



AS A  
**LEADER**  
IS YOUR APPROACH TO  
**YOUR BRAND**  
**INTENTIONAL...**  
OR  
**TRANSACTIONAL?**

Let me ask you a slightly tougher question from my previous two articles.

*Are you leading your brand with intent... or are you managing it transactionally?*

At first glance, most leadership teams would confidently say they are 'Intentional'. After all, the organisation has a logo, a positioning statement, a website and a campaign calendar. There are marketing plans, brand guidelines and periodic refreshes. Everything appears structured.

However, in my experience working across 20-odd industries, there is a simple test. If the concept of a 'brand' only shows up in marketing meetings, it is almost always a sign that it is being managed transactionally.



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## The Transactional Brand Approach

A transactional approach towards the concept of a brand is not uncommon. In fact, it is often the default. In this model, brand is treated as a set of outputs:

- A visual identity
- A messaging framework
- A campaign platform
- A periodic 'refresh' exercise

I like to call this approach as defining a brand as a name, logo or jingle. It typically gains attention when something goes wrong, such as when sales soften, or when a competitor sharpens their positioning, or even when the website starts to feel outdated. At times, the

'brand' also comes to the fore when the Board begins asking harder questions about growth.

The language of a transactional approach to 'brand' reflects this mindset:

- "We need sharper messaging."
- "Let's rebrand."
- "Marketing should fix this."

Brand becomes a communications exercise. It sits within a function and is often isolated from the rest of the organisation. With such a sustained transactional approach, over time something subtle but significant begins to happen.



### *This gap is where brand erosion begins.*

It doesn't begin with a bang. Instead, it starts under layers very quietly and strengthens itself with every inconsistency.

It is important to understand that a brand is just like a person. It is not just what they look like and how they communicate – it is what they say, what they do and who they are. This is the true essence of a brand.

Imagine a salesperson who is well dressed and looks smart and speaks well. At the same time, they are not reliable and makes promises that they do not keep. What if that person has no distinguishing characteristics, nothing that makes them stand out?

In comparison, imagine a person who is dressed

smartly, communicates coherently and confidently, is reliable and a pleasure to deal with. In addition, this person has qualities and expertise that truly stand out. Finally, you can tell that they have a personal purpose beyond just selling you something, they want to help you and make a difference.

Which one would you select to do business with? Which person is a stronger brand?

I have seen organisations invest heavily in rebranding exercises while the underlying experience and internal culture remains unchanged. The result is predictable in all these cases. Customers hear a promise that a 'brand' makes, but their experience is entirely different and not on the good side. And over time, trust weakens.



## The Intentional Brand Leader

*Intentional leaders approach brand very differently.*

They understand a fundamental truth, which is: 'Brand' is not what you say.

**Brand is what customers consistently experience.**

They understand that 'brand' is the alignment between:

- What you promise
- How your people behave
- What customers actually experience
- How employees experience the organisation
- The decisions leadership makes every day to keep up the brand's promise

In organisations that lead intentionally, brand becomes a filter for decision-making. It does what it says. This is why intentional leaders begin to ask more demanding questions.

- What do we want to be known for?
- Is our brand promise compelling enough for prospects to select us and for existing customers to refer us?
- Are we consistent in delivering on our brand promise?
- Does our customer experience reinforce our positioning?
- Do our staff behave in line with our brand promise?
- Do our policies support what we claim? If they contradict, how can we justify them or modify them to align with the brand promise?
- Are we willing to sacrifice short-term revenue to protect long-term brand equity?

These questions shift the definition of a 'brand' from being an output to being a discipline.

## What Intentional Brand Leadership Designs

Just like customer experience and employee engagement, brand strength does not happen accidentally. It is designed with intent. In organisations that lead intentionally, three elements are clearly aligned.

### 1. A Clear and Differentiated Brand Promise

This goes beyond slogans and defines what the organisation stands for in the market and why customers should choose it beyond price.

### 2. Consistent Experience Delivery

The customer experience is deliberately planned in functional and emotional terms and designed to reinforce the brand promise at every touchpoint.

### 3. Organisational Alignment

People, processes and policies are aligned to support the brand. This includes how employees are hired, trained, rewarded and empowered.

It is the alignment of these three arms that gives a 'brand' its competitive advantage.

However, in our experience, achieving this alignment consistently requires more than intent — it requires a system.

At Engaged Strategy, we approach this through our proprietary Total Engagement Model®, which integrates customer experience, employee engagement and brand into a single operating framework.

Rather than treating brand as a marketing construct, the Total Engagement Model® of Engaged Strategy ensures that:

- Your Customer Value Proposition (CVP) defines the promise
- Your Employee Experience and Organisational Culture enable delivery
- Your Customer Experience Design and Governance ensure consistency
- And importantly, your clients' loyalty and likelihood to recommend becomes the ultimate measure of brand strength

This model has been used successfully to recover damaged brands, rejuvenate tired brands and increase likelihood to recommend scores by 100+ points. Because, the universal truth is that a brand is only as strong as the advocacy it creates.

## The Real Difference

*Transactional brand leadership tends to be:*

- Reactive
- Campaign-driven
- Cosmetic
- Functionally owned

*Intentional brand leadership is:*

- Strategic
- Experience-driven
- Structural
- Leadership-owned

Transactional brand leadership focuses on how the organisation looks.

Intentional brand leadership focuses on how the organisation behaves.

And behaviour is what customers ultimately remember.



## Where Organisations Drift

The concept of brand alignment is widely understood. However, its execution is where organisations struggle.

Across industries, I often see leadership teams invest in brand positioning while leaving operational systems unchanged. Marketing evolves, but customer experience does not. Culture remains disconnected from the promise. As a result, the organisation unintentionally dilutes its own brand.

In one case, a client had invested significantly in repositioning their brand around customer centricity. The messaging was clear, the campaigns were compelling and the market response was initially positive.

However, frontline processes had not changed. Customers continued to experience delays, rigid policies and inconsistent service. Within months, the gap between promise and experience became evident, and customer trust began to erode.

It was only when the leadership understood the gap and aligned customer experience with the culture and aligned governance to the brand promise that the organisation's performance began to shift meaningfully.

Using *The Total Engagement Model*<sup>®</sup>, we worked with the leadership team to:

- Redefine their customer promise
- Align employee behaviours and leadership expectations
- Introduce governance that translated insights into action
- Embed NPS<sup>®</sup> as a leadership metric, not just a CX score

Over time, this led to a significant uplift in advocacy, stronger retention and a measurable improvement in brand perception.

In another instance, we worked with an organisation that deliberately aligned its employee experience with its brand positioning. Leadership behaviour, internal communication and customer experience were brought into alignment. Over time, this translated into stronger advocacy, improved retention and a noticeable increase in referral-driven growth.

The difference was purely achieved by aligning the brand's promise with their delivery and the experience they offered.



## The Commercial Reality

Brand is not some random marketing concept. It is an economic lever with potential to make or break a business. When a 'brand' is managed transactionally, organisations often experience:

- Increased discounting
- Price-based competition
- Weak differentiation
- Higher acquisition costs
- Inconsistent customer experience

However, when a '**Brand**' is led intentionally, the outcomes are very different. The organisation experiences:

- Greater pricing power
- Increased referral behaviour
- Stronger customer retention
- Lower cost to acquire customers
- Greater resilience during market downturns

Strong brands reduce friction across the business, whereas weak brands increase the cost of growth. This is precisely why *the Total Engagement Model*<sup>®</sup>, is the ultimate measure of brand strength. Each aspect of the model which includes culture, CX and brand needs to be defined managed and measured,

Unfortunately, many leaders underestimate that every decision made within the organisation either strengthens or weakens brand equity. These in turn have a tremendous impact on:

- Hiring decisions
- Pricing decisions
- Customer recovery decisions
- Policy decisions
- Supplier decisions

However, all of these are brand decisions.



## The Real Question

*Have you intentionally built a brand where your brand communications, internal culture & experiences are designed and aligned to drive customer growth and build a sustainable competitive advantage?* In today's market, brand strength drives pricing power, advocacy, talent attraction and resilience. And none of those happen by accident.

If you have this question nagging you, *then our proprietary Total Engagement Model*<sup>®</sup> can help you realign your brand's growth engine.

*The Total Engagement Model*<sup>®</sup> is a proprietary tool and registered trademark of Engaged Strategy<sup>®</sup> & Christopher Roberts.

## Who Owns the Brand?

One of the clearest indicators of whether the concept of a 'brand' is intentional or transactional is ownership. If a brand is owned by marketing, it will behave transactionally. If a brand is owned by the CEO and leadership team, it becomes intentional.

This is because 'Brand' is a leadership discipline. And when leadership does not actively steward it, the organisation drifts apart.

## A Leadership Mirror

*Leader to leader, consider these questions carefully.*

- Can your leadership team articulate your brand promise in one clear sentence?
- Would your frontline teams describe it the same way?
- Do your customers experience doing business with you just the way you describe yourselves?
- When was the last time you chose long-term reputation over short-term revenue?
- Does your Board view brand as a strategic asset, or simply as marketing spend?

The answers to these questions reveal far more than any brand audit.