



# Branding manufacturing

Shifting the perception of Canadian industry

A brand is what people think of you. And Canadians don't think especially highly of their manufacturing industry. As CME's *Think again* campaign seeks to overturn, Canadians see manufacturing in 4-D: Dirty, Dangerous, Declining and

Depressing. Amid the current economic downturn, it would be understandable for the national psyche to preface the latter two terms with "very."

How can branding change Canadians' perception of manufacturing to one that is more accurate and

compelling? The starting point is to debunk the false and predominant view, held by business leaders in every sector, that a brand is essentially a logo.

Logos, along with advertising and taglines, are among the tools you

have fashioned to communicate what you think your brand is. But the ultimate determination is made by those who receive your messaging. Consider the promise of Nissan's "Shift" ad campaign: "everything we touch, we shift. And everything we shift, we make better." Yet a friend wasn't asked to renew her Nissan lease until four weeks before it expired, even though she'd just had the car at the dealer for service. Why didn't the service guys – who surely knew the lease was expiring – walk my friend into the showroom?

Intrigued, I called a dealership and Nissan's customer satisfaction number. No one had any idea what "Shift" meant – although one suggested a connection to manual and automatic gears. And so, despite management's wishful thinking that their brand is about improving everything they touch, we know it's not.

A brand is what people think of you. How then to exercise some measure of control over what people – potential and actual customers, employees, makers of government policy – think?

It begins by clearly understanding what they think of your brand now – clarity that can be achieved through stakeholder research that need not be costly or complex. By its nature, the process of understanding your present brand will also generate new ideas as to the brand's ultimate potential.

The next step is to cement those aspirational elements, along with the best of your current brand, in a brand foundation. A brand foundation consists of:

**Core Purpose** – why we exist

**Vision** – where we are going, and how we'll know we're there

**Mission** – what we do every day to get there

While maintaining brand discipline is challenging enough in a single company, for an entire Canadian manufacturing industry that hopes to brand-build, it is the single most difficult problem.

**Values** – what we believe in; our principles

**Position** – how we are different

**Positioning Statement** –

how we say we are different

**Character** – our voice; how we act

The brand foundation is unchangeable. It defines precisely how you want your brand to be perceived now, and for the long-term future. It must be referred to, when making all decisions large and small, by everyone in the organization. The exact brand you desire will thereby be communicated to all stakeholders, internal and external, in accordance with the most important rule of branding: be consistent. Less than relentless adherence to the brand foundation will result in inconsistent messaging, which will dilute your desired brand in the minds of your target audience. Of course, your desired brand must be an accurate reflection of reality, or people will see right through it – as with Nissan.

While everyone in the organization is responsible for "living" the foundation, one person is ultimately so: the CEO, who must self-appoint as the CBO – the chief brand officer. Only the CEO can make everyone live the brand.

Consider Apple's Steve Jobs, whose vision to create "perfect machines" is apparent in every aspect of the Apple brand experience: from the beautiful usability and appearance of Apple products, to advertisements and retail stores with that same look and feel, to packaging so meticulously designed with the user experience in mind, that people post on YouTube, for all

the world to enjoy, video of themselves unwrapping their latest Apple purchase. No one, other than a CEO/CBO, could ever enforce such a seamless brand experience.

While maintaining brand discipline is challenging enough in a single company, for an entire Canadian manufacturing industry that hopes to brand-build, it is the single most difficult problem. An agreed-upon industry group – CME is an obviously strong candidate – must define its own brand foundation, recognize its own CBO, and vest that individual with brand enforcement powers over member companies. Yet each company has its own way of doing things – perhaps even a CEO/CBO and a brand foundation that fits the company's specific realities and aspirations.

The promise for Canadian manufacturing is to fully empower an industry-level CBO to lead discussion on which brand foundation elements must be identical for the industry group and its member companies, and which elements can be left to each company's discretion. A possible beginning would be for that CBO to take the goal of CME's *Manufacturing 20/20* initiative – to make Canada the most prosperous country in the Americas by 2020 – and campaign for its unanimous adoption as the industry's brand vision. <sup>20/20</sup>

*Andris Pone is brand coach and partner at Instinct Brand Equity Coaches, and co-author of Brand: It Ain't the Logo\* (\*It's what people think of you™), available at Amazon.com and Books for Business.*