

A brand promise

 By [Giles Shepherd](#)

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"A great brand is a promise kept."

Q: Your most significant industry trends for 2015?

A: A brand is a promise made. A great brand is a promise kept. It is people that keep promises, and they can only do so if they understand what those promises are, believe and buy into them and most importantly, understand how to deliver on them.

• Inside out

The idea of internal brand engagement - getting the staff of an organisation to understand, buy into and live the values and principles of the brand - is not new. What is new is real corporate commitment to this practice. Over the past decade, South African brands have dabbled with engagement, some putting more money than others behind it, but very few investing seriously. In many cases, consumer-facing brands have seen it more as an opportunity to look good to their customers by displaying their supposed activities and internal communication campaigns loudly in branches and stores - yet the real engagement of the people behind the scenes is left sorely wanting.

What's new is the realisation that the best form of promotion of the business is getting customers to passionately advocate the brand due to the positive experiences they are having - and that the only way to achieve that is to invest cleverly in the people of the organisation. And not simply by telling them what words and ideas have been crafted by the marketing department and expecting them to conveniently believe in them. Rather by involving them in the process of 'architecting' and articulating those words and ideas. By facilitating them on a journey and allowing their passion and contributions to reveal the uniqueness of the brand. People will naturally support what they have had a hand in creating - or even feel as though they have - and sensible businesses are realising this.

• Short, powerful communication

The age of the standard 'corporate video' has come to an end. In a world where time is of the essence and our every moment is bombarded with communication - from emails and SMSes, through television and social media to a multitude of advertising - we have become very discerning as to what we will pay attention to, and our expectations as to the quality of communication has risen significantly. The ordinary person is very aware that powerful ideas can be communicated in a very short time frame - if conceived and executed well. And more to the point - they understand what constitutes quality communication.

What this means is that the 12-minute long, 'talking heads' style video, where executives describe the operation,

principles, locations and other extraneous information, no longer has a place. Instead, the same principles that are applied to advertising and film work are the standard for corporate communication - both internal and external. Short, powerful 'concept' pieces that employ excellent photography, graphic styling and animation create a sense of a quality brand that is at the forefront. And even in these short pieces, a well thought-out story that can leave the audience imprinted with a memorable message. Most importantly, only one key message at a time, rather than everything the brand has to say in one piece of communication.

The clever brands are using these techniques and then creating a variety of versions to suit the various channels, and integrating them to work in harmony. So a version for YouTube, another as a presentation intro piece, one to send out on memory sticks, one for social media, and so on. Properly managed, this is the way they are making powerful and cost-effective use of the digital world.

Q: Your 'game changer' trend in 2014?

A: Understanding the power of the individual - creating ambassadors for a brand out of high profile people so that they advocate it on their social media platforms. Well managed, an extremely cost-effective marketing tool.

Q: What do you hope to see less of going into a New Year?

A: The misunderstanding and misuse of social media by brands that believe that simply being there is what counts.

Q: What do you hope to see more of in 2015?

A: Real industry collaboration - rather than just window dressing by fancily-named organisations suggesting that the industry is working together to improve and advance itself. Real activities and real commitments by agencies that honour their undertakings.

Q: What advice do you have for your employees/peers for the next year?

A: Remember that brands are conversations, and those conversations are instant and global. Things won't always go well, but if you manage the conversation with integrity, even a bad situation can work in your favour.

Q: What would you like to tell your clients?

A: A brand is a promise made... A great brand is a promise kept... We need to ensure that you have a compelling, differentiated and relevant promise, communicated excellently both internally and externally, and that your people are impassioned and equipped to deliver.

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