
Four Steps Boards Should Take to Build Global Brands



By Martin Roll , Business and Brand Strategist, Founder of Martin Roll Company (INSEAD MBA '99D)

The board has a much more critical role to play in successful branding than ever before. It needs to act as the catalyst, supporter, enhancer and implementer of brand building strategies.

A basic premise and one of the core objectives of a board in any organisation is to build and sustain shareholder value. To fulfill these objectives on a continuous basis, a board must focus on making the equity of the organisation's brands a reputational asset in the minds of the consumer. With organisations rapidly expanding globally on one side and also rapidly consolidating via mergers and acquisitions on the other, the board has a stronger onus to lead the way for building and managing strong global brands.

No one can deny the fact that creating shareholder value has become increasingly challenging in recent times. Organisational growth, the primary catalyst for driving value, is extremely difficult to maintain over sustained periods of time. This is more challenging for organisations that have a wider geographic footprint as they are more exposed to the influences of broad

economic, political, regulatory and financial factors.

In such challenging and uncertain environments, global brand building by the board needs to happen within a structured framework, should be pursued with discipline and should be aligned with the organisation's financial goals. Four steps a board should consider for implementation are:

1. Create and develop the brand vision: The board's involvement in brand building should not start as a random intervention in a brand's life, but should start at a very strategic level and at the top. The board should play a key role in the creation of a brand's vision and its sustenance. This should be made possible by having an individual on the board who is closest to building brands in the organisation or who has been tasked with this specific responsibility. In many instances it is the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) or the Chief Brand Officer (CBO), but it could be anyone. This individual's role within the board is to get the board involved and enthusiastic about developing the brand vision.

2. Action a global implementation strategy: Brand building starts with a vision but does not end there. A vision on paper is just what it is, on paper. To have an impact on organisational growth, brand visions need to be translated into global strategies that are pragmatic, actionable and measurable. Global brand strategies have long been the property of marketing and branding functions, but it is high time the board starts to influence and enhance these strategies.

Implementing a global brand strategy driven by the board ensures that the strategy is truly global in nature and has the brand vision driving it on a long-term basis. Such strategies are free from global versus local push and pull, position the brand with both a present and future perspective and are in line with organisational values and shareholder expectations. Because of these aspects, such strategies have a stronger impact on brand building and also in terms of enhancing organisational growth.

3. Motivate, influence and align goals and objectives: A critical task for the board is to motivate employees and align their goals and objectives with those of the organisation. In this case, the role of the board changes to be able to influence individuals to align their personal goals and expectations with the global brand building strategies. This is easier when the

board has an understanding of brand building and has representation of individuals who can finely balance the need for building strong brands with the need for short-term and medium-term profitability and healthy shareholder returns.

The process of motivating and influencing should be top-down with the board selecting the influential individuals, who can then take on the responsibility of percolating the vision and the associated strategies to the wider organisation. The selection of individuals, who have strong credibility, visibility and influence within the organisation, is the key here.

4. Sustain, enhance and sustain again: Brand building is a continuous effort and when practiced at a global level, can also be a long-term process requiring lots of persistence and focus. This requires the brand building process to be sustained through continuous board level support. But sustenance is only half the story. To survive and to maintain a competitive edge in any category, a brand needs to continuously evolve and strengthen its positioning. This also requires a continuous enhancement of the brand building process. With the emergence of digital channels, this has now become more of an imperative rather than being an option.

Consequently, the board should be involved in any form of enhanced brand building strategies globally. This also forces consistency of efforts and general direction the brand is taking when there are multiple regional and local stakeholders interested in developing the brand from their respective markets. The board should drive consistency in brand building efforts and should also ensure that none of the organisation's future direction for its brands is in contradiction with the mission and brand values.

Every level of enhancement in a brand building strategy is followed by a phase of sustenance. The role of the board, as highlighted earlier, should not be a sporadic one, but should ensure a continuous and close association with any form of brand building that is being implemented anywhere.

Brands for the long-term

In summary, a board needs to move out of its traditional mindset of being only interested in generating short-term and medium-term shareholder returns, to a more long-term perspective of building value through investing in brand building strategies. Easier to think than implement, the board

involvement in brand building is a long-term one, which includes creating a brand vision, helping in its implementation, enhancing and broadening its aspects, supporting growth and sustenance initiatives and motivating employees. By following some of the best practices explained above, the board enhances its role as a success driver for the organisation's brands and also invests in their future.

Martin Roll is a business & brand strategist, and the founder of Martin Roll Company. He provides advisory and guidance on leadership, strategy and execution, and how to build and sustain high performing, enduring brand-driven businesses and global, marketing-oriented organisations. Martin Roll has an MBA from INSEAD ('99D) and is the author of ***Asian Brand Strategy***. You can follow him on Twitter ***@MartinRoll***

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