
Case Studies

Angus Jenkinson

is a professor at and director of the Centre for Integrated Marketing, a research centre at Luton Business School, where he develops integrated marketing strategy and best practice tools, and is chairman of Stepping Stones Consultancy Ltd, a consultancy firm specialising in helping brands get closer to their customers.

Branko Sain

is a research fellow at the Centre for Integrated Marketing.

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Angus Jenkinson
Luton University Business School
Centre for Integrated Marketing
Putteridge Bury
Hitchin Road
Luton LU2 8LE, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1582 489303
Fax: +44 (0)1582 743150
E-mail:
angus.jenkinson@luton.ac.uk

Implementing integrated marketing: The Seeboard Energy case

Angus Jenkinson and Branko Sain

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Abstract

The paper argues that current fragmented marketing sub-optimises performance. It suggests that integrated marketing, when implemented effectively, enhances multilateral value creation (for shareholders, customers, employees, the organisation and wider stakeholders' communities). It proposes the 18 leadership actions model for integrated marketing implementation using the Seeboard Energy case analysis to test it. The findings suggest that the proposed model outlines an effective road-map for marketing leaders that in the Seeboard Energy case generated £51m net equity, substantially enhanced customer and employee satisfaction and delivered new products and services that contribute to sustainability.

Introduction

Over the last century, the marketing field has largely evolved into discrete specialist streams that have progressively gained expertise while losing touch with each other and the greater business problems that marketing must address.¹⁻³ The fragmentation of marketing into disciplines (eg advertising, direct) and isolation of some marketing constituents to totally detached sectors (eg strategy, sales, PR, new product development) has many valuable results but it has also determined a series of relatively independent tools with different theoretical bases,⁴⁻⁵ planning and evaluation criteria, skills and processes.⁶⁻⁹ In an era of proliferation of media, globalisation and a growing need for accountability, fragmented marketing is not capable of optimising return on investment (ROI). Furthermore, there is some tendency for marketing to become associated with 'marketing communication' and hence something 'tacked on the end'; as a result, it gets pushed away from the top decision-making tables. According to a recent analysis by the CIM, only 8 per cent of the FTSE 100 have a marketer on the board.¹⁰

There is therefore a need for change. Marketing should heal its self-inflicted divisions and further enhance its value to the firm. A proposed aid is integrated marketing, a new paradigm and developing theory of good marketing that pulls together many existing elements of best practice, some for the first time. The objective of this paper is to propose the 18 leadership actions model of integrated marketing based on how they were implemented at Seeboard Energy.

The business problem

Seeboard Energy was identified as an exemplar of good practice due to its interrelated achievements in a variety of fields that sustain the principles of integrated marketing.¹¹ A relatively small company of only 1.5 million customers (2 million accounts) and turnover of £2bn, following industry deregulation it found itself in 2000–2002 in a competitive battle for customers with the giants (eg British Gas). Like other brands in the energy category, it diversified and added gas and other products to its portfolio. None of its customers had ever consciously chosen to be a Seeboard customer. They were customers only because they happened to live in its area. After market deregulation, competitors claimed cheaper solutions and implemented aggressive sales tactics. The haemorrhage of customers grew to a peak of 10,000 accounts a week during 2000–2001. The crisis challenge was how to exploit the company's potential to arrest and reverse the decline. Seeboard Energy turned to archibald ingall stretton (AIS), a London-based integrated communications agency, with a simple brief: 'An honest, 12-month retention plan to cover all aspects of the Seeboard Energy business. Not limited by what is currently possible. Not limited by budget.'

The communications brief

AIS researched current reality, both the strengths and the weaknesses, and recommended a radical solution known as the 'Where does it all come from?' campaign, based on a core truth of the business: that Seeboard Energy is actually surprisingly creative, innovative and passionate about customers. This led to a substantial integrated programme of organisation change, marketing communications, product development and employee involvement. Three achievements sum up the effectiveness of their actions and communication programme (see Achievements section below for further details).

Significant achievements

- Seeboard Energy was acquired by the LE Group at the end of 2002 at a premium over historic per-customer values. The project was worth approximately £51m net to the Seeboard Energy business, representing a significant return on investment for shareholders.
- The reduced staff churn produces a saving of £800,000 in reduced recruitment and training costs during 2002, representing not only financial savings but also a changed employee experience.
- Innovation led to new products and services that guarantee the sustainability of the project and improved customer experience. Independent research showed that in December 2002 Seeboard Energy was both most improved and industry leader in customer satisfaction.¹²

Following a brief description of research methodology, the first part of the paper discusses integrated marketing, while the second part tests the leadership actions model using the Seeboard Energy example.

Research methodology

The present study includes a combination of in-depth interviews with the sales and marketing director and other senior managers, interviews with the managing partner of the agency and other business partners,

interviews and action research with the staff, in particular in the call centre and with the sales force, a specialist practitioner literature review and document and content analysis including marketing communications, evaluation studies and results, reports and performance assessments, industry reports and awards entries.

The process of triangulation of sources and triangulation of data at the analysis stage is aimed at enhancing the validity of research findings.

The proposed 18 leadership actions model has also drawn on the findings from previous studies. The research methodology included interviews with senior executives and other senior practitioners, focus groups, inspection and independent research with 50 leading firms and agencies, as well as a CIM media-neutral planning best practice research project with some 20 senior marketers, supplemented by interviews with authorities, secondary literature research, conferences and professional experience.

Integrated marketing, a new paradigm

Integrated marketing is a response to the fragmentation of the modern large organisation environment and its media that determines higher costs to its stakeholders and a fragmented customer experience. Literature on media planning,¹³ organisation development,¹⁴ human resources,¹⁵ service marketing,^{16,17} employee and customer satisfaction,¹⁸⁻²⁰ direct and interactive marketing^{21,22} and the research of the Centre for Integrated Marketing (CFIM) supports this vision.

Integrated marketing extends the concepts of traditional marketing by building on principles and theories of systems thinking,^{23,24} organisational development,²⁵ leadership,²⁶ lean thinking²⁷ and 30-degree branding experience. It is a development of the concepts of relationship marketing²⁸ and customer relationship management (CRM)^{29,30} on organisation change,³¹ as well as of integrated marketing communications (IMC)³² and the marketing planning concepts.^{33,34} Whereas the Kellogg view of integrated marketing³⁵ is broadly based on the integration of mass and one-to-one communication into the brand's customer segments over time, the broader concept of integrated marketing extends to the wider (integrated) enterprise that is the vehicle for communication and value delivery,^{36,37} as this study shows.

Table 1 illustrates the development of integrated marketing from existing marketing practice. IMC includes best practice in brand communication using commercial media; relationship marketing includes the best practice in developing customer equity and sustained brand building; and CRM the best practice in managing touchpoints and infrastructure. Besides merging these, integrated marketing connects them to other organisational fields, such as HR (eg learning company),^{38,39} production, (eg lean management)⁴⁰ and finance (eg activity-based costing).⁴¹

Integrated marketing proposes three interrelated objectives.

- A customer experience that satisfies the customer and feels relevant, congruent and coherent across all touchpoints/media and builds brand

Extending the marketing field

Integrated marketing objectives

Table 1: Integration practices

	Seasonal	Sustained
	CRM/internal marketing	Integrated marketing
Management range Internal media and customer touchpoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project rollout includes web, call centres, sales force and other channels supporting objectives and idea • Touchpoint management • Response rate/sales measures • Internal marketing activities • Database enhancement • Knowledge management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture, vision and brand alignment • Seamless customer-facing organisation • Total communications planning and execution • All-stakeholder value • Media-neutral planning (MNP)
	IMC	Relationship marketing
Marcoms media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand management/brand equity • Big creative idea harmonising communications across media and disciplines • Coordinated marketing communications plan, including PR • Awareness/market share measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained brand positioning and communication harmony to maximise brand equity • IMC deployed in relationship management programmes to optimise customer equity • Investment in one-to-one management competence

and customer equity.

- The whole organisation works as an aligned, creative team. Processes smoothly deliver value to customers, employees, company/ shareholders and society.
- The marketing team, including agencies, harmoniously executes best ideas across the optimum platforms and leads in the development of brand alignment.

Integrated marketing consists of a ‘vertical creative alignment’ through the organisation and a ‘horizontal creative alignment’ through media, channels and touchpoints, as shown in Figure 1.

Integrated marketing defined

Thus the CFIM developed the following definition: ‘Integrated marketing is a holistic discipline that involves the whole organisation in developing congruent, sustainable and high-value brand experience for all stakeholders.’

In order to do this, integrated marketing explicitly develops the importance and practice of cultural and organisational alignment as well promoting a mental and systemic infrastructure for integration. With its practice guidelines, marketers, including direct and interactive marketers, undoubtedly have the potential to step up to a challenge that amounts to a widening of their responsibility, potential and vision.

Implementing integrated marketing

The 18 leadership actions model

In order to achieve this, some changes will be needed to the processes and other aspects of the enterprise/brand. What should the chief marketing officer (CMO) and other leaders do? The paper now outlines 18 interconnected leadership actions that appear to be effective (see Figure 2). They bring together recognised and new action areas in a network of change.

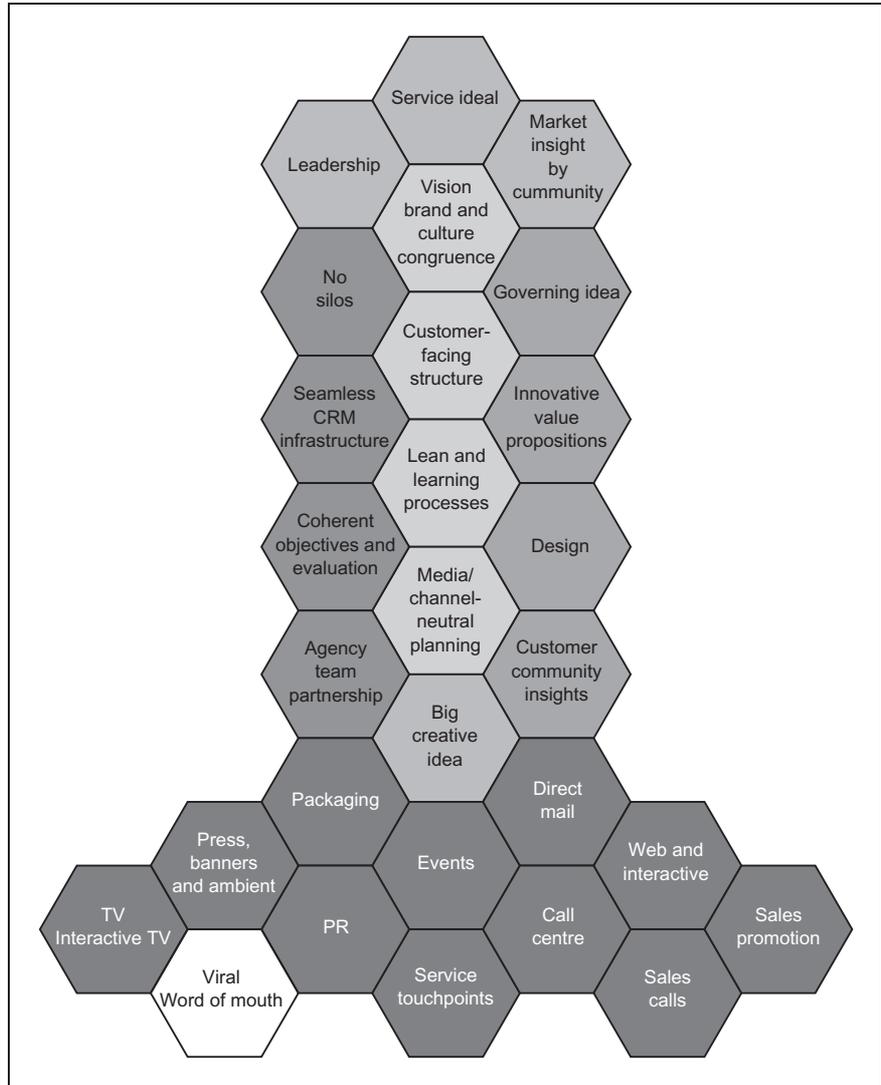


Figure 1: An integrated marketing framework
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Leaders drive change

Leadership commitment

Leadership commitment initiates the integrated marketing process and sustains it. Final success usually comes from a form of leadership across the organisation that is collective (everyone takes ownership together), distributed (all parts play their part) and situational (the right person takes leadership at the right time).

At Seaboard Energy the lead responsibility for this belonged to the sales and marketing director (Nigel Samuels). His vision was a galvanising force that transformed the brand and influenced every part of the organisation, in partnership with the managing director (Peter Hoffman). Leadership was empowered in pursuit of the brand objectives at all levels and across the organisation. The leadership role of the agency is also important. They brought insights, creative solutions and a major

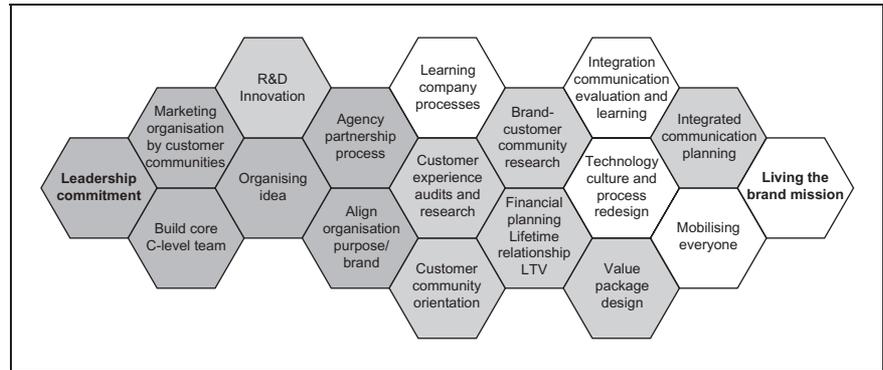


Figure 2: The 18 leadership actions model of integrated marketing

idea, recommended actions, made important contributions to the design of various events and programmes, as well as to their execution, and maintained the essential combination of acceptance of the problem and faith in the solution.

The research confirms the value of a committed leader making the initial decisive shift and sustaining it over time.

Agency partnership process

Leaders should engage in establishing an agency partnership that optimises integrated marketing results.

Collaboration and partnership

Seeboard Energy and AIS established an excellent partnership that was fundamental to success. Seeboard Energy offered the agency complete access to every part of the organisation and provided a significant budget for researching the various stakeholder groups, especially customers. There is strong evidence of good ‘chemistry’ and trust between the principals. The partnership process also included working with the equivalent of an internal agency: the Organisational Development (OD) function at Seeboard Energy was responsible for all human resources issues. The OD sub-project won an internal marketing PR award from the Institute of Public Relations. AIS and OD collaborated closely and well.

Success undoubtedly depended on the collaboration, partnership and trust of the sales and marketing team, the external agency and OD/human resources, which confirms the importance of the CMO’s actions in initiating this.

Organising idea

Leaders must develop powerful organising ideas and use them as fundamental tools for achieving alignment.

Powerful ideas align organisations

Seeboard Energy achieved alignment through an organising idea that grew out of a creative insight driven by research. AIS and Samuels envisaged an integrated communication programme within a larger integrated marketing project. They proposed a new brand promise and ‘innovative’ positioning (mission statement: ‘Passionate about finding ways of saving you energy’) communicated through a big, media-neutral creative idea (‘Where does it all come from?’). Their proposal was that

Seaboard Energy makes visible its creative commitment, not simply to saving the customer money, but to its relentless pursuit of innovative ideas that would save customers energy. Their proposition involved aligning current reality, vision and the brand by stretching the organisation to achieve its existing potential and uniqueness. This idea was then implemented across the business and external communication. The idea (and insight) contrasts with a previous lack of direction and advertising that made a noise without a differentiating message.

The research confirms how ideas can align organisations and empower staff in all parts of the business. Ideas change the way people see the world.^{42,43} They have the potential to generate meaning and purpose. Brands are themselves primary examples.

Build core C-level team

Marketing leaders are required to seek cooperation and commitment across the C-level team (those heading the various functions of the business) in order to be successful.

The leadership role of the Seaboard Energy C-level team had three separate and important aspects.

- An acceptance of the facts: there was a crisis and something needed to be done. This was accepted by the entire management team.
- An evaluation of the integrity of the proposition and proposed solution. Was this a message that Seaboard Energy could genuinely live up to? Did it really express a truth of the brand? The entire team committed to this proposition.
- Having accepted that the proposition lay within the potential of the organisation, albeit with an acceptable margin of aspiration, they then committed together and individually to its achievement. Moreover, they sustained this commitment for over a year with the full intention to continue it.

The research indicates that cooperation between functional leaders is fundamental to resource optimisation and necessary for success.

Align organisation purpose and brand

Leaders need to align the brand organisation to reflect its purpose.

Seaboard Energy had actively developed the brand organisation, yet there remained a significant gap between external and internal image. As an example of how this was reversed, the agency mapped out all the possible touchpoints between customers and the Seaboard Energy brand, and designed how to present the brand proposition at different touchpoints. The organisation was transformed, so that it then actually delivered. More fundamentally, the new positioning brought congruence between culture, internal perception and brand message, backed by real action, such as product innovation.

Congruence between internal image, for example cultural values, external brand image and future vision seems vital. Where these are not congruent, there is a tendency towards higher costs, lower value, stress,

The Board commits to collaborate

Achieving internal and external congruence

confusion and failure. The research shows Seeboard Energy aligning purpose and brand through commitment to its new positioning.

Marketing organised by customer communities

Leaders must organise marketing functions into customer-focused structures.

Marketing organisation mirrors customer communities

The Seeboard Energy marketing communications department was organised not on marketing communication disciplines but on primary customer communities. The entire range of communications for each customer type is managed holistically by a single group with a full complement of skills for brand management, communication, product development, customer research and organisation. The customer group developed the marketing plan and strategy for each community and agreed that plan with the other parts of the business. They were then responsible for taking the plan to market. This was supported by customer insight management and data to ensure business performance.

The case reinforces the proposition and the importance of holistic and congruent communication planning and management.

Brand and communities research

Leaders must ensure research insights focused on the brand signature — its essence, core values, positioning, the core customer needs it satisfies and brand promise — and customer communities and their relationship with the brand.

Understanding customers and their experience

Seeboard Energy funded AIS and its research partner to develop insights that drove brand development, customer vision, organisation development and customer communication across all media. Seeboard Energy has made customer research an ongoing commitment to understanding its key customer types. Working in conjunction with a consulting firm that analysed and developed their database of customers, they identified ten customer clusters, used to manage communication and products. Recognising that knowledge is power, they further embedded the mission to understand customer experience by appointing ‘brand experience’ managers.

The case shows that the brand and communities research constitutes a fundamental step towards integrated marketing. Understanding the brand and the customers’ relationship to it was acknowledged and is apparent as a driver of success.

Living the brand mission

Leaders must sustain the objective of ‘living the brand mission’ from early in the course of the integrated marketing implementation process.

Vision and involvement

To achieve this, the board committed to a full-scale programme of internal development, launched and directed as the internal arm of the ‘Where does it all come from?’ campaign. Agreeing the customer vision/brand promise was a process that involved all parts of the organisation and was taken up actively, not only by marketing but also by the OD team who worked collaboratively in conjunction with the agency. The project explicitly included internal marketing communications and a series of

involvement events. That involved extensive dialogue. For example, leaders put themselves on the line to discuss real issues with staff across the organisation. The systematic process involved everyone in the organisation in a significant variety of ways to ensure that the organisation lived the brand vision.

The case sustains the importance of ensuring that everyone in the value stream understands and lives the brand mission.

Financial planning, lifetime relationship and LTV

Leaders should understand and apply the dynamics of customer. Pareto analysis is used to manage investment in services and communication as well as customer acquisition strategies. Lifetime value (LTV) is the most strategic Pareto measure.

Focusing on lifetime value

Seeboard Energy's modelling included LTV approximations for different customer types and a recalibration of strategy in order to optimise LTV. For example, the programme shifted priority from acquisition to retention and upgrade. They achieved the lowest churn rates and highest LTV in the industry as well as a 20 per cent improvement in cross-sell.

The research shows how good marketers manage customer relationships as an integrated process over time, taking into account the full variety of customer touchpoints. A key step is modelling and optimising the financial dynamics around acquisition, retention and upgrade strategies.

R&D innovation

Leaders must recognise and exploit the contribution of R&D innovation.

Developing a culture of innovation

R&D innovation was a central pillar of Seeboard Energy's strategy. They developed enhanced and sustainable competency and a culture of innovation to produce tailored customer value while enhancing value for all other stakeholders; and innovated not only in what but how value was delivered, taking into account, for example, infrastructure, tools and processes. The new products represent mid-term assets.

The case shows that R&D includes the whole value stream, and it contributes to achieve a sustainable model of value creation that is tailored and relevant to different customer communities.

Community orientation of business

Leaders should ensure that the business focuses effectively on each of its customer franchises across all business units.

Customer-centred structures

The Seeboard Energy marketing leaders were responsible for reorganising the business so that it to focuses on customer communities across its business units. The teams work together to channel value to the customer, supported by touchpoints research. The teams collectively agreed budgets and service-level specifications. Within the two primary communities (business and residential), there were additional customer communities, with units.

The research confirms the value of all business units adopting a customer-centred structure and value stream.

Collecting and connecting insights

Customer experience audits and research

Leaders should develop an intense, empathic and widely disseminated knowledge of the experience of the different customer communities.

Seeboard Energy appointed brand experience managers to understand and monitor the residential and business communities. In the case of residential customers, two analysts were involved in understanding every aspect of the customer experience across every touchpoint. This is a full-time and ongoing commitment and involves not only external but also internal research. A full model of customer touchpoints for each type of customer was developed and is used for both evaluation and innovation across the organisation.

The research indicates that this has connected previously fragmented knowledge, improved services and inspired staff.

Using NPD to achieve positioning

Value package design

Leaders should ensure innovative value package designs relevant to each customer community and reflecting brand positioning.

The Seeboard Energy customer vision represented an ideal of value generation for customers. In order to deliver on this ideal, it needed to engage in product innovation. An essential objective of the project was to get customers to commit themselves actively to new products or variants on existing ones, rather than being passive consumers. Seeboard Energy's innovations included industry trust and service enhancements. Seeboard Energy was subsequently recognised as the most improved and satisfying company in its categories. A prompt payment product provided discount for early payment, and a new website was developed in order to provide enhanced services.

The research confirms the importance of designing enhanced value that reflects unique positioning.

Using every interaction to develop the brand

Integrated communications planning

Leaders must ensure that the integrated communications planning includes a holistic attitude to communication; media-neutral planning, and media-neutral payment to agencies; a media-neutral creative idea; recognition that all communication is brand defining — there are no such things as brand-building and non-brand-building communications disciplines; and integrated thinking across mass and one-to-one communication.

Seeboard Energy not only developed conventional marketing communications such as TV, direct mail, website, radio, posters and exhibitions, but also a range of Seeboard Energy reality media, such as the call centre and the bill. A multimedia creative programme was developed from a big media-neutral creative idea: 'Where does it all come from?' It further demonstrated the brand-building power of one-to-one communication and its ability to transform attitudes. This seems to be partly because it conveyed a sense of caring, and partly because it communicates genuine innovation and value. The full range of communication involved is extensive. Given that the project also included a redesign of the logo, everything from letterheads to vans needed to

change. Communication also extended to, for instance, road shows, the Ideal Home exhibition and doorstep visits.

The research shows that integrated communication thinking can successfully include reality media as well as traditional advertising media, and break out of artificial barriers between the communication disciplines.

Technology, culture and process redesign

Leaders should audit and improve the technology, culture and processes of the business to support data, process, behaviours and knowledge integration.

Enhancing working practice

Since the company would shortly be divested, the directors prioritised sustainable investments and activities. Major technology investment was not considered viable. The focus was on the development of improved processes and skills. This decision turned out to be appropriate, given that since it merged with LE Group, Seaboard Energy is able to use their technology.

The directors nevertheless acknowledged the vital role of technology innovation for the company's overall future success.

Mobilising everyone

Integrated marketing leaders should mobilise everyone towards living the brand mission.

Gaining buy-in

The OD team drove internal communication culture and changes required to support the campaign. It was a year-long holistic project that touched every part of the business and impacted on the entire people plan. Basing the brand, customer vision and strategy on the attributes of the people was a practical, financial and emotional investment. The challenge included convincing the staff that this was true, and not just advertising hype, before it could be real for customers. To bring the customer vision to life required innovation and a new approach that placed people at the centre of their strategy and created the kind of company people actively want to work for. The activities undertaken as part of this project demonstrate marketing innovation. The OD leader commented: 'By placing staff at the centre of our customer vision and strategy, we had to truly demonstrate that everyone from the top team to front-line agent believed that we are a company full of ideas, passion and energy. The approach taken aimed to inform, lead, listen and importantly involve people.' The results demonstrate its effectiveness and the level of support by staff:

- 99 per cent supported the vision and strategy
- over 90 per cent consistently understood the contribution they could make
- 88 per cent would recommend Seaboard Energy as a good place to work
- 92 per cent felt proud to work there.

Seeboard Energy supports the proposition and suggests the following keys to success:

- cross-functional activity and cooperation: a team that works as a team
- a structure which facilitates customer focus and end-to-end customer processes across the business
- an energetic, talented and ideas-focused team of people taken from all parts of the business
- an ability to communicate a vision right across the business
- an inspiring customer service ideal
- clear focus on the business value and clear selection criteria.

It suggests that effective implementation of any change or innovation benefits from inclusion of all the involved parties. Integration needs hearts and minds and not just compliance — a significant new strategic role for the senior marketing executive.

Learning company processes

Leaders must endeavour to ensure the organisation adopts a learning culture that is an integral part of business processes and infrastructure.

Seeboard Energy adopted a learning culture which enabled them to identify their business problem and design and execute the solution. Evidence of their healthy approach was apparent from many examples, including:

- encouragement of extensive internal communication across departments and responsibility levels
- ready availability and access to in-depth fact-based evidence
- openness to research, including ‘negative findings’.

At Seeboard Energy transparency is part of the organisational culture: it is prepared, organised and has a history of learning and evaluating effectively. The entire project depended on this, eg the take-up of the insights, the process of rapid change and projection of an innovative culture. This demonstrates the importance of a learning culture supported by good knowledge processes and activities.

Integrated communication evaluation and learning

Marketing leaders must integrate evaluation and learning into the planning processes.

Seeboard Energy used a wide range of criteria to evaluate their work, from very specific marketing communications measures (response, sales, counts on website traffic) to the strategic measures: LTV (customer loss rates were an ultimate test: residential customer losses were down 31 per cent and business customer losses down nearly 35 per cent), customer satisfaction and shareholder ROI.

It confirms the importance of integrating evaluation and learning in the business processes. It also suggests that the marketing community needs

**Learning
organisation**

Excellent results

Integrated marketing works

to develop new tools for the evaluation of integrated marketing communications.

Conclusions

Seeboard Energy followed a pattern of leadership behaviour that is characterised as the 18 leadership actions model. In addition to the achievements cited above and a considerable range of creative and business awards, this led to enhanced brand awareness (prompted awareness increased by 11 per cent, unprompted awareness of their advertising outstripped British Gas by three to one), brand attitudes, sales effectiveness (against an industry average of 50 per cent cancellation rate for new accounts, the Seeboard Energy rate reduced from 40 per cent at the start of the campaign to just 27 per cent) and customer satisfaction (Seeboard Energy was clear industry leader and most improved company in customer satisfaction in both the J. D. Power and Energywatch (Gas Electricity, December 2002) surveys).

This suggests that the proposed action model, which was observed also in other research cases, outlines an effective integrated marketing road-map for marketing leaders. Further research will be forthcoming on this hypothesis.

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