The Soft Side of Branding: Leveraging Emotional Intelligence

Abstract

Marketers and managers cannot directly control the environment, but they certainly can influence how stakeholders perceive company image, thereby influencing brand equity. Brand equity plays a key role in the success of a firm and often differentiates a company from its competitors. Brand equity, the additional value a company earns that is attributed to a variety of elements, is mostly intangible in nature (i.e., a recognizable name or symbol, superior quality and reliability compared to competitors or generic brands, and elements known as behavioral assets or “soft skills”). Behavioral assets are the culmination of both hard skills (e.g., knowledge and ability) and soft skills (e.g., empathy, motivation, listening ability, and relationship-building) among all members of a company. However, the role of soft skills among organizational relationships, as well as how to best demonstrate these skills, is not well understood in business-to-business (B2B) industries. This research explores how B2Bs can enhance their brand through leveraging their behavioral assets, or EI, specifically through social media marketing. The findings from our analysis of 11 B2B companies that received an award for their social media marketing show that those “best in class” organizations employ communication strategies that utilize emotional intelligence and soft skills. These findings are critical since B2Bs traditionally took a rational, transactional approach. Additionally, these findings are more in line with the notion that B2B marketers strive to build relationships as the foundation upon which to transact business. Until now, an important piece of the puzzle was missing.