

# Building a Better Brand

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The Boeing Co., a B-to-B behemoth that manufactures everything from commercial airplanes to satellites, needed a brand strategy that's unified yet flexible enough to authentically represent the company's many enterprises.

**FROM HIS OFFICE** high in The Boeing Co.'s headquarters at the edge of the Chicago River, Fritz Johnston, Boeing's vice president of corporate brand management and advertising, looks out at the big blue sky dotted with planes gleaming in the afternoon sun—no doubt admiring his colleagues' handiwork.

Boeing, the Chicago-based aerospace giant, is known for its commercial aircraft. The 93-year-old company is the No. 2 manufacturer in the world of such planes, behind Blagnac, France-based Airbus. But Boeing produces much more than just commercial jets. It also makes military aircraft, integrated defense systems, missiles, satellites and communications systems. It's the No. 2 contractor for the Pentagon, second only to Lockheed Martin Corp. It works with NASA to help operate the space shuttle and International Space Station, and with the U.S. Army as a systems integrator. Boeing employs more than 158,000 people in the United States and 70 other countries, has customers in more than 90 countries and is one of the United States' largest exporters.

In short, Boeing is a multifaceted B-to-B behemoth. But while the Boeing brand might be familiar to the marketplace, until recently the company lacked a cohesive brand identity or communications strategy to unify its disparate enterprises. A few years ago, Boeing set out to integrate its various businesses into one company, one visual identity and one brand. And in early

2008, Boeing launched the One campaign, a comprehensive internal and external branding effort to drive a "one brand" culture and unify how the company connects with the outside world.

Boeing execs understand that, regardless of its size, a company needs to present a cohesive identity to clearly define where the company stands within the marketplace and how it intends to serve its customers. In other words, every company needs to leverage the power of "One."

### 'One Brand'

For a B-to-B brand whose power and legacy already resonate within the marketplace, a comprehensive brand overhaul, many years in the making, might seem unnecessary. But "the choice is a house of brands versus a branded house [and] we chose the branded house," Fritz Johnston says. A strong, cohesive brand lends instant recognition to new products, positions a company well against competition and withstands any negative impacts within the marketplace, he says. "And probably one of the most important [benefits of a unified brand] is internally, it makes us more cohesive. One name. We all work for it. That name is on our badges, that name is on our business cards, that name is on our building. We feel more integrated. ... Everything is about 'we.'"

A 36-year Boeing veteran with graphic design roots, Johnston is one of the men at the helm of the Boeing brand. When he arrived at the company in the early 1970s,



he found that Boeing's visual identity was all over the map. Boeing grew over the years through a series of mergers and acquisitions, and Johnston noticed that although every business segment shared the Boeing label, each had its own marketing material, signage, color palette, you name it. There were more than 200 different styles of letterhead and business cards. Johnston and his colleagues knew there needed to be a thread—or thickly threaded rope, given the company's size—running through each business segment to tie the Boeing brand together.

Over the years, Boeing execs have worked to create a cohesive communications style. And with the “current brand refresh,”

as the company calls it, Boeing is taking hold of the aforementioned rope to tie the company's visual elements, culture and outwardly facing brand together. “We've been on an evolutionary path for years ... but I think that having Jim [McNerney, Boeing's CEO since 2005] here has accentuated it,” Johnston says. “My boss, Tom Downey [senior vice president of communications], Jim and other executives in the company get the importance of One. So all of a sudden they're pulling the rope, rather than people in communications trying to push something forward.”

### ‘One Look’

The aerospace industry as a whole is becoming more sophisticated in how it approaches the marketplace. So in 2006 and 2007, Boeing conducted a series of audits of all communication materials to see how it was measuring up, says Jim Newcomb, Boeing's director of brand management and promotion. Newcomb and his team found that cohesion was sorely lacking, and marketing materials appeared dated and disjointed. “We just felt that for a company that does the things we do, we weren't there yet,” he says.

In early 2008, Boeing execs put together a cross-departmental, “super-unwieldy” team of employees from communications, creative services, customer relations, marketing, sales, HR and other “internal organs” to hash out what the Boeing brand's visual identity should be, Newcomb says. They called in assistance from the company's ad agency, Chicago-based Draftfcb; Seattle-based corporate design firm Methodologie Inc.; and Paul Haverly, an aviation design consultant. They all set out to cut through Boeing's visual clutter, create a unified brand, reduce costs and drive efficiency by promoting consistent design principles.

The team researched the brand's personality, promise and mission. Team members understood that to create an authentic sense of “oneness,” they had to identify which characteristics Boeing's many enterprises have in common.

The first phase of the process concluded with “the initial distillation of all of [the gathered information] into the brand DNA,” says Dale Hart, Methodologie's partner and creative director. The team came up with a triple helix: enterprising spirit, or why Boeing does what it does; precision performance, or how Boeing gets things done; and defining the future, or what Boeing achieves as a company.

Using that simply stated but carefully honed framework, the team created a design roadmap for the Boeing brand called the brand visualizer. Methodologie, which had experience building brand mapping systems for other clients, assembled the brand visualizer to guide all design decisions—creating a company color palette, pinpointing one company typeface, defining the company's voice and commu-

nications style, and determining how photos and images should be used.

“In a company the size of Boeing ... they have many, many agencies articulating their brand, as well as many people on the staff articulating the brand,” says Janet DeDonato, Methodologie's founding partner and strategic director. “It had to be a really broad and encompassing system. ... It's hard to figure out a system that will work for everybody.”

For example, one employee who worked with military customers said the design was trending toward a light, ephemeral typography that wouldn't correctly convey who Boeing is to his customers. He said the company needed something with enough weight to suit both commercial and military enterprises. The team then spent five days doing type studies to find a font with some edge and eventually chose Helvetica, Newcomb says.

The resulting system is structured enough to keep everyone on the same page from a branding and design perspective, but flexible enough to accommodate products “from zero elevation up to 30,000 feet and beyond,” Hart says.

Of course, it's all well and good to create a comprehensive system like this, but the true test of a company's success is employee buy-in. For that, the brand visualizer's simplicity is key, says Sandy Kolkey, executive vice president and group management director at Draftfcb and manager of the Boeing account. “It's like the difference between getting a 400-page PowerPoint deck and getting the executive summary. No one reads the 400-page deck.”

“The main thing is getting people to understand the concept. ... That's the hard part,” Newcomb adds. Once employees understand the reason behind the branding strategy and design, they can implement the guidelines, tools and best practices correctly, he says. Employee training is underway and the company has held design and branding workshops. Every employee in the company has access to the brand map and to a company brand network online, whether or not his job description requires it, for one simple reason: “Everyone should be managing the brand,” Newcomb says.

And every employee now is interested in Boeing's branding process, he adds. Just recently, Newcomb was asked to give a brand presentation to the company's cost management group—i.e. a room full of accountants. “There's a natural, silo-busting nature to ‘brand’ that I think can be really useful,” he says.

### ‘One Company’

Over the past few years, Boeing has leveraged its brand's silo-busting power wherever and however possible, extending that thickly threaded rope throughout the company to create a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose among the disparate enterprises.

## A Snapshot of Boeing's Business

Boeing ranks No. 34 on the Fortune 50, ahead of companies including Microsoft, Walgreen, United Technologies and Dow Chemical. And it continues to grow.

In July alone, Boeing announced that it will acquire the North Charleston, S.C., operations of Vought Aircraft Industries Inc., where a key structure of Boeing's 787 Dreamliner aircraft is built. Moreover, Boeing will build four satellites for Bermuda-based telecommunications company Intelsat Ltd. for a contract reportedly worth \$1 billion.

The company beat analysts' expectations by posting a 17% profit increase for the second quarter of 2009 to \$998 million, or \$1.41 per share, up from \$852 million, or \$1.16, in the year-earlier period.

However, Boeing certainly hasn't escaped the recent economic turbulence. In January, the company announced plans to cut 10,000 jobs, or 6% of its workforce, over the course of the year. And in June, Boeing postponed the Dreamliner's first test flight because of a minor structural problem with the wing design, pushing the plane's much-anticipated launch two years behind schedule. Boeing has lost orders for nearly 60 Dreamliners because of the hit that the travel industry has taken in these unfavorable economic conditions.

But Boeing reportedly has lost only about 7% of Dreamliner orders; it still boasts commitments for 850 of the long-haul mid-sized planes at an estimated \$180 million a pop; and remains well ahead of its leading competitor, Airbus, in the category of wide-body plane orders.



Even before embarking on the brand refresh project, the company began working to bond its employees together through internal communications. A set of newsletters, for example, are sent out to managers and employees to keep them up to speed on the company's daily goings-on. And Johnston and his team have been working on a series of internal motivational videos featuring Boeing employees talking about their jobs and achievements.

"It's the 'One company' thing," Johnston says. "We've got 160,000 people and they're spread all over the world. If we let them speak to what they're accomplishing, then they get more interested in one another and all of a sudden they're sharing information. [That leads to] what we call enterprise-wide efficiencies, [which] drive up performance and make us more competitive. So rather than working in silos, independently doing really great work, we now start to share information across the business." The video series has proven to be "very, very motivational," Johnston says. "It's probably up at the higher end of things in terms of promotional [efforts] and branding."

In 2007, Boeing parlayed the internal motivational video effort into an external B-to-B-to-C advertising effort known as the "That's Why We're Here" campaign. Like the motivational videos, the ads feature real Boeing employees from a diverse range of business segments talking about what Boeing does and what the Boeing brand stands for.

The campaign has been a huge hit with Boeing employees, which has served to strengthen the "One company" strategy, Johnston says. In a company survey, seven out of 10 respondents said that the campaign "expresses the way I feel about Boeing" and nine out of 10 found the campaign appealing. "It was a 65% increase over the previous campaign," Johnston says.

Adds Newcomb, "People think that those commercials represent their ideals about their jobs." Newcomb visited with a team developing military helicopters and asked them how they felt about their jobs and their products. "Their enthusiasm for it, I noticed, was a little bit caught up in the language of the advertising campaign," he says. "Not only is it translating to them, but they're using it to translate their feelings back to me. I thought that was immensely powerful. ... There's a moment when you know you're getting it right when people recognize their aspirations in the thing and it's not phony. ... It clearly and optimistically presents this picture of why we do what we do."

### Prepare for Takeoff

Richard Abouafia, vice president of analysis at Teal Group Corp., a Fairfax, Va.-based aerospace and defense industry research group, says Boeing has an "extremely strong" brand, but he's wary of giving an all-out endorsement for the external manifestations of the "One brand, One company" strategy.

"Is branding important? Sure. Is creating a unified company and making it look like you're one company? Sure," he says. "On balance, I think it's good" to have a cohesive brand. But if Boeing's brand is intrinsically unified, negative

## Boeing at a Glance

- Headquarters: Chicago
- Chairman, President and CEO: W. James McNerney Jr.
- Global employees: more than 158,000 in more than 70 countries
- Primary business units: Boeing Commercial Airplanes and Boeing Integrated Defense Systems
- World's second-largest manufacturer of commercial jetliners
- World's largest manufacturer of commercial jetliners and military aircraft combined
- No. 2 contractor for the Pentagon behind Lockheed Martin Corp.
- Major service provider to NASA
- One of the United States' largest exporters, in terms of revenue
- 2008 total revenue: \$60.9 billion  
2007 total revenue: \$66.4 billion
- 2008 net income: \$2.7 billion  
2007 net income: \$4.1 billion



occurrences in one area of the company can reflect poorly on other areas as well. For example, issues that occur in the construction of Boeing's much-anticipated and much-delayed 787 Dreamliner aircraft also could reflect poorly on Boeing's military or information systems businesses, Abouafia surmises.

The flipside of that coin is that a cohesive, well-executed brand can create more favorable perceptions of the company and can act as a buffer for the company's image, says Richard Ford, executive creative director of the New York office of Landor Associates, a global branding firm. "It's more about keeping stock prices high and about making sure that Boeing has some kind of halo around it ... a positive impression of the brand that would protect the brand from damage, should it occur," says Ford, an expert in aviation branding. "I think they're on the right track, at least as far as the [brand] clean-up goes,"

he says. "But I think there's a lot more for Boeing in the future and this is just the beginning."

A global, multipronged business, Boeing is making strides in branding itself as one company versus a conglomerate of smaller businesses, banking on the power of internal branding and a cohesive marketing communications strategy to put it ahead of its competitors. And as mentioned earlier, when it comes to branding, a true measure of success is employee buy-in. If the Boeing brand rings true to the people who represent it, and those people want to take care in representing it well, then the brand is well-positioned to succeed, Newcomb says. "The more people who want to hold the banner high and get people to march with them, the more powerful it becomes. [In the beginning,] it felt like we were a bunch of kids picking up pots and pans and calling it a parade, and now we look behind us and it's like we're seeing the whole philharmonic." **m**