

## “Fueling Growth: Increasing Market Value by Aligning Business and Brand Strategies”

By Ray Baird, principal of RiechesBaird

Companies are expected to spend more than \$427 billion on advertising in 2006, not including the fees paid to advertising agencies to counsel, create and buy this space, which could easily tack on another few billion dollars. Add to this fees paid to public relations agencies, business consulting firms and branding experts, and companies are spending close to a trillion dollars to create and communicate their messages. But what if these messages are missing the mark? Or worse, what if the company's entire view of itself is inaccurate?

Today's C-suite executives rely heavily upon consultancies to fuel their growth. Many work with three types of experts: business consultancy firms, branding firms and advertising agencies. While all three excel in their respective fields, they operate independently of one another—without an overall manager to ensure alignment. This model, more often than not, breeds failure. Let me explain.

A few years ago, we worked with a major manufacturing company that considered customer service to be its number-one asset. As we began developing a branding strategy for the company, we continually hit road blocks aligning the branding strategies with the business and marketing plans—the visions were inconsistent. To get to the bottom of the inconsistencies, we initiated a Strategic Branding Assessment (SBA).

### The SBA Process

The SBA is a scientific measurement of a brand and can determine if a company's opinion of itself is the same as that of its internal and external audiences. In this case, we set off to determine whether customer service truly was its number-one asset.

The SBA takes a holistic approach to the issue of branding, based on a philosophy that a strong brand is not only the result of effective marketing, but also effective corporate structure, management, internal communication, training, etc.

Conventional marketing research tools can tell you about consumer awareness, attitudes and preferences toward a brand. But very often the brand fails to achieve success because it isn't understood or supported by the company itself. The SBA:

- Uncovers underlying business or marketing issues that may be undermining the success of the brand
- Shows the alignment of perceptions and attitudes of management, employees and sales channel
- Identifies perceptual gaps among important internal audiences on key dimensions of the brand
- Recommends specific areas in which business and marketing communications practices need to be improved in order for the brand to reach its potential

An online questionnaire is administered to three audiences—management, employees and the sales channel—to anonymously measure specific areas of a company's business and marketing performance in the areas of strategy, structure and execution.



The results of the SBA clearly illustrated that the company's customer service was, in fact, horrible. This came as a shock to the management team but underscored the need to align business and brand strategies. Internal incongruent opinions became a common result for struggling companies who completed our SBA. It also resonated with our team, and we set off to form an entirely new model of agency.

#### Integrating Business and Branding

RiechesBaird's groundbreaking concept involves a synergistic approach that includes business strategy, brand development and integrated marketing. The model evolved over time as more clients sought our assistance with their business challenges that went beyond the scope of our traditional service offerings. To help our clients develop sound business strategies, we hired several industry-leading business strategists, many of them former CEOs.

Our initial charge when working with a client is to identify the gaps between what clients want to accomplish and the ability of the organization to achieve it. We then work directly with senior-level executives to develop strategic initiatives, validate business models, develop business plans and identify growth.

Once the business strategy is in place, our brand strategists create and evolve a brand that is relevant, believable and defensible. The final step in aligning business and branding strategies is to execute an integrated marketing program that can sustain long-term momentum. To accomplish this, we rely upon both new and traditional methods such as advertising, public relations and online/interactive marketing.

So before you finalize your business development, advertising and marketing budgets for 2007, ask yourself this: Are you 100 percent confident your messages are hitting the mark? If not, it's time to for an alignment check.

### **Does Your Company Have a Problem?**

To determine whether your company needs a business and brand overhaul, e-mail the following six statements to your executives, managers and employees. The answers might surprise you.

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Our company has a clearly defined focus/vision.                        | Yes or No |
| 2. Our company has a clearly defined business strategy.                   | Yes or No |
| 3. Our company has a clearly defined brand message.                       | Yes or No |
| 4. Our brand message matches our overall business strategy.               | Yes or No |
| 5. Our customers clearly understand our brand promise.                    | Yes or No |
| 6. All communication to our customers reflects our overall brand message. | Yes or No |



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As president of RiechesBaird, Ray Baird is known for creating extraordinary brands and strategies that transform business and improve financial value. Baird's experience with leading companies through change and brand adoption has earned him a place in BtoB magazine's "Who's Who in B-to-B." He has been recognized for spearheading the firm's growth into new areas, including a major restructuring of its business model that has set it apart from other agencies nationwide. He directs the RiechesBaird team of business-to-business strategists in the course of vision creation, strategic planning, brand creation and development and integrated marketing.

Currently Baird is also the leader of the firm's Technology practice group. He has over 20 years of experience creating and developing such brands as Linksys, Epicor Software, Emulex, Newport Corporation, Veeco and FrontBridge.

He co-founded RiechesBaird in 1994 with partner Ryan Rieches, and together they have built the firm into an internationally recognized leader in business-to-business brand strategy. For the past seven years, the firm has been ranked among the top 25 business-to-business agencies in the United States, according to BtoB magazine, with a client roster that includes Toyota Industrial Equipment, American Airlines, Sharp, Sony, Bosch, MonierLifetile and Pacific Life.