

Collaboration – The 2013 Theme for the International Association of Business Communicators’ (IABC)

The first panel of the year discussed a 2008-2010 case study outlining how a Hewlett Packard team helped break down silos to align on a common vision, brand strategy, and culture. Led by Mark Hurd, Glenna Patton’s team drove an increase of \$4.4 billion in HP’s brand value and catapulted them into the [Top 10 of Interbrand’s annual global brand ranking](#) for the first time in HP history.

Silos Are Still Rampant

Silos in large organizations aren’t unusual. In my 15+ years of consulting, many of the Fortune 1000 companies whom I worked with had an organization where the right hand wasn’t effectively communicating with the left. You’d think that with the last decade’s plethora of collaboration tools – from social media and the cloud to software programs – this would be unusual. But it’s not.

And it wasn’t for Hewlett Packard in 2008. HP and their 300,000+ employees had become so disparate in their silos that they had five different logos, more than ten different articulations of value propositions, and 13 different identity systems. How did they pull it all together to have the best year they’d had in decades?

First, a little history...

Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard used three types of kindling to start the fire in the belly of HP. Mainly? Collaboration, innovation, and loyalty. As moderator Rick DeMarco says, “Collaboration was in the HP DNA.”

In the 40s, they started a unique profit sharing program and a pioneering health plan; they issued bonuses. “They encouraged us to innovate... we learned that our ideas should overrule any ideas from the top,” said Al Bagley.

In fact, in the 50’s, they introduced their formal [corporate aims](#), announcing decentralized-decision-making objectives, furthering their strong view that collaboration fueled innovation.

They initiated flex-time in the 60s – before it was a household word, furthering work-life balance. Their employees were some of the most brilliant scientists and technologists in the world and were [introducing some of the most innovative and successful products we've known.](#)

And yet, they were considered to be dull and boring in 2008. Their reputation had evolved from an innovative and inventive technology company to a staid hardware company.

Mark Hurd's Two-Pronged Plan to Change HP's Brand

CEO Mark Hurd had a two-part plan to grow the company and to change that perception. His first prong included acquiring several companies with products that would boost the effort to restructure them from a hardware company to a solutions company. The second part of his plan was to work together to deliver one brand experience.

Enter Glenna Patton, the branding expert from MTV. Patton has a holistic idea of branding. It's not just the visual identity of a company. It's every touch point, every experience – ranging from phone conversations with customers to the way employees think about and act toward and within their own company. How they behave. The culture.

Patton holds that there is an inextricable link between a company's culture and branding. "That's why it's essential for HR and executive communications to partner and take ownership of the brand."

In other words, she says, "If you can't sell it inside, you can't sell it outside."

She also believes, and benchmark studies have proven, that if the CEO isn't passionate enough about an idea to become its steward, the idea is doomed. So one of her conditions for taking on the HP challenge was that all executives had to buy in, passionately. "They can't just approve the plan. They have to believe in it." And they had to understand that it's a multi-layered, long-term commitment.

But how could she bring all the teams together to align with the umbrella messaging and yet still deliver on the objectives of their

respective groups – and customize for business unit or region – to think of one brand, one company, one culture. It required inclusiveness. They needed to rekindle those DNA embers of collaboration and innovation but understand the new normal, the world as it is today and beyond.

Include Everyone in the Collaboration

Panel member Evan Wittenberg joined HP in 2010. He reminded us, “If you’re going to be that size (300,000+ employees) and not a holding company, you have to collaborate.” Wittenberg doesn’t believe that people always resist change. “They can accept the new point of view if they understand why it’s worth the pain to get to the finish line.”

And Patton said you have to give people a reason to be *passionate* about the end game. Show them what their future can look like. “Paint a better picture of the future. It will galvanize people. It inspires and keeps people involved.”

Says Wittenberg, who has, among other things, a background in psychology, “People are amazingly loyal to a company they understand and can believe in and feel a part of. And he doesn’t believe that people have to resist change. “They need to accept the loss of the old point of view; you have to give them a reason for going through the pain to get to the finish line.”

Glenna agrees. “People had a higher calling because they believed they could have a positive impact on the world.” They accepted that they had a boring, dull image. “It takes not just the business case, not just the human case, but the emotional case to inspire.”

Says Patton, “People maybe got tired of me asking whether that one accountant in India buy in,” she laughs. She knew that what it meant to be a brand had to be ingrained in the culture, relevant to every employee, in every function, in every market.

Patton’s team developed leadership teams, workshops, focus groups, surveys and training – all employed across functions, divisions, business units, languages, and countries. Their social media platform helped with internal immersion. She even took the campaign to the

design team to be integrated into the user experience for printers, PCs, and servers. And she forced outside vendors to work together, too. “You stretch your consultants to get out of their silos and to think holistically about the impact of their work.”

The Campaign – Let’s Do Amazing

When asked the importance of stories in branding, Glenna says in fact that’s what the campaign was about – HP’s amazing stories. Their campaign was called, “Let’s Do Amazing.” [LINK TO VIDEO](#)

This included not only product stories, but also internal employee stories. Like the length an employee had gone to ensure a customer’s business-critical operations remained intact during a typhoon in Southeast Asia.

Product stories launched during the pilot campaign were also used... like how HP was responsible for networking the International Space Station. It was a sustainable, episodic campaign that could be easily localized.

Patton says, “In the end, every employee could see himself in the outcome because they’d had a shared goal. Even that accountant across the globe.”

Elaine Chin said, “Along the way, we published mini internal success stories about how different people succeeded in collaborating.”

Her communications division also developed one central location for the delivery of key messaging docs, talking points, templates, and other basic tools. Elaine says, “It’s not rocket science, but it didn’t exist before this campaign. So the central collaboration site became huge.” They wanted a dialogue so that they weren’t just pushing out messages. The collaboration software allowed employees at all levels to participate in the conversation.

HR had a strong voice in the workforce surveys. Moderator Rick DeMarco said they developed common criteria across functions for the reward and recognition programs. People started to adopt that kind of behavior.

They couldn't eliminate the old communications activities and events, but they could weave in the new brand and messaging going forward. And according to metrics, the campaign pilot was one of the most successful branding campaigns in HP history.

The Good and Bad News

The bad news? After Mark Hurd's abrupt departure, the new executive team didn't continue with what was a successful campaign.

The good news? That year, after the pilot campaign ran during basketball's March Madness, according to metrics that followed Interbrand's award-winning methodology, the campaign pilot was one of the most successful branding campaigns in HP history.

HP was also voted:

Top Ten Best performing companies

Top 10 brands

Number one in social responsibility

Number one green company

Best performing CEOs

Ironically, Mark Hurd was voted one of the Best Performing CEOs for that year.

What's Happening Now?

Wittenberg says he hopes that the collaboration became even better in part because he helped to initiate an internal recruiting process, reducing external recruitment from greater than 70 percent to under 35 percent.

He believes you have to be able to find the best people within your company. It's not just that people need to feel they can develop their career have a career path. "You can't tie back and keep consistency with brand and values if you keep bringing in new senior leaders who have their own ideas and set of assumptions, and their own ideas

about leadership. Or their own people.” They’ll kill old ideas. Like the Let’s Do Amazing campaign.

Because the campaign ran internally prior to the pilot, because of the collaboration mechanisms instilled in the behavior of employees, the legacy of collaboration across functional lines lives on today. Those embers from Hewlett and Packard’s fire were rekindled. Some 70 years later, I’d say that’s analogous to some strong DNA.