



Split Personality Branding

Helping Employee Culture Thrive in Times of AI

Think about it. Does a luxury car feel the same if you're buying it or building it? Is a smartphone engineer equally connected to the product as an end user? Does a retail associate experience the brand like the customer they just directed to the restroom? What about the delivery driver and the person waiting for their package?

These are not trivial differences. They reveal there is a gap between how a brand presents itself and how someone lives it. And yet, most organizations still operate under the assumption that if they perfect how it looks on the outside, everything else will fall into place. It doesn't.

While brands are not human, they display human traits, like the ability to be different things to different people and, by the same token, to be perceived differently depending on who interacts with them. This is extremely apparent in the online world, where an individual's virtual self is likely to be different from the actual self.

In psychology, this is the concept of self-discrepancy¹, the gap between how we see ourselves and how others perceive us. We judge ourselves based on internal thoughts, intentions, and effort. Others judge us based on what they observe about us.

Brands operate under the same conditions. Externally, they are judged by what they communicate, their messaging, campaigns, design systems, and product experiences. Internally, they are experienced through less scripted leadership behavior, culture, recognition, collaboration, and the thousands of micro-interactions that define a workday.

This mirror-image thinking has created an imbalance. Companies invest heavily in refining how they appear—polishing their voice, tightening their visual systems, optimizing their messaging—while the internal experience is left to evolve on its own, often undocumented and rarely designed. When the external promise and internal reality drift apart, the brand splits.

A FACE FOR THE MARKETPLACE AND ANOTHER FOR THE WORKPLACE.

Decades before social media began to reshape our human interactions, brands were already being trained in the art of judgment. They lived under constant observation through advertising, personal trial and experience, inviting us to form opinions, take sides, and decide what deserved our patronage and what deserved our criticism. In many ways, they prepared us for a world where everything, including ourselves, would be subject to public scrutiny.

During the advertising boom of the 1960s/70s, the great Jerry Della Femina declared that “nothing kills a bad product faster than good advertising.” Add influencer marketing and the perceived validity of a post, story, and reel from any social media account, and the message has become: “in the age of virality, innocence is irrelevant and any product can be convicted.”

Now that the tools of persuasion are democratized, artificial intelligence has hypnotized us and turned everything on its head. What once required time, craft, and creative intuition can now be generated instantly. Campaigns can be produced, voices can be mimicked, visuals can be replicated, and entire content ecosystems can be built with remarkable efficiency. The external brand, once a competitive advantage, is rapidly becoming a commodity.

But there are many things AI cannot generate. It cannot manufacture belief. It cannot simulate the pride someone feels when they are part of something meaningful, the sense of ownership that comes from contribution, or the quiet confidence of knowing that what happens inside the organization matches what is being said outside of it. That is the domain of the internal brand, and it has been largely overlooked.

Brands, like people, operate through dual identities. There is the face they present to the world, the curated, intentional expression designed to attract, persuade, and eventually separate people from their money. And then there is the identity they live by, the one shaped by experience, collaboration, relationships, and reality. Transaction or connection?

The strongest brands are not those that collapse these into one. They are the ones that align them. Because employees don't need to be convinced by the brand, they need to believe in it.

Behind every campaign, every product, every customer interaction, there is a workforce interpreting and delivering what the brand actually means. They are not consuming the brand. They are embodying it. And still, they are rarely treated as a primary audience in its construction.

This is where EndoLogo™ (the inner brand) exists. Not as a contradiction, but as a support system that strengthens the internal bond between the company and its employees.



Solely for illustrative purposes: Made-up Mc-Employee program; internal empowerment for collaborators; workers make up the brand's logo.

People don't show up to the world the same way they show up to themselves, and brands shouldn't either. It's clear that many brands have a huge performance-driven, proud-to-be-a-part-of, collaborative-and-committed, mostly human, ecosystem that deserves its own EndoLogo, because behind every great brand is another great brand.

Reference:

1. Schlechter, P., Hellmann, J. H., & Morina, N. (2022). Self-discrepancy, depression, anxiety, and psychological well-being. Cognitive Therapy and Research.

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Behind every great brand is another great brand.™