Brand Communication in a Large Consumer Goods Company: A Case of The Coca-Cola Company

Juliana Deal
The University of Tennessee
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Michelle Childs
Department of Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to better understand the flow of communication among the multitude of different bottlers within a large consumer goods company, The Coca-Cola Company.

Methods
This qualitative study conducted several interviews, both with lower and middle level employees and with executives. Interviews were either conducted in-person or through email communication. Participating employees signed consent forms prior to each interview. Following transcription of the recorded interviews, this study applied thematic analysis to determine trends surrounding brand communication within the Coca-Cola Company and strategic methods that employees found both effective and unsuccessful.

Communication Keys
- When asked about communication, being open and honest with each other appears to be the most important concept among Coca-Cola employees as a whole. Despite differences in levels of employment within the company, employees believe that each voice is equally important; after all, some of the most innovative ideas come from the ground floor.
- Communication is most effective when people feel comfortable enough to speak openly and honestly. Coca-Cola puts great focus on creating an atmosphere that allows productive and constructive communication.
- Coca-Cola encourages employees to be helpful without being hurtful in their communication with one another. This creates a sense of respect in the workplace that contributes to advantageous communication throughout the company as a whole.
- Patience and perseverance are critical themes throughout the company. One senior-level employee admitted that, “It is not uncommon for the department to take over 6 months only for the entire project to be scrapped”.

Conclusions
Through an array of interviews, several themes stuck out as key factors for successful brand communication:
- Reducing micromanagement and allowing creative freedom to flow throughout the workplace.
- Creating a place where people want to work.
- Basing each business decision off of strong rooted company values to ensure morality, positivity, and overall success.
- Networking with winning partners and suppliers.
- Working diligently and being effective and productive to ensure fast-paced results.
- Maintaining open communication channels, weekly departmental meetings, monthly team sessions, and surveys to evaluate employee comfort and happiness in the workplace.
- Positive recognition and reward for employees continually proves to be a motivator for hard work at Coca-Cola.

The Coca-Cola Company’s Values

- "The success of a company is not enough to ensure positive culture"
- Serving others, putting others first
- Serving over selling
- Mission driven company
- Growth: individually, in relationships with others, and as a company
- Truth, integrity, humility, and morality in everything the company does.

Coca-Cola Consolidated’s Purpose Statement (A Bottle’s Perspective)

To Honor God in All We Do
To Serve Others to Pursue Excellence to Grow Profitably

Bottling System
- As a whole, Coca-Cola is comprised of various bottlers across the United States and the globe. As the company began growing rapidly, it developed a sort of franchise system in which local bottlers became responsible for specific territory.
- The U.S. used to contain many bottlers, but larger bottlers have taken over smaller bottlers over time.
- Coca-Cola Consolidated is the largest in the United States (Coca-Cola North America).

Strategies
- Throughout the company, sharing strategies for promotions, packaging, retail marketing, and much more are discussed among other departments for critique and collaboration. Meetings are held for each department in which the specific department’s strategies for the upcoming year are discussed in detail and assessed by executives from the department as well as executives from outside of the department, such as the COO and CFO.
- Coca-Cola employees strive to avoid micro-managing in all situations. Experience has shown members of the company that stressing over every little thing is not an effective method; instead, strive to respect employees’ creative space.
- Self-reflection and introspection help employees reduce tension and stress among team members.
- Low turnover rate among employees allows teams to build stronger relationships and, consequently, work more effectively as a company overall.