It is an example of the

discussed theoretical finding that when well-established internal brand management and interfunctional communication are both present, organisations become effective at communicating the brand promise to their employees and therefore volunteers. According to the festival management, materials that are handed out for the volunteers and their team leaders are in line with Pori Jazz's brand communication strategy, which supports the festival's vision, grasps its mission, and puts the business strategy in practice. The mission of Pori Jazz is: 'One feels good at Pori Jazz. The festival connects people via holistic experiences that will be remembered for a long time'. (Communication Strategy of Pori Jazz, 2021). The brand communication strategy crystallises the way in which the business strategy should be visible in all communication. This brand strategy is aimed at all internal stakeholders (be they full-time employees or volunteers), gives mutual direction and describes what kind of communication Pori Jazz needs and how this communication is integrated in the broader societal context. Thus, the brand communication strategy is important in making sure that all communication, whether directed towards internal or external stakeholders (such as consumers and sponsors), is consistent both in the Pori Jazz's own media channels and in media collaboration, and at the levels of local, national and international communication. (Communication Strategy of Pori Jazz, 2021).

The aim of Pori Jazz's internal communication targeted at the employees and internal stakeholders is to make sure that: 'we build and cherish our internal community with active communication. We encourage and support each other and respect one another's expertise. We build Pori Jazz's reputation by open communication and by paying attention to social responsibility in all actions'. Consequently, the core message of this internal communication is emphasising that: 'we are bridge builders between culture, music and people. We guarantee a successful festival experience: we want the visitor to feel comfortable, we make people happy. We want to surprise people positively' (Communication Strategy of Pori Jazz, 2021).

In relation to the volunteers, the aim of Pori Jazz's internal communication targeted to this group is to underline that:

we value the contribution of the volunteers and their skills and make sure that everyone has the necessary knowledge to carry out the festival successfully. We encourage creativity, solution-focused customer service and positive interaction with our teams. We communicate openly and create community, we engage – without volunteers Pori Jazz would not be Pori Jazz.

(Communication Strategy of Pori Jazz, 2021)

The core message related to this aim and targeted for the group of volunteers is: ‘we are an equal and community builder and a partner who it is easy to work with. We wish that joy and easiness grasp our volunteers’ (Communication Strategy of Pori Jazz, 2021).

It is clear that, as in many nonprofit organisations, volunteers are critical to ongoing success. What then motivates these volunteers, some of them working year after year (some have a 30-year volunteer career at the festival!), to engage with the brand so deeply (Yle, 2015)?

The answer has its basis in the fact that, with over 50 years’ history, Pori Jazz has a leading position in Finland’s music festival scene, and a strong international reputation. Indeed, a long-serving former CEO believed that many volunteers appreciate the work experience gained as a volunteer at Pori Jazz, and are very proud to add it to their CVs; in short it is a brand that they wish to be associated with, and this is testament to ongoing internal branding. The festival’s brand awareness is strong in Finland; volunteers find it attractive and wish to maintain ongoing links (see also Febriani & Selamet, 2020). Further, they feel important as part of a team producing a national festival and are motivated to ensure that everything works well at the festival.

The festival has a strong brand experience element which underpins internal branding; the event itself, its social context, shared memories and belongingness can form an unforgettable and holistic experience for a volunteer, and positive word-of-mouth received from past and current volunteers therefore attracts new volunteers (see also Luonila et al., 2016). During the festival days, the whole city starts to bustle, as local stores, cafes and restaurants are full of customers. Indeed, many local people are engaged in supporting the festival and its successful production in many ways; all this helps enhance the brand experience.

In addition to recruiting volunteers, a consistent and clear brand message is vital to obtaining sponsors and building collaboration with companies, as well as building relationships with other relevant stakeholders, such as festival attendees, media and the local community (see also Luonila et al., 2016). A strong brand is obviously also important in attracting world-famous performers to this Finnish city far away from the capital (a location that some might consider remote).

The brand also protects a nonprofit organisation in the event of any unforeseen crisis (for example in 2018 when earlier comments of Pori Jazz’s new CEO on homosexuality became public and led to negative publicity). Some of the performers began to cancel their shows at the festival and the sensation was covered in national news. The association behind Pori Jazz fired the CEO in less than 24 hours to save its reputation (and therefore save support from

festival attendees, performers and other stakeholders). However, without such a strong brand, the harm could have been more severe for the festival, despite the organisation's prompt action (see also Mäkelä, 2019).

In conclusion, a strong brand is important for nonprofit organisations (such as festivals) in attracting and engaging both internal and external stakeholders; in this case the primary internal branding focus is on both employees and volunteers. Innovative marketing strategies and a coherent message, which is relevant to festival attendees and stakeholders, are crucial in ensuring the viability and permanence of the festival in a competitive environment (Luonila et al., 2019; Suomi et al., 2020). Further, the strong brand of such a nonprofit organisation may have a significant impact on the brand of its hosting city (e.g. Lemmetyinen et al., 2013). A number of the findings and conclusions of the research outlined in this chapter are therefore applicable and demonstrable through the example of the Pori Jazz festival (see Table 12.1).

<INSERT TABLE 12.1 HERE>

Table 12.1 Pori Jazz Festival internal marketing best practice lessons; what they got right!

Three questions

1. We are taught at an early stage in marketing education to seek a unique selling point – why might this not always be as essential for NPOs?
2. NPOs generally have a complex stakeholder network. What are the implications for internal branding?
3. How can brand strategy be made into something meaningful for the majority of people working for and with a charity?

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