



driving brand leadership

Enhancing culture, engineering experiences
and growing consumers.

A POSITION PAPER BY MARK WEBER



Mark Weber

PRESIDENT & CEO

Mark Weber is CEO of Weber Marketing Group, one of North America's leading strategic branding agencies with offices in Seattle, Atlanta and Vancouver, BC. Weber Marketing is the winner of over 240 national marketing and brand awards.

Let's face it. The traditional financial services world we have known well for many years is in massive transformation.

As consumers embrace new mobile technologies, wean gradually away from branch teller transactions, and new online competitors rise up, the financial industry is rushing headfirst into a fusion of online, digital, branch and social media channels that are reshaping how we retain consumers, compete and grow.

In this new world of smart phones, tablets, Twitter and video tellers, it raises the bar even higher for how we manage our brand reputation and position our financial institutions to stand apart in a highly commoditized – and now increasingly wired financial industry.

So how do you find meaningful brand distinction and a compelling value proposition that's unique and appealing? You start by looking inside first.

One key to helping your financial institution step to the next level of competitive external brand differentiation and healthy consumer growth is to first ensure you are defining, evolving and clearly articulating a unified brand strategy internally across your entire enterprise. Armed with a distinct and compelling value proposition and relevant messaging aligned to all your staff – it can then be linked across every physical, digital and social touch point to ensure your brand is helping you stand apart externally, while unifying cultural alignment.

Gallup researchers Jai Gill and David Helvadjan found while analyzing financial brand distinction among consumers, that “44% of all banks and financial institutions are about the same;” and only 7% believed any one bank was better. What they found that set financial institutions apart though surprised them. Put simply, they found that marketing and technology alone won't drive meaningful distinction; it's the

consumer-facing employees who deliver the brand via consistent actions.

In our work building distinctive brand strategies among hundreds of financial institutions across the US and Canada, our agency has demonstrated repeatedly that a clear brand strategy – not a new “look and feel,” can become a catalyst of positive organizational change. It inspires a culture to deliver a unique, compelling and consistent brand promise and actions that create rich and consistent brand experiences for consumers and prospects. But transformation does not come from words, a fresh new logo, a beautiful new website or look and feel alone. It comes from intentional focus on engaging employees in shaping the future brand. From developing cross-functional engagement teams, to implementing dynamic new brand training, consistent and simple brand messaging, and rich storytelling.

Chris Catliff, CEO of \$3.2 billion BlueShore Financial in North Vancouver, BC who embarked on an enterprise-wide premium brand strategy years ago shares this note, “our choreographed five-star brand experience is backed by expert financial advice and personalized, proactive solutions, delivered across all channels consistently. That includes our financial spa branches, call center, online and mobile environments which are all fully integrated.” Catliff’s proudest achievement though sums it up, “without our incredibly engaged employees, our premium brand experience and record growth could never have been achieved.” BlueShore Financial has been named one of Canada’s 10 Most Admired Corporate Cultures and achieved double-digit growth for ten straight years.

Increased staff satisfaction, an intended byproduct of reshaping internal cultural brand focus leads to higher engagement and retention – that directly hits your bottom line. National estimates from SHRM peg the cost of replacing employees at 50% - 400% of their annual salary (do the math for your organization).

This search for culture and even relevant workplace meaning has never been more important than in managing, rewarding and retaining the new generation of Millennial

workers, now approaching 30-35% of the workforce. A 2013 study by Bentley University Center for Women & Business, showed that 84% of Millennials say “making a difference in the world is more important than personal recognition.” Closing the gap from “engaged employees” to brand leading, passionate, values-driven staff can lead to “brand evangelists.”

Effective branding and staff alignment also pays off in higher consumer satisfaction, NPS scores and organic growth. Highly engaged employees drive richer, more focused consumer brand experiences. They lead to increased client engagement, deeper profitable relationship building, renewed brand experiences and ultimately market share growth.

At Portland Oregon’s Trailhead Credit Union, VP of Marketing Kim Faucher shared, “we had been through brand work before but it had never captured the unique spirit of our credit union and our culture in any way that set us apart. Weber Marketing Group led the entire board, management team and our staff through a six-month strategic, cultural and creative process, conducting workshops, employee surveys and focus groups to articulate our brand and culture and explore our brand and name equity. Along the way they revealed our unique distinctiveness and discovered new opportunities where our brand could aspire and flourish.”

Highly engaged employees drive richer, more focused consumer brand experiences.



Photos: Top: BlueShore Financial’s employee cultural Brand Book. Bottom: BlueShore Financial CEO Chris Catliff in one of the trademarked Financial Spa branches.

The leadership team wanted to build a brand that would excite employees first—a brand that would resonate as authentic and identifiable, representing something the entire staff could stand behind. The new tagline, “Small Enough To Know Better,” captures Trailhead’s highly personal philosophy and lines up with their young, distinctive Portland urbanite lifestyle. The new brand bucks conformity to capture a unique and unconventional Portland vibe.

Since Trailhead’s brand launch in June 2013, the results speak for themselves. After seven+ years of no new member growth, slow loan and checking growth, the credit union has set growth records for new members (especially millennial borrowers), loans, branch and web traffic, and new checking every month since launching their new brand. This January alone, net monthly memberships compared to the year prior increased 536% from 25 to 134, lending increased 344% from \$385,000 to \$1,328,000 and website traffic is up 26%.

According to Trailhead’s Faucher, employee engagement, morale and pride have never been higher. A new dress code was embraced to support the brand. Employees and even board members are supporting local businesses and proudly display their “be who you are tattoos.” They have turned employees into raving brand advocates and some members are close behind.

Trailhead’s new brand strategy, design and standards are clear, unique and owned by every stakeholder who lives it out every day with total consistency. One Trailhead member tweeted, “L-O-V-E the rebranding. I’m sure you will increase your membership. Smart move and investment.” Results like that show how much louder actions speak in successful branding than words and pictures alone.

So how do you know if your financial institution’s brand is on target and effective, or overdue for a brand refresh or strategy update? Here are seven questions to ask how healthy your organizational brand program is today:

1. Are you regularly growing younger millennial consumers and borrowers who are drawn to your brand?



2. Do all managers and employees understand what your brand is today and how to live it out? Can they express your differentiating brand position (if you have one... do you)?

3. Is your name and brand awareness in the market and your image confusing, or need a boost?

4. Do you have strong Brand Guidelines that unify your brand promise, key messages, personality, tone of voice, style and imagery across all channels consistently?

5. Is there a well-defined value proposition, or relevant core values that are communicated consistently in all communications, or do you often turn to rates and low fees to stand apart?

6. Are your digital, online, mobile and social media strategies all growing and aligned behind a unified and well-branded consumer experience?

7. Do your branch interiors, products information, consumer experiences, ATM’s and digital media all express the best of your brand and online message platform?

Brand leaders challenge the status quo of their brand position constantly, instead of settling for thinking their static brand is doing fine. They know delivering “good,” or “friendly” service is not a competitive differentiator, it is simply the “table stakes” level everyone must provide. Uniting your brand and your team towards a higher



Photos: Top: brand ad celebrates individuality in the fiercely independent Portland metro market; Bottom: Trailhead Tattoo Station.

Results show how much louder actions speak in successful branding than words and pictures alone.

brand vision and market distinction can transform your culture. Tom's Shoes CEO Blake Mycoskie says, "I realized the importance of having a story today is what really separates companies. People don't just wear our shoes, they tell our story."

The rapid shift to mobile and online virtual experiences requires careful management and evolution of your brand philosophy, but also of carefully linking your user experiences (or UX) across all channels consistently. One of our agency's most powerful tools for shaping employee and consumer brand perceptions is engineering simpler design principles, key messaging and brand content platforms into traditional processes. We engineer transformational changes by aligning all brand experiences, design and content across channels: online (responsive web, mobile and tablet integrated user experience, or UX design); in-person (new branch model prototyping); in print (unique branded content and digital - over traditional collateral); social media (video and storytelling); and interactive media (SEO, SEM and digital campaigns). They are woven together into a seamless and unique user experience with a shared and distinctive brand personality, tone of voice and style, and then combined with personal "brand storytelling" to reshape perceptions.

Stellar brand experiences like the hospitality of the Four Seasons deliver user experiences online and in person like a symphony of musicians aligned behind a melodic musical score. No detail is missed to ensure total satisfaction of guests to win their enduring advocacy and storytelling. That brand integration occurs just as tightly behind the scenes, proactively to ensure a personalized, unique and powerful focus on each guest's individual needs and wants.

Amidst explosive technology shifts and the rise of new financial competitors, it's time to think carefully about assessing the state of your brand perceptions and strategy both internally and externally. Managing and evolving distinctive user experiences, improving your cultural brand focus and alignment can make the difference between who stays the course and whose brand thrives in this new digital world. Is it time to assess the state of your brand?

It's time to
think carefully
about assessing
the state of
your brand
perceptions and
strategy both
internally and
externally.



webermarketing.com
206.340.6111