

Building Strong Brands

Investing in Long-Term Branding to Ensure Resilience and Meet Customer Needs

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Strong brands aren't born; they're built.

Almost two decades ago, an article in the *Harvard Business Review* posed the question: *If brands are built over years, why are they managed over quarters?*

Times may have changed, but today's executives face a familiar conundrum—short-term strategies that respond to current circumstances may provide a boost to sales, but can also contribute to a decline in brand equity. At Frontify, we believe in brand, in cultivating consistency, and in building for the long term. But we also understand that the impact of brand building is difficult to assess in the short term.

In the current climate, we understand that budgets are tight, the future feels fragile, and temptation exists to ignore the long term in order to chase quick wins. These factors, combined with the constant need for agility and responsiveness, make it difficult to focus on consistency and investments in your brand.

Digital surfaces, social media, and the advent of artificial intelligence have created a fast-moving and content-hungry world, where brands are under increasing pressure to stay relevant. Audiences expect the content they consume to be highly

personalized and delivered across multiple touchpoints and formats, heightening the need for brand agility.

In this environment, any strategic brand initiative now requires a huge volume of content to support it, too. And there needs to be a high level of consistency of both content and messaging in order to boost recognition, authenticity, and trust.

For multinationals with multiple stakeholders generating brand content across several markets, the situation is particularly complicated. It's no wonder, then, that executives may have difficulty in finding support for brand strategy. Despite these factors, many of the organizations we speak to are committed to building for the long term.

We sponsored this survey and report in order to understand what brand-building strategies organizations are undertaking and prioritizing, and whether they are able to measure the impact of these efforts on brand equity.

The report examines how brand consistency and brand equity play a role in long-term brand health and financial success. It uncovers common obstacles to brand building, explores how organizations can overcome them,



Digge Zetterberg
VP of Marketing
Frontify

and provides best practices. We know you understand the value of investment in brand. With this report, we seek to provide the tools to help gather support for your initiatives and offer proven ways to make them more effective. Good luck out there.

For more information, visit www.frontify.com.

Building Strong Brands

Investing in Long-Term Branding to Ensure Resilience and Meet Customer Needs

Brand marketers today face a conundrum. Focus too much on short-term brand management to boost sales and long-term brand equity may suffer; home in solely on the future value of the brand and sacrifice innovation in order to serve immediate customer wants.

Pete Panciera, leader of global brand design at Specialized Bicycle Components Inc., commonly known as Specialized, a Morgan Hill, Calif.-based company that designs, manufactures, and markets bicycles, bicycle components, and related cycling products, notes that reconciling these often-conflicting brand priorities leads to creative tension between preserving the familiar brand identity that customers relate to while keeping up with the times. “As a 50-year old brand, we can’t afford to rest on our laurels and simply keep doing what we have always done. We are actively looking at our foundation and translating it into how we might approach the future,” he says.

To be sure, long-term brand building remains top of mind for many

executives. In April 2025, Harvard Business Review Analytic Services surveyed 530 members of the *Harvard Business Review* audience involved with marketing or strategy decisions that affect their organization’s brand. Survey respondents overwhelmingly agree that long-term branding (referring to branding efforts focused on the next five to 10 or more years) is critical for an organization’s success. Specifically, 93% agree that long-term brand building is essential to an organization’s growth, and 91% agree that long-term brand building is linked to an organization’s sustained commercial success.

Still, many organizations struggle to get long-term brand building right. While 84% of respondents say that long-term brand building is very

HIGHLIGHTS

 **95%**

of survey respondents agree that long-term brand building improves an organization’s brand equity.

 **91%**

agree that long-term brand building is linked to an organization’s sustained commercial success.

 **84%**

say that long-term brand building is very important to their organization’s business success, but only 36% say that their organization is very effective at it.

Due to rounding, some figures in this report may not add up to 100%.

“ Brand marketing and performance marketing are not independent tasks; they are codependent, and they both have short- and long-term effects. ”

Ken Favaro, strategy, innovation, and organization consultant and author

important to their organization’s business success, only 36% say that their organization is very effective at it. For purposes of this paper, these organizations are defined as leaders. Likewise, 39% of respondents say their organization is “somewhat effective,” making them followers. The 25% of respondents who say their organization is “not at all effective” at long-term brand building are defined as laggards. **FIGURE 1**

That only one-third of respondents say their organization is effective at long-term brand building isn’t surprising, given the challenges branding executives face and the marketing industry’s typically short-term mindset and behavior. “Average chief marketing officer tenure is probably around two years,” says Rob Meyerson, principal and founder of Heirloom, a San Francisco-based brand strategy and identity firm. “It’s an industry inside joke that every new person taking on a marketing or branding role will want to change or refresh something about the brand or the logo. That may sound exaggerated, but it makes the point that, often, people are driven by their own relatively short-term goals, like getting a promotion or a bonus or making a great impression on leadership.”

Meanwhile, branding and marketing objectives, data, and roles have become siloed as executives try to make sense of today’s increasingly complex media landscape, according to Ken Favaro, a strategy, innovation, and organization consultant and the coauthor of the May-June 2023 *Harvard Business Review* article “How Brand Building and Performance Marketing Can Work Together.”¹ Consequently, activities are polarized between focusing on so-called brand marketing (building brand affinity, reaching a broader audience, focusing on the long term) and performance marketing (finding buyers, converting buyers, focusing on short-term sales).

Organizations could make their brand-building efforts far more effective by understanding how the full range of branding and marketing activities can work together. “Brand marketing and performance marketing are not independent tasks; they are codependent, and they both have short- and long-term effects,” says Favaro. “Performance marketing does not only affect short-term sales. It’s

a consumer touchpoint, therefore it affects your brand. And if your brand-building efforts are successful in growing your brand equity, that creates a more productive context for your performance marketing. The key is to bring together every element of branding and marketing to drive sales today and in the future.”

This report examines various facets of branding and looks at what common themes and traits emerge in organizations that believe they do long-term branding well. It addresses the interrelated concepts of brand equity and consistency and how they may play a strategic role in long-term brand health and financial success. The report also explores strategies organizations are using to strengthen their brands, whether establishing a new brand or nurturing a long-standing one, and uncovers common obstacles that stand in the way of long-term brand building and how these might be overcome.

“When it comes to strategically managing brands over time, companies need to find the balance between too much change and not enough change. There’s a sweet spot where you’re constantly evolving the brand and moving it forward—and making sure you’re moving in the right direction at the right pace,” says Kevin Lane Keller, the E. B. Osborn Professor of Marketing at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College. “Finding the right balance between innovation and relevance, what’s new and what you’ve always stood for, as well as having a thread of consistency in everything you do, can build a strong, long-lasting brand.”

A Balancing Act

One organization that is balancing short- and long-term branding considerations is Solventum, a St. Paul, Minn.-based medtech company that was spun off from the multinational conglomerate 3M in April 2024. Michelle Weir, a senior global brand leader at Solventum, describes the challenge of launching a new brand that is associated with a well-established one.

“As 3M Health Care, we were working with a brand that had been on the market for more than 100 years, where it’s all about finesse—finding insights and nuances that you can massage to grow a brand that already has high awareness and high trust,” she explains. “As Solventum, we’re building on a strong legacy to establish a new brand, which means drawing the blueprint and building a strong foundation so the house can go up quickly and with precision. We need the right foundational blocks in the early maturity cycle to set us up for success long term.”

For Weir, long-term success depends on building the brand around a core strategy and having a bit of flexibility when it comes to implementation. “We started Solventum’s brand building by solidifying who we are, what we do, and why that matters. From there we could define our mission: enabling better, smarter, safer health care to improve lives. Every brand element, including our visual identity and verbal identity, needs to convey our mission, educate customers about what we do, and build trust in the new brand,” she explains. “We’ve embraced a philosophy of flexibility and agility because when you’re moving fast to launch something new, you have to adapt as you put guidelines into practice. We adapt, learn, optimize, and cascade those learnings across the organization.”

Weir notes that if a brand is going to last, it has to be embedded in the organization’s culture, ethos, and operations. “A brand is not just your logo, colors, or trademark strategy—it runs deeper than that,” she asserts. “We’re building Solventum through our values, in the way we show up every day, and in the experience we create for our customers, employees, and end users of our products.”

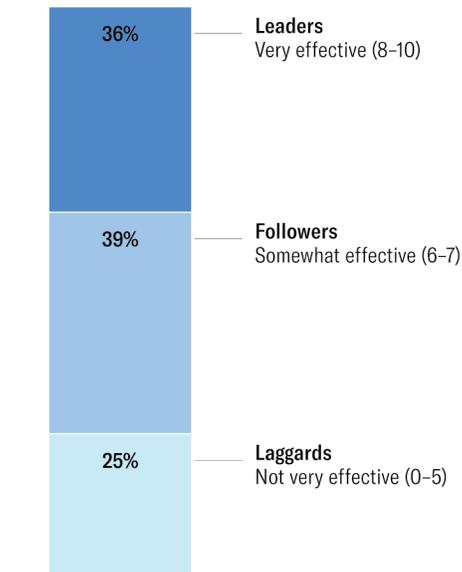
Indeed, as Solventum’s situation illustrates, an either/or approach isn’t necessary when it comes to short- and long-term brand priorities. Brand-building efforts can boost growth and profitability by increasing sales, and can even affect how much customers are prepared to pay in the process. “The notion that brand building is a long-term thing that has some fuzzy, ill-defined return in the future makes it particularly susceptible to corporate short termism,”

FIGURE 1

Brand-Building Effectiveness Varies Widely

Organizations differ in their effectiveness at long-term brand building

How effective is your organization at long-term brand building? On a scale from 0=Not at all effective to 10=Extremely effective.



Base: 530 respondents.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, April 2025

says author and strategy consultant Favaro. “If done well, brand-building investments have a demonstrably material and immediate impact on both purchases and pricing power. Smart brand investments *today* produce a return *today and* in the future.”

Arguing against a dichotomous approach to brand building is the fact that several factors can make a brand successful—and help it stay that way over time. For Marty Neumeier, a keynote speaker and author of the book *Zag: The Number One Strategy of High-Performance Brands*, the most important factor is paying attention to your customers.

“A brand exists in the mind of the customer. Your brand is not what *you* say it is—it’s what *they* say it is,” Neumeier explains. “Strategic long-term branding is not about tactical elements like logos and messaging and cash flows and market size. It’s about focusing on what you are providing, what need your product or service fills in society, and how you can make your customers’ lives better. Brand building

“There’s nothing wrong with wanting to see tangible benefits or measure the results of our actions, but generally people don’t want to wait a few years for that satisfaction.”

Rob Meyerson, principal and founder of Heirloom

is about how you not only satisfy your customers but [also] delight them.”

Many survey respondents may feel the same way, as customer experience stands out as a key factor contributing to long-term brand success. The top factors respondents cite as contributing to an organization’s long-term brand success are positive customer experience (42%), high-quality product or service (41%), well-regarded reputation (34%), living up to your brand purpose or mission (33%), and differentiation from competitors (31%).

ROI and Other Challenges

Several obstacles can stand in the way of long-term brand-building efforts, many of which revolve around a mindset where short-term concerns, initiatives, or circumstances take precedence over long-term thinking. To illustrate, 62% of survey respondents agree that when budgets are constrained, branding efforts are paused.

A related challenge is the difficulty of measuring ROI in the long term. “Executives might shy away from long-term branding efforts because the benefits of those efforts won’t materialize until far in the future—maybe even after they’ve left the organization or retired,” says Heirloom’s Meyerson. “You can’t guarantee what you’ll get in 10 years, and once it’s happened, it’s too late to do anything about it. You can’t rewind and change course.”

The survey findings mirror this observation. Overall, difficulty of measuring ROI is the most common challenge that organizations face when it comes to long-term brand building (45%). But for laggards, there are plenty of other challenges, too, such as lack of budget (48%), short-term initiatives derailing long-term planning (47%), and short-term marketing taking priority over long-term branding (46%). Those percentages are higher than they are for leaders and followers. **FIGURE 2** This distinction could shed light on what it takes to become effective at long-term brand building: prioritizing it at a high level.

“There’s nothing wrong with wanting to see tangible benefits or measure the results of our actions, but generally people don’t want to wait a few years for that satisfaction,” Meyerson continues. Chasing the satisfaction of doing something dramatic here and now can derail long-term branding efforts. Meyerson cites the example of running an attention-grabbing promotion—under the old-fashioned notion that any press is good press—simply to chase an uptick in a specific set of metrics like Google Search. “These efforts might boost short-term hype, but if these actions are not aligned with your core brand, they could do far more damage than good in the long run,” he notes.

These challenges are significant but not insurmountable. Meyerson suggests that organizations could work at fostering a long-term mindset by instilling a culture of caring for the brand. “Some companies have built-in, structural elements that make caring for the brand more likely. For example, businesses that are still led by the founder or that have been passed down through generations are often far more motivated to preserve the brand,” he says.

Other companies may have to train people to care by showing them how their actions could affect the brand. If the brand has an authentic purpose that people can relate to, that might instill a culture of care, Meyerson says, adding, “It also comes down to compensation—making sure that you are not inadvertently incentivizing people to make decisions that could potentially damage the brand over the long term.”

And although ROI on long-term branding is hard to measure, brand equity *can* be measured. And it can be increased.

Building and Measuring Brand Equity

Strong brand equity—the perceived value that a brand adds to a product—is worth striving for. “If you increase your brand equity today, three things are going to increase tomorrow: your sales, pricing power, and marketing effectiveness,” says Favaro.

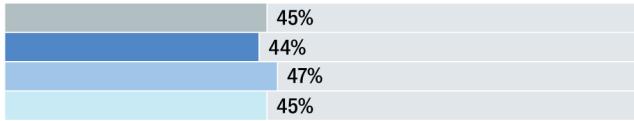
FIGURE 2

Obstacles to Long-Term Branding

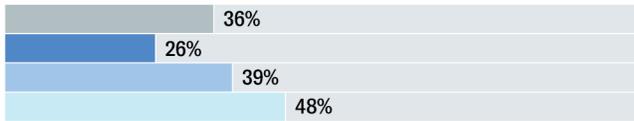
Many organizations find it difficult to measure ROI

What challenges does your organization face when it comes to long-term brand building? Select all that apply.

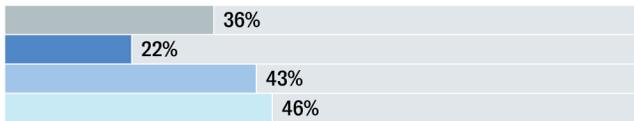
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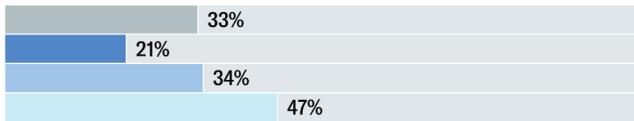
Difficult to measure ROI



Lack of budget



Short-term marketing takes priority over long-term branding



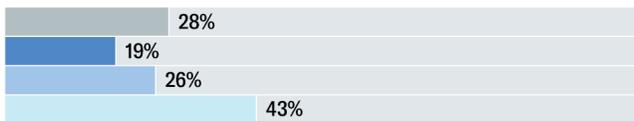
Short-term initiatives derail long-term planning



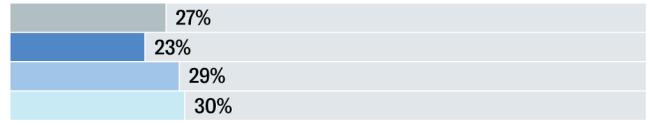
Multiple stakeholders make brand decisions



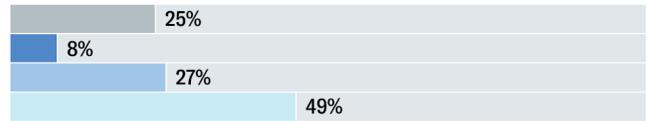
Lack of needed data



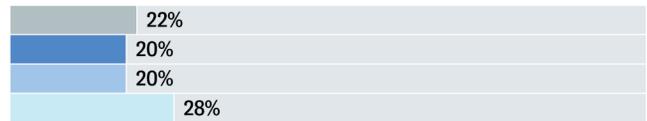
Lack of branding expertise



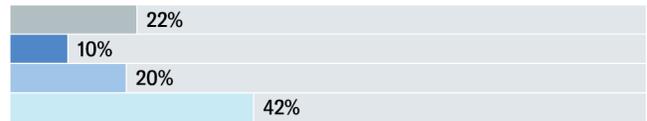
Lack of bandwidth/time



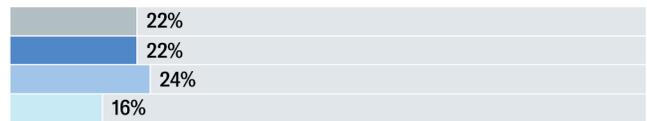
Leadership does not prioritize long-term brand building



Focus on short-term innovation



Organizational culture doesn't align with long-term brand building



Too many touchpoints to be consistent



Little control over customer-generated content



Lack of brand guidelines

Base: 530 respondents, varies by segment. Not shown: 0%–4% don't know, 0%–4% none, and 2%–3% other, varies by segment.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, April 2025

“If you increase your brand equity today, three things are going to increase tomorrow: your sales, pricing power, and marketing effectiveness.”

Favaro

He describes how organizations can go about increasing their brand equity by measuring familiarity, regard, meaning, and uniqueness (FRMU). Familiarity shows how much consumers feel they know about a brand, beyond just being aware of it. Regard indicates how much they respect a brand, and meaning describes how relevant the brand is to their lives. Uniqueness refers to how special, or differentiated, a brand is relative to other brands.

“To get an accurate and verifiable quantification of a brand’s business impact, organizations have to measure their brand’s FRMU relative to the major brands that mirror a country’s culture, not just its category competitors,” Favaro explains. “They can increase brand equity by defining the positioning attributes that are most important for driving FRMU in their target market, such as purpose[ful], emotional, functional, and experiential. Finally, to build a lasting brand, organizations need consistent fortification of FRMU over time through all ‘five P’s’ of consumer touchpoints: product, price, promotion, place, and people,” he says.

Solvantum has already taken steps to measure its brand equity even though the brand is still in its early days. “We’ve invested heavily in brand health research and have captured our benchmarks for year one to give us a base for moving forward,” says senior global brand strategy leader Weir. “We’re assessing how people see us now that we’ve separated from a well-known brand. And since we’re in medical technology, patient safety is always the top priority—so it’s critical that we measure trust in the quality of our products.”

According to Tuck School of Business’s Keller, it’s vitally important that organizations track their brand’s metrics, as these signal coming changes. “If brand awareness drops, you can expect a drop in sales,” he says. “It may lag, but if you see perceptual changes, behavioral changes are soon to follow. That’s not rocket science; it’s a natural progression. So you’ve got to keep on top of what customers are thinking and feeling.”

When it comes to tracking brand equity, customer satisfaction metrics are a popular place to start. Survey data shows that customer satisfaction metrics (59%) top the list

of methods organizations use to measure their brand equity, followed by share of market as compared to competitors (47%). **FIGURE 3** However, it is worth noting that leaders (48%) stand out as more likely to use social media sentiment analysis as a method to measure brand equity than are followers (33%) or laggards (27%).

Consistency Counts

Survey findings suggest that long-term brand building improves brand equity, as does brand consistency, which is the practice of maintaining a uniform, recognizable identity or “look and feel” across all communications and customer experiences. Consistency and equity are interrelated. The majority of respondents (95%) agree that long-term brand building improves an organization’s brand equity. In terms of consistency, 91% of respondents agree that brand consistency of content/messaging builds an organization’s brand equity, and 95% agree that brand consistency over time builds an organization’s brand equity.

Global brand design leader Panciera explains that at Specialized, the company’s celebration of its brand’s 50th anniversary in 2024 was the occasion that prompted a shift in brand strategy and how the brand is managed.

“Leading up to the anniversary, we became aware that much of our brand knowledge existed in disparate places throughout the organization and in different formats,” he explains. “It also existed with different people—we have a number of people who’ve worked here for 30-plus years, and if you want to know something about the brand you generally go and ask them. We’re a big, privately owned company with thousands of employees across the world, but when it came to our branding, we had been operating more like a startup. We didn’t have brand management systems in place.”

The company set out to codify all its brand information and aggregate it in one spot. “We worked with the founder and the leadership team to get a unified view of who we are, who we want to be, how we want to sound, and how we want

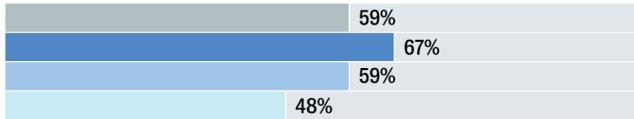
FIGURE 3

Multiple Ways to Measure Brand Equity

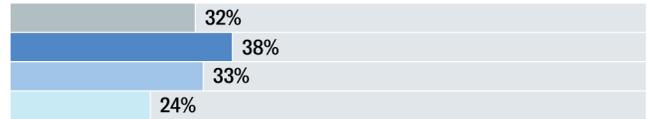
Customer satisfaction metrics top the list, outpacing market share

Which of the following methods, if any, does your organization use to measure its brand equity? Select all that apply.

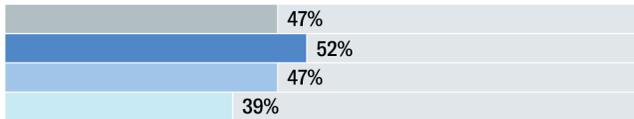
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Customer satisfaction metrics



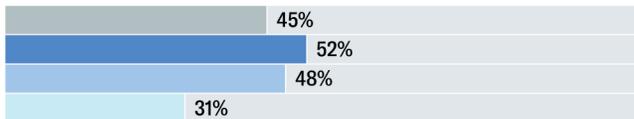
Brand awareness surveys



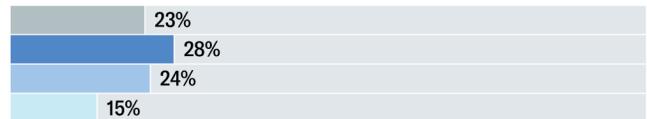
Share of market compared to competitors



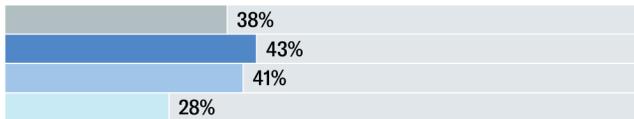
Focus group research



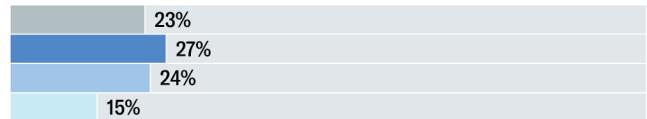
Employee engagement/satisfaction metrics



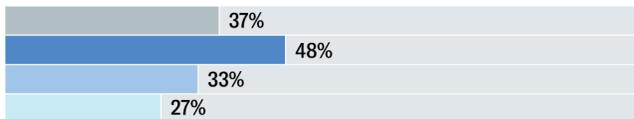
Customer lifetime value



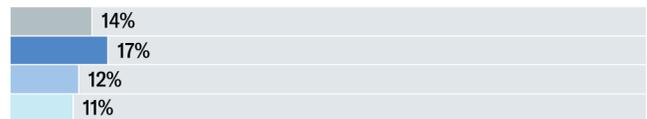
Media coverage/brand visibility tracking



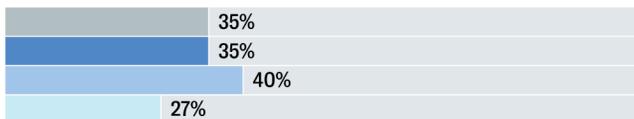
Research to assess customer purchasing decisions



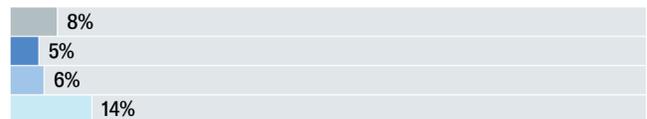
Social media sentiment analysis



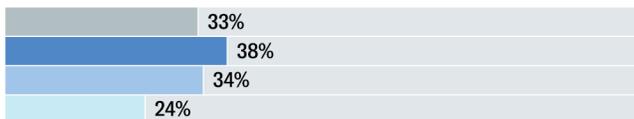
Loyalty program participation



Net Promoter Score



My organization does not measure brand equity



Brand perception surveys

Base: 530 respondents, varies by segment. Not shown: 1%–2% other and 2%–3% don't know, varies by segment.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, April 2025

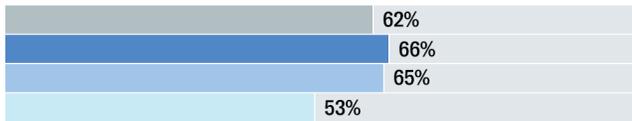
FIGURE 4

Tools for Long-Term Brand Building

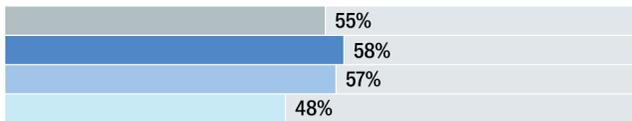
Most organizations use brand guidelines, while leaders use several tools more than others do

Which of the following tools, if any, is your organization using in support of its long-term brand-building efforts? Select all that apply.

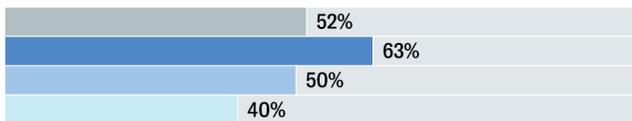
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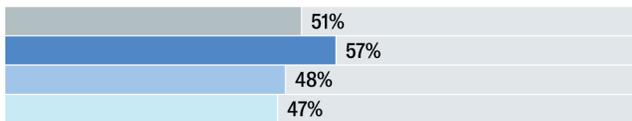
Brand guidelines



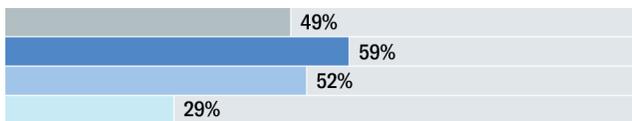
Brand templates



Internal communication platforms



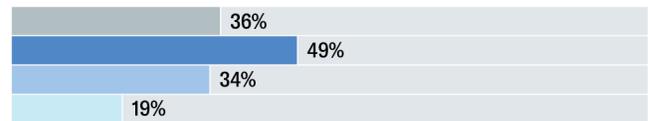
Tools for social media management



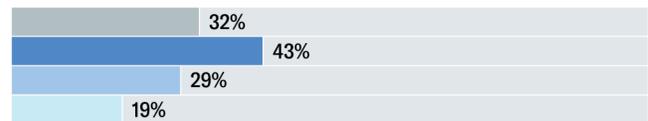
Data and analytics tools



Brand portals or a central hub for brand resources (e.g., guidelines and templates)



Customer engagement tools



Digital asset management systems (e.g., to organize and store brand assets)



Social listening tools



Tools for personalization

Base: 530 respondents, varies by segment. Not shown: 0%–5% none, 1%–2% don't know, and 0%–2% other, varies by segment.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, April 2025

to act,” Panciera relates. “We captured this vision and put it and all our existing materials on a central platform, a brand portal, to use as a source of truth for our brand. It now acts as our North Star.”

This centralized approach has led to greater consistency in how the brand is managed throughout the company and across regions. Panciera notes this effort has been good for the brand and good for the employees, who now have a renewed sense of enthusiasm. “You can develop the most amazing brand strategy, but unless you can communicate that down throughout the organization, it’s not going to be activated,” he notes. “We didn’t just create a framework. We built something that can inspire and move people to action.”

Many organizations are using such tools to strengthen their brands. Survey responses show that the most commonly used tools in support of long-term brand-building efforts are brand guidelines (62%), brand templates (55%), and internal communication platforms (52%). Leaders stand out for using several tools more than others, including internal communication platforms (63%, compared with 50% of followers and 40% of laggards), customer engagement tools (49%, compared with 34% of followers and 19% of laggards), and digital asset management systems (43%, compared with 29% of followers and 19% of laggards). **FIGURE 4**

Brand consistency does not have to be rigid. It can allow for flexibility, especially in regional variations. “A strong

“The difference between the average stock price of a strong brand and the stock price of a weaker brand is almost double. This shows that brand equity and brand momentum can be used as leading indicators of financial success.”

Marty Neumeier, keynote speaker and author

brand needs to maintain consistency at the core but have some leeway to adapt for different demographics and markets across the world,” says Panciera. “We empower regional teams to understand the global brand on a deep level and to run local campaigns in keeping with what suits their markets. For example, Instagram content, email marketing, or local activations can change from place to place but still reflect the central feeling of the brand.”

Putting Strategy into Practice

Neumeier, the author of *Zag*, believes that brand strategy and business strategy are one and the same. “Your brand strategy is your business strategy; it’s central to everything that you do. Every action you take affects your brand, whether that’s about your product or how you operate,” he says. “It takes a strong leader to recognize that and to make branding a strategic conversation, not an activity that gets tacked on after all the business decisions have been made.”

Indeed, branding is commonly considered to be an organization-wide concern that is central to business success. Most survey respondents (91%) agree that when long-term branding is an integral part of decision making across the business, organizations can be more successful.

Again, consistency proves to be an important consideration. When it comes to implementing specific strategies to build long-term brands, developing/upholding brand guidelines and ensuring brand consistency across channels are the most common, both cited by 44% of respondents.

There are noted distinctions in what strategies leaders choose to follow as compared to others. Leaders pull ahead of the rest in three areas. They are far more likely to follow a long-term brand strategy (47%, compared with 29% of followers and 11% of laggards), align organizational culture and long-term brand building (44%, compared with 33% of followers and 18% of laggards), and prioritize long-term branding across the organization (39%, compared with 19% of followers and 8% of laggards). FIGURE 5

Reaping the Benefits

Despite the complexities, long-term branding efforts do bear fruit. The survey finds that stronger brand equity is the most common benefit that organizations have achieved, cited by 46% of respondents. Other common benefits include increased customer loyalty and retention (40%), greater customer engagement (40%), better customer experience (39%), and business growth (38%). Further, leaders experience these benefits more than followers or laggards do. Areas where leaders stand out include increased customer loyalty and retention (59%, compared with 32% of followers and 24% of laggards), business growth (53%, compared with 35% of followers and 20% of laggards), and greater competitive advantage (48%, compared with 36% of followers and 21% of laggards). FIGURE 6

According to Neumeier, the relationship between a strong brand and its stock price is clear-cut: “It’s remarkable. The difference between the average stock price of a strong brand and the stock price of a weaker brand is almost double,” he says. “This shows that brand equity and brand momentum can be used as leading indicators of financial success.”

A Pathway for Building Value

Several themes have emerged on what it takes to build a strong brand that can endure over time. Here is a path to follow:

Link brand strategy and corporate strategy. All business decisions will ultimately shape how an organization’s brand is perceived. Accordingly, brand strategy should be an integral part of the enterprise-wide business strategy, not a separate or sidelined concern. “Great brands are built from the bottom but led from the top,” says Neumeier. “Brand strategy and corporate strategy must be fully integrated to keep customers at the center of the organization’s purpose.”

Don’t let short-term issues derail long-term objectives. “Organizations can really paint themselves into a corner

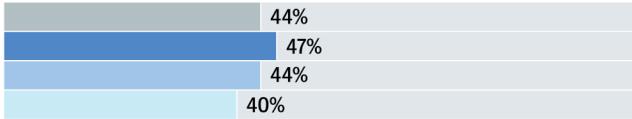
FIGURE 5

Strategies for Building a Long-Term Brand

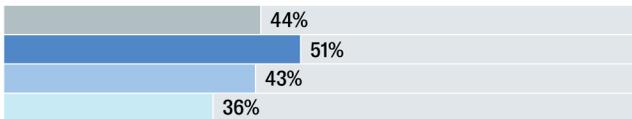
Upholding brand guidelines and ensuring brand consistency are key

Which of the following strategies, if any, is your organization using to build its long-term brand? Select all that apply.

■ Total ■ Leaders ■ Followers ■ Laggards



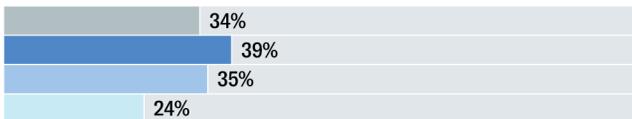
Developing/upholding brand guidelines



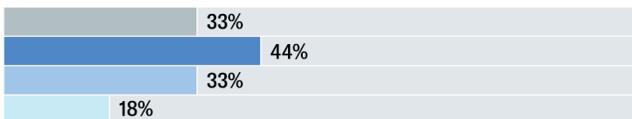
Ensuring brand consistency across channels



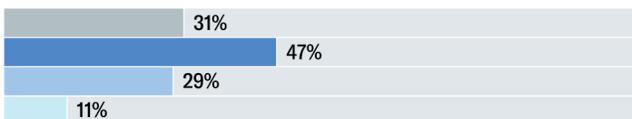
Using customer insights and data to inform brand decisions



Aligning stakeholders on brand decisions



Aligning organizational culture and long-term brand building



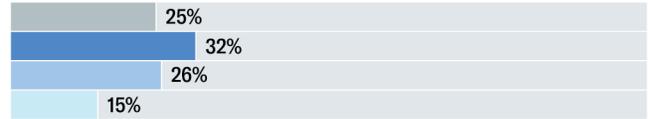
Following a long-term brand strategy



Seeking ways to engage with customer-generated content



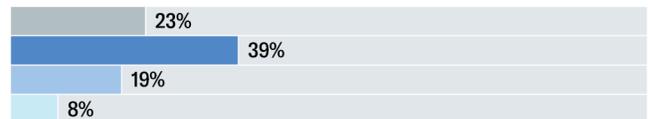
Establishing data-driven KPIs for brand equity



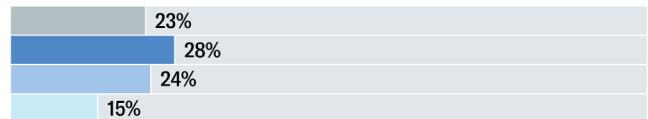
Acquiring talent with brand expertise



Balancing short-term marketing and long-term branding objectives



Prioritizing long-term branding across the organization



Balancing short-term initiatives and brand consistency



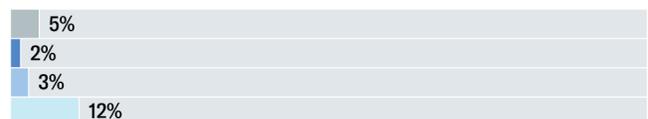
Providing upskilling/training on branding



Increasing resources/time for long-term branding efforts



Increasing investment in long-term branding



None

Base: 530 respondents, varies by segment. Not shown: 2% don't know and 0%-2% other, varies by segment.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, April 2025

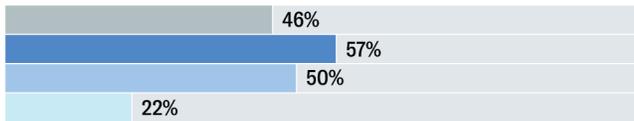
FIGURE 6

A Brand Strategy with Clear Benefits

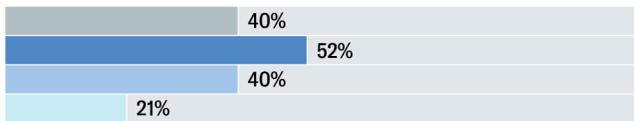
Long-term thinking reaps stronger brand equity and boosts customer loyalty and retention

What benefits, if any, has your organization achieved to date from its long-term brand-building efforts? Select all that apply.

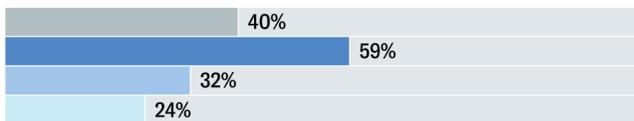
■ Total ■ Leaders ■ Followers ■ Laggards



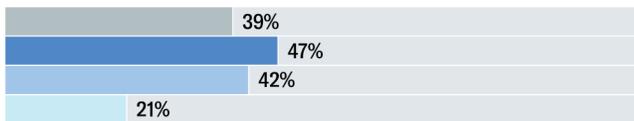
Stronger brand equity



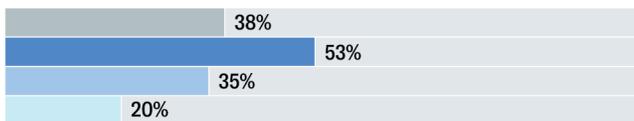
Greater customer engagement



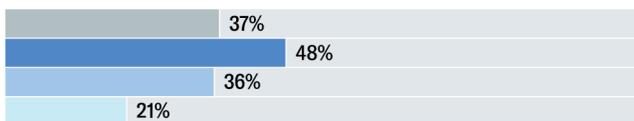
Increased customer loyalty and retention



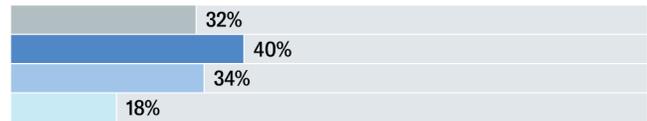
Better customer experience



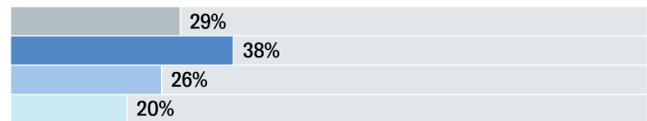
Business growth (e.g., new capabilities, products, services, or markets)



Greater competitive advantage



Improved employee engagement/satisfaction



Increased sales/revenue



More effective marketing (e.g., lower customer acquisition cost)



Stronger investor confidence



Improved financial projections



Reduced price sensitivity

Base: 530 respondents, varies by segment. Not shown: 3%–11% don't know, 1%–14% none, and 0%–1% other, varies by segment.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, April 2025

or inadvertently go down a path they really don't want to take by chasing short-term opportunities at the expense of long-term brand considerations," says Meyerson. "Ensure that everything you do aligns with where you want to be in the future."

Keep your customers top of mind. According to Neumeier, the brands that last are the ones that give customers something of value, something they will continue to want for

a long time. He cites the example of Steve Jobs at consumer technology maker Apple, renowned for making customer experience the company's central concern. Jobs famously advocated the approach of starting with customer experience and working backward from there to develop technology as an enabler for meeting customer needs.

Be consistent, with room for variation. Consistency across a brand's visual identity, language, content, and

customer touchpoints can build brand equity through improving brand recognition and building customer trust. But consistency does not have to come at the expense of innovation. “You don’t have to take consistency literally,” says Keller. “You don’t want to be banging out the same old thing year after year across everything you do. Leave room for innovation and for modifications to suit different circumstances.”

Measure brand equity and track your progress.

Brand-building efforts do pay off and demonstrate quantifiable, verifiable ROI—in the short and long term. The most common benefit is stronger brand equity, which, in turn, drives sales and profitability. “You need to believe that brand equity is a measurable, manageable driver of business—not just a consequence of great products. It is possible to grow brand equity through deliberate effort, including marketing, but also product packaging, customer service, CEO leadership, and other such efforts,” says Favaro.

Conclusion

A brand is intangible. It exists as a perception in the mind of the consumer. Organizations need to invest in figuring out exactly what that perception is, keeping an eye on its health, and tracking how it is evolving. Measuring brand equity is particularly important, as changes in perception will likely be followed by tangible changes in customer behavior and revenue.

Creating a successful brand is no easy feat. The ever-present task of nurturing it, protecting it from harm, and building its value is a complex endeavor. Everything an organization

does will have an effect on its brand, and these effects will add up over time.

A persistent challenge, but one that many long-lasting brands master, is balancing the allure of short-term sales spikes with the need for a long-term mindset that values a brand’s heritage and future legacy. Thinking long term is also a prerequisite for continued brand-building efforts, even in a downturn. Organizations can work on both short- and long-term branding objectives simultaneously. Neither has to be at the expense of the other.

The upside is that it is possible to build brand value and equity. Organizations can do this by prioritizing branding efforts, embedding a culture of caring for the brand in the organization, and fostering a long-term mindset that helps evaluate the consequences of branding decisions, now and in the future.

Strong brands aren’t born. They are built. The building is done through hard work when it comes to satisfying customers and gaining their trust. It’s a long-term exercise.

“Things like brand purpose, authenticity, and good leadership could contribute to a brand’s strength or longevity,” says Meyerson. “But brand purpose has fallen out of favor. Sadly, it’s often little more than an overblown marketing tactic, trying to get customers to buy into claims of values that are not backed up by what the organization actually does. That said, if your brand purpose is authentically built into the business, and if there is strong leadership behind that, it could conceivably have positive impacts on things like recruitment efforts, employee morale, and—in rare cases, maybe—customer relationships.”

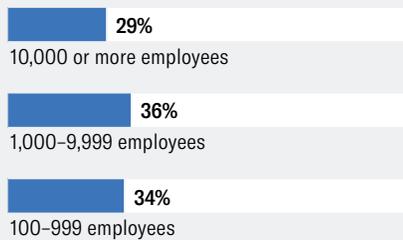
Endnotes

- 1 Jim Stengel, Cait Lambertson, and Ken Favaro, “How Brand Building and Performance Marketing can Work Together,” *Harvard Business Review*, May-June 2023. <https://hbr.org/2023/05/how-brand-building-and-performance-marketing-can-work-together>.

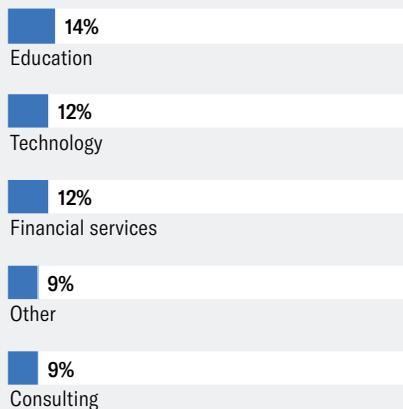


Harvard Business Review Analytic Services surveyed 530 members of the *Harvard Business Review* audience via an online survey fielded in April 2025. Respondents qualified to complete the survey if they are involved with marketing or strategy decisions that affect their organization's brand.

ORGANIZATION SIZE

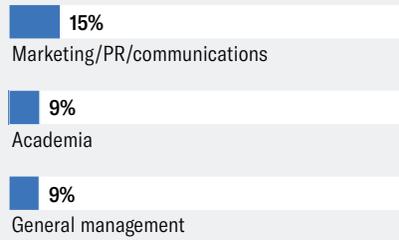


INDUSTRIES



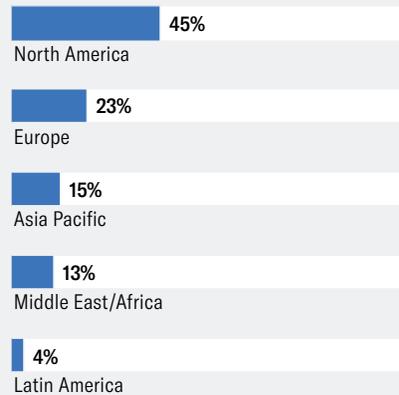
All other sectors less than 8% each.

JOB FUNCTIONS

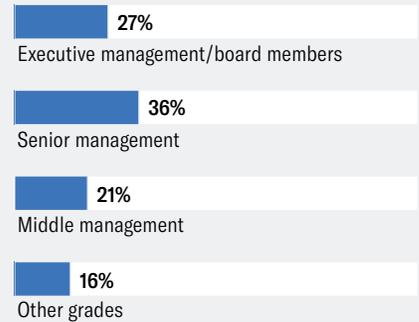


All other sectors less than 8% each.

REGIONS



SENIORITY





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