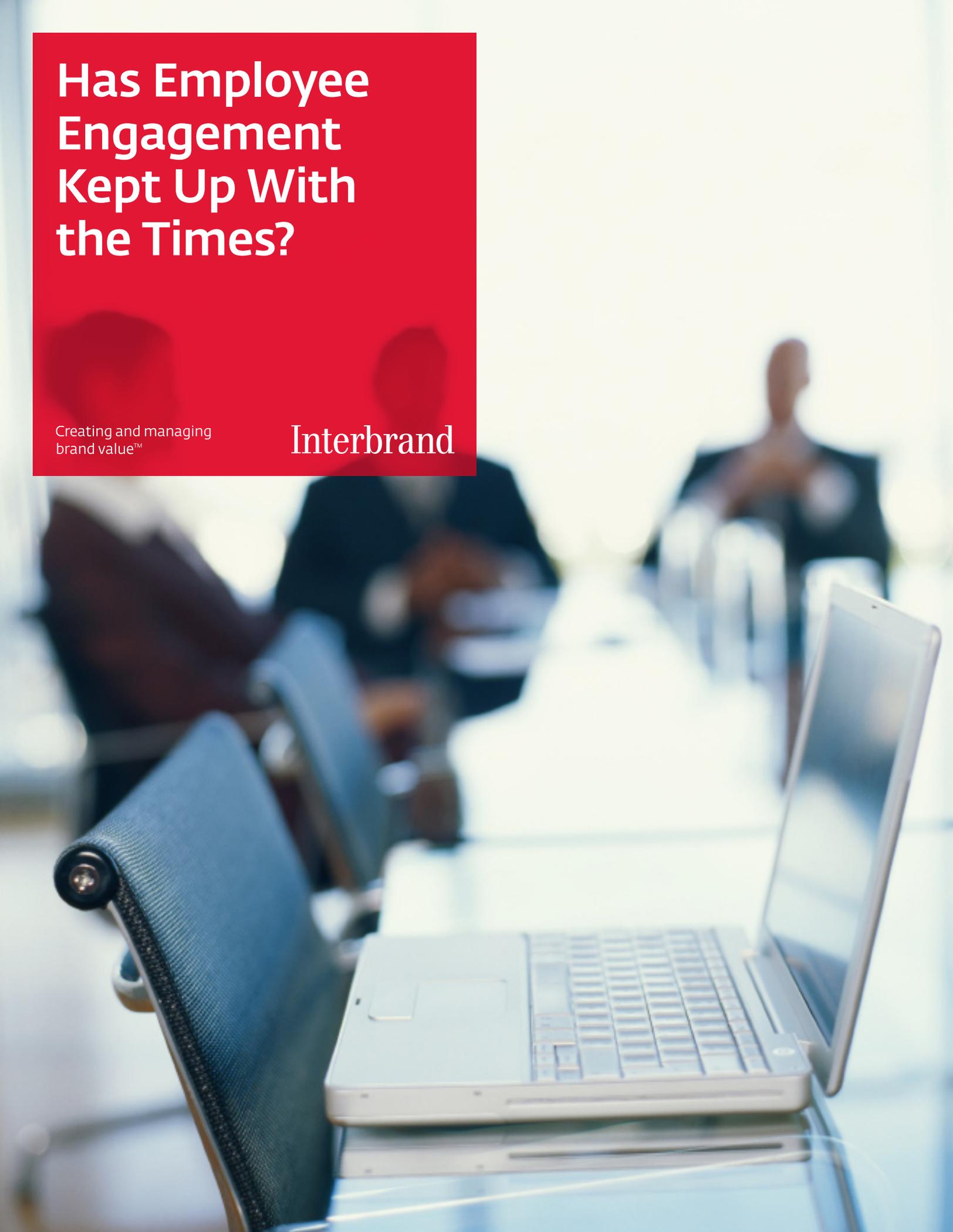


# Has Employee Engagement Kept Up With the Times?

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by Maryann Stump

Twenty years after William A. Kahn's groundbreaking study of personal engagement at work, Interbrand conducted a survey of 267 professionals to understand the current state of employee engagement in companies of all sizes. Employers understand that engaged employees are more likely to perform better at day-to-day job tasks, exert discretionary effort, and are less likely to leave, so it's not surprising that 90 percent of companies surveyed have some sort of ongoing employee engagement activity.

What is surprising is that those activities and the measures of their success have not changed significantly.

Employee engagement remains the domain of Human Resources with 40 percent of those surveyed reporting that HR holds primary responsibility for employee

engagement in their organization. Those with roles in communication are the next most common owners of employee engagement—18 percent say that corporate communications holds this role and 13 percent say that those in employee/internal communications are responsible.

Given the resources available to HR and Communications functions in most companies, it makes sense that 20 percent describe their company's approach to employee engagement as "all-company or business unit/division meetings on a monthly or quarterly basis," and 11 percent describe it as a "campaign to reengage employees." The tools commonly used in marketing are not widely used in employee engagement. Less than 40 percent of companies surveyed segment their employees for employee engagement and less than 29 percent use social media (such as Facebook or Twitter) in their efforts.

The picture the data paint is clear: Most employee engagement efforts attempt to send the broadest possible message to the widest possible audience. Despite the fact that the business world has embraced

the benefits of narrow casting, employee engagement is still stuck in broadcast mode—and suffering as a result.

The responses around the measurement of these efforts reveal an overwhelmingly internal focus. While 57 percent measure employee engagement, less than half measure it annually or more frequently. The metrics used remain (surprisingly) internally focused with "Employee satisfaction" the most commonly applied at 64 percent. Only 40 percent link it to business performance and only 32 percent link it to customer satisfaction.

Twenty years has passed since Kahn's study, but it is clear that employee engagement, as a practice, has not kept up with the times. To move forward, we need to go back to the beginning and remember what the discipline is really about: engaging employees to deliver better business performance. It is about more than knowledge; it's about behavior. It requires commitment and activity. Perhaps most importantly, to create a link between employees, the business and customers, the brand must be part of the equation.

Some companies are already including the brand in their employee engagement efforts through employee brand engagement initiatives. Companies that train employees in the brand do somewhat better in evolving employee engagement than those that do not have brand training. 40 percent of these companies that do make employee brand engagement efforts describe their approach as “a continuous effort to connect employees to business performance.” These companies are also more likely to use social media in their efforts and measure employee engagements’ effectiveness—66 percent measure engagement and 54 percent measure it at least once a year. It is not surprising that companies that understand that employees need to be trained in their brand are more likely to use customer satisfaction as an employee engagement metric.

And yet, too often these initiatives are short-lived or event driven. Sustainable results require a sustained effort. As Interbrand defines it, true employee brand engagement—the practice of Internal Brand Engagement—means aligning all aspects of the business and its people to ensure delivery of the promised customer experience. Effective Internal Brand Engagement moves from communication alone to identifying and instilling behavior with a purpose—the delivery of the customer experience, and backs it up with ongoing metrics and training.

All successful businesses know that satisfied customers are the key to business results, and brand is the connection between the company and their customers. By

expanding the influence of IBE and linking it to the customer experience, brand can be the catalyst for engaging employees. First, get more people at the table. For this to happen, the traditional owners of IBE, the brand architects (brand, marketing, internal communications and HR), must join forces with the business architects (sales, R&D, IT, operations, customer service, etc.) to influence the essential transformation.

Next, define the role of the employee in delivering business performance. Understand the parts that different segments of employees play at various stages of the customer experience and link desired behaviors to desired outcomes. Stop broadcasting and start narrow casting—inform and incite only what is relevant to specific employee segments. It’s more efficient for the business, saves employees’ time and allows everyone to focus on what’s important. Finally, invite a dialogue with your employees around the business goals. Social media is an effective way to learn from your employees about what works and what doesn’t work. It also allows you to gather ideas about how to achieve better business results.

The business world has changed and now it is time for employee engagement to change too. The current climate demands that organizations practice true Internal Brand Engagement for the sake of their business. ■



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