



What can HR learn from marketing?

Whereas huge efforts are put into managing brands to the external market, how many HR functions consider their internal brand within the organisation?

The people and the brand are unique to an organisation; most other things can be replicated. Sophisticated organisations are developing their employee brand to bring together external brand values with the behaviours and values needed to support this brand. They are becoming enmeshed. But positioning different HR initiatives, particularly benefits, is often not considered in terms of branding.

There is no such thing as best practice for many of the things reward people are responsible for. It is the HR equivalent of the Holy Grail and would lead to an equally fruitless search. There is no point trying to import a 'product' into your market (organisation) if it just does not fit. Companies thrive on bringing innovative new products to market, with fresh marketing ideas to promote them. But HR people often look for safety in a proven solution such as one that a larger player in the same sector has already implemented.

Reward people can often find themselves emphasising the

features of a new plan rather than the benefit to the individual. We always have to answer the question: 'what's in it for me?' This does not mean explain the technical niceties that you might have found interesting in designing the programme, but 'what will I get out of it', 'what will it do for me?' HR people need to get themselves out of features and into benefits. Selling ideas and concepts should be a core competency of an HR professional but, too often, the emphasis is on the technical design and administration rather than the underlying values, beliefs and benefits. These need selling.

Whereas no marketing director would sign off a new advertising campaign or product launch without test marketing, HR launches initiatives across the whole business without any testing or piloting.

The value of what we do is released by effective communications, so ensure the internal communications are at the same level as those used for customers.

■ *Michael Rose, director of reward and HR policy at Aon and vice president reward at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development*