



BRAND

The Critical Importance of Defining and Delivering Your Firm's Brand Culture

As your firm looks ahead to 2023 and an increasingly competitive legal market, it will be even more important to stand out in ways that have a real impact, by clearly defining how you're relevant to clients, recruits, and your own people. To understand and deliver on these points of relevance, it helps to define your Brand Culture: Who are you, what you stand for, and what sets you apart.

This is a way of thinking about brand that goes beyond communications. We believe brand is a promise of performance that, when delivered consistently, creates a preference. By "delivered consistently", we mean across the full range of your firm's touchpoints, from communications like thought leadership, marketing materials, and your website, to your office environment and events.

But in professional services organisations — or, as we prefer to think of them, 'people-to-people' businesses — what's even more critical are touchpoints like how your people interact with clients and each other to deliver on your brand in a consistent way. Indeed, the strongest-performing organisations put their brand — their promise of performance — at the centre of everything they do. It's a touchstone for all communications, actions, and behaviours.

"brand is a promise of performance that, when delivered consistently, creates a preference"

When you think about brand in this way, you see that your firm's culture is intrinsically linked to your brand. They are, in truth, in a loop, with each feeding and defining the other.

Brand Culture is more important than ever

The link between brand and culture is so critical to service firms that the idea of Brand Culture is now becoming widely accepted within the legal services category. *HR* magazine defines it as the "unique blend of psychology, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs informing brand behaviour, influencing brand experience, and ultimately shaping brand reputation".¹ And a strong Brand Culture is particularly critical now, for a number of reasons:

- The legal industry is more competitive than ever. Clients view quality and expertise as table stakes, and firms need to work harder to differentiate themselves from their peers.
- Shared values help to build stronger relationships between brands and their customers. Deloitte's '2021 Global Marketing Trends' research revealed that organisations that view their customers through the lens of human values can better connect their promises with the services and experiences they deliver, establishing loyalty.²
- Clients increasingly care about organisational values. In a recent survey,³ 71% of consumers overall indicated that they prefer buying from brands that align with their values. These numbers are even higher among younger generations.
- The war for talent may be cooling, but the best and brightest are still in demand, and they care about much more than salary and status.
- The pandemic has left many people feeling isolated and wanting stronger connections. Organisations with clear purpose and value-driven cultures will attract and retain talent better than others.
- Strong relationships with clients are built on trust. But trust in organisations — from companies to governments — is in crisis. Your Brand Culture can be a driver of trust.

Let's walk through each of these six areas to understand them in better detail.

“The strongest-performing organisations put their brand - their promise of performance - at the centre of everything they do”

Expertise is table stakes, so softer skills become more important

For law firms, the slowing economy will only make new business generation and client development more competitive. With fewer dollars to spend, clients will be looking for ways to distinguish one firm from the next. When comparing firms that have equal expertise in a given area, clients look to other aspects to help decide which to choose. In other words, once expertise has been determined, clients judge firms on soft skills like relationships, empathy, and responsiveness. If these are core to your firm’s DNA, and are consistently delivered upon in a distinctive way, you have something special.

These soft skills only become more important once you’ve landed the client; they are intrinsic to building a strong client relationship that lasts over the years. That client hopefully not only brings you more and more business, but also becomes an advocate, referring other clients your way.

Shared values help to build brand loyalty and advocacy

Customers connect with brands that they feel are aligned with their own values. Think about how Patagonia’s genuine commitment to the environment positively affects consumers’ impression of its products and brand. The connection between Patagonia’s values and its customers’ values is so strong that the company refers to its customers as “Patagoniacs”.

In addition, so-called ‘emotional responses’ were found to inspire greater brand loyalty and advocacy. In describing brands to which they are loyal, a majority of customers will use emotional words like “love”, “happy”, and “adore” —⁴ the same terms they use when talking about their family, friends, and pets.

A Razorfish / VICE Media study found that 62% of consumers surveyed say that when it comes to making purchase decisions, a brand’s values are important or very important to them, with 40% actively researching a brand’s values and practices.⁵

It stands to reason that if consumers care this much about the values associated with the product brands they purchase, they will care at least as much about the values associated with the service brands they buy from. After all, values are human qualities, and services are primarily experienced through interactions with people.



Generational shifts are driving an even greater desire for values alignment

Generational shifts are also having an increasingly profound effect on firms. Generation Y (‘Millennials’) and Generation Z (‘Zoomers’) combined include people ages 10 to 46, and there are a lot of them. Per the World Economic Forum, Millennials are now the largest adult cohort worldwide, constituting more than 14 million people in the UK, more than 148 million in Europe, and more than 75 million in the US.⁶ Born between 1981 and 1996, Millennials recently surpassed Baby Boomers as the biggest population group in the UK.⁷

According to the independent think tank, the Resolution Foundation, “The coming decade will be marked by mass exits from the labour market as the original baby boomer generation retires. But there’ll be an even bigger mass entry in the labour market, as those born in the millennial baby boom start to come of age”.⁸ Having a strong brand culture, aligned with the largely value-driven wants and needs of this younger generation, can set you apart.

What does this demographic care about as consumers, or in the case of law firms, as clients? While 50% of Generation X’ers say that buying from brands that share their ideologies and values is important, a whopping 83% of Millennials stress the importance of value alignment in their buying decision.⁹ That’s a huge shift, and one that is having a major impact on a wide range of businesses, including law firms. In the US, many law firms are finding that their employees and clients are expecting them to take stands on controversial issues such as immigration, abortion rights, and gay civil rights.

The war on talent may be cooling, but it’s only temporary

That generational shift is also of course affecting internal cultures, as well as recruitment and retention. While the slowing economy might lead many firms to think that they need to slow hiring and ease up on recruiting efforts, history tells us that is short-sighted. Firms are still going to compete fiercely for the best and brightest even when there are fewer positions to fill.

And once the economy turns around, the war for talent will, of course, heat up again. Today’s up-and-coming workforce cares more deeply about purpose, values, and ‘soft attributes’ like collaboration and flexibility than the generations that preceded them. According to Forbes, “The Millennial demographic is the first demographic of employees to put effort and time into working toward their personal beliefs and values versus external drivers, such as money and wealth.”¹⁰

The Big Four accounting firms have long been ahead of most law firms in thinking proactively about how to attract and retain a strong global workforce. PwC surveyed Millennials and wrote, “Reputation matters. The employers that appeal the most to this generation are those that successfully answer the tricky question: ‘Why do I want to work here?’ Millennials want their work to have a purpose, to contribute something to the world and they want to be proud of their employer. The brands that appeal to young people as consumers, including those that stress their environmental and social record, are the same brands that appeal to them as employees.”¹¹

More and more, law firms need to take into account these changing priorities in order to attract, develop, and retain the types of people who will in turn attract and retain their peers as clients. Deloitte's 2022 Gen Z and Millennial Survey observes that "prioritising work/life balance, learning and development, and well-being will be critical, as will having a clear purpose and giving employees the opportunity to address societal issues through their work".¹² If a law firm can deliver these qualities, it can stand out in ways that will make a real difference in the recruiting sphere, and ultimately in client acquisition and retention.

The pandemic has left people wanting more connection

The effects of the pandemic are driving people to seek out or remain with organisations with strong brand cultures as well. After being cooped up and working from home, people are looking for a larger sense of connection and camaraderie. While productivity has never been higher at many firms, plenty of remote workers miss the connectivity they had with office colleagues.

And that sense of connection needs to be more than just work-driven. People want to belong to something bigger than themselves. They are looking for a place that cares about them and their well-being, that provides support in the way of training, development, mentoring, and inclusiveness, and — here's the kicker — in a way that is distinctive from others. In 2021, *Forbes* declared, "The Future of Work Is Employee Well-Being", citing organisations' increasing focus on "building a culture of holistic well-being including physical, emotional, financial, social, career, community, and purpose".¹³

Flexibility and wellness are key values for workers these days. According to LinkedIn's '2022 Global Talent Trends' report, 63% of job seekers called work-life balance a top priority when selecting a new job.¹⁴

Brand Culture can build trust

It's all over the news: trust in organisations has eroded in recent years, whether you're talking about corporations or governments. And yet, people are still making everyday-purchasing decisions based on trust; 81% of shoppers make decisions based on their level of trust for a brand.¹⁵

Of course, law firms, more than many other types of organisations, need to have their clients' trust. The stakes are typically quite high, there is a lot of sensitive information, and usually not an insignificant amount of money, at stake. And yet, clients often report scepticism about law firms and lawyers, complaining about high bills, or "over-lawyering".

A 2020 Deloitte survey identified four components of trust: humanity, transparency, capability, and reliability. Law firms that actively seek to build trust with their clients, through a Brand Culture that expresses those four qualities, will establish stronger, longer-lasting relationships with their clients. Remember that a Brand Culture is more than just a promise, it's delivering upon that promise, in consistent ways, and that ongoing and consistent delivery is what will establish and maintain a relationship of trust with your clients, especially in difficult times.



Building and capitalising on a Brand Culture

Building a distinctive Brand Culture is a long-term investment that more than pays off in the long run. Thomson Reuters noted in its 12th annual Global Elite Law Firm Brand Index 2022, "If there is one aspect that was brought into sharp focus as the global pandemic greatly disrupted worldwide business in 2020 and 2021, it was how important a strong and clearly defined brand is when it comes to attracting clients and gaining their trust".¹⁶

We couldn't agree more. If we learned anything from the pandemic, it's that the world can be dramatically changed overnight, and we need to be as prepared as we can possibly be. Of course, we want to be financially prepared, but we also want to think about things like — how strong are our connections to our clients? To our own people? To our communities? These connections — which constitute our Brand Culture at its essence — are what will get us through the rough times.



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1. To read the full article, see www.templafy.com/blog/3-key-ways-to-build-brand-culture/#:~:text=Brand%20culture%20is%20what%20HR,in%20their%20daily%20work%20life.
2. To read the full report, see www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/marketing-and-sales-operations/global-marketing-trends/2021/brand-promises-we-keep-brand-trust.html?id=us:ze1:3dp:wjsjpon:awa:WSJCMO:2021:WSJFY21.
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16. Global Elite Law Firm Brand Index 2022, Thomson Reuters: https://www.thomsonreuters.com/en-us/posts/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/01/Global-Elite-Law-Firm-Brand-Index-2022_FINAL.pdf.

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