

Jump on the Brand Wagon

Extending Your Corporate Culture to an Outsourcing Provider

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In This White Paper

- What is corporate culture and how can service providers incorporate a client's culture into their operations.
- What steps can a third-party provider take to infuse a client's culture into their offering.
- What has Sitel done to ensure our associates project our clients' culture.
- What must be considered to make it work.

Introduction

"If an outsource firm and a prospective client company do not walk and talk the same cultural language from the beginning of the relationship, the two organizations end up working at cross purposes."

A company's culture isn't easily defined, but profound cultures are clearly understood and readily acknowledged. Fly U.S. carrier Southwest Airlines and you'll find an airline that dresses down and laughs it up. Work for Dutch furniture retailer IKEA and you'll experience a company as uncommon as a round bed - one that emphasizes employee equality over a traditional hierarchy. Ask yourself this question: Is my company's culture exceptional? If the answer is no, you could be missing out, according to Dr. Kevin Freiberg and Dr. Jackie Freiberg, co-authors of two books on innovative companies. "A branded culture separates an organization from its competition and places it in a league of its own," the Freibergs write. "Famous cultures create and reflect emotional, moral, and social bonds among people."

Companies are keenly aware of how closely their culture is tied to their identity. While a culture is easily nurtured within the incubated confines of an organization, its meaning can be lost on those outside the ranks. When companies outsource, they are challenged with selecting the right vendor in which to infuse their culture. In turn, it is critical for vendors to adopt a client's culture in order for the two organizations to attain a shared vision and achieve their goals. "If an outsource firm and a prospective client company do not walk and talk the same cultural language from the beginning of the relationship, the two organizations end up working at cross purposes," according to author Stormy Friday, who has written two books on facility management. "The outsource firm doesn't fit into the corporate environment, and the corporate environment can't work with the culture the outsource firm brings to the client."

This paper will discuss the different ways in which third-party contact center service providers incorporate a client's culture into their operations and the impact that cultural exchange has on both the client and the provider.

Defining Corporate Culture: 'How Things are Done Around Here.'

Dr. Randall Hansen, founder and publisher of the Web site Quintessential Careers, provides an excellent definition of the term corporate culture. "At its most basic, it's described as the personality of an organization, or simply as, 'How things are done around here,' " writes Dr. Hansen. "It guides how employees think, act, and feel. Corporate culture is a broad term used to define the unique personality or character of a particular company or organization, and includes such elements as core values and beliefs, corporate ethics, and rules of behavior. Corporate culture can be expressed in the company's mission statement and other communications, in the architectural style or interior décor of offices, by what people wear to work, by how people address each other, and in the titles given to various employees." Stormy Friday describes corporate culture as "the very essence of a company's DNA ... the cement that holds a company together. The larger and more established the institution, the more entrenched and inflexible the culture tends to be. Contrast that sort of corporate culture with the culture of an outsourcing firm, which, by the very nature of its business, has to be the antithesis of an older, more established corporate culture. To compete successfully in the marketplace, companies in the outsourcing business have to be fast-moving, dynamic and fluid, and have highly adaptable structures designed to change rapidly as new customer demands arise."

Southwest Airlines (SWA) is a vivid example of a company with a definitive corporate culture. SWA is known for taking the formality out of flying with its casual attire and approach. "Southwest has built a reputation as a fun, light-hearted and irreverent airline with a happy staff," according to author Jim R. Sapp, who has written a book about entrepreneurship. "It is said that Southwest's biggest hiring criterion is whether an applicant smiles during his or her interview. Southwest feels it can train anyone to do the job, but it can't teach a person to have a positive attitude." SWA has been positively profitable for the past 33 years.

Richard Branson's global Virgin brand is known for its "wild at heart" culture, writes Dr. Kevin Freiberg and Dr. Jackie Freiberg. "People who are

adventurous and entrepreneurial are attracted to it because they know the culture encourages risk taking, innovation, and flamboyance. Got an idea for a new company? At Virgin you have the freedom to pursue it without the fear of repercussion if it fails. That's because Virgin knows if it unleashes enough creative ideas, over time the company is eventually going to have a blockbuster. We think Branson gets it when he says, 'High standards of service depend on having staff that are proud of the company. This is why the interests of our people come first. In the end, the long-term interests of the shareholders are actually damaged by giving them superficial short-term priority.' "

While every corporate culture is different, author Vadim Kotelnikov notes commonality among the exceptional ones. "Firms with strong cultures achieve higher results because employees sustain focus both on what to do and how to do it."

A challenge that companies face is infusing their culture into their relationships with third-party service providers. In turn, a dilemma the associates of service providers face is being completely accepting of a client's culture while making the distinction that it is an outsourced relationship.

Steps to Adopting a Client's Culture

For a third-party provider, the adoption of a client's culture is a multi-layered, ongoing process involving site selection, recruiting, training, operations and relationship management. In this section we will discuss how each of these elements affects the infusion of a client's culture.

Selecting the Right Site

Associates that are familiar with a brand or product have an advantage in terms of embracing a client's culture. Ideally, the allure of a brand or product will serve as a recruiting tool for an eager talent pool. Some providers establish "centers of excellence" that are positioned for specific types of clients or services. In certain geographies - whether they be on-

shore, nearshore or offshore - where a brand or product is unavailable, the essence of a client's culture might be completely foreign, and thus, a bad fit.

Recruiting and Hiring the Right People

The associate profile, created by the client, supplies the service provider with a description of the qualifications and characteristics that it is seeking in associates. The qualifications generally are tangible, but the characteristics are intangible. For example, a leading manufacturer of audio systems seeks associates that appreciate music and sound, while a mobile virtual network operator targets "nice people" to enhance the customer experience. Applicants might be asked about their personal use of a product to determine their knowledge of it and their ability to communicate that knowledge. Sample questions might include:

- Explain the features of your current (product).
- What feature do you feel is most important to the customer?
- What feature is the most difficult for the customer to understand or operate? How would you simplify that issue for the customer?

One company prominently displays its product during an interview expecting the interviewee to inquire about it or handle it. Those interviewees that don't demonstrate any curiosity are viewed with skepticism.

As further introduction to the culture, a client's commercials or promotional material might be shown or displayed during the application process. Feedback is solicited to determine the applicant's affinity toward the product.

A company's culture also might be reflected in the documents it issues to the service provider. Take note of the informal language (paraphrased) used for an applicants' evaluation form:

- Waste of Time / Poor
- Not so Hot / Fair

- Didn't Awe Me / Satisfactory
- This One's Cool! / Good
- Future Star! / Excellent

The language clearly reflects a company with an edge, in keeping with its high-tech product. It is looking to hire people who speak in the same manner.

Developing Dynamic Training Programs

Training is so vital because it represents the first opportunity to mold impressionable trainees into the type of high-performing, respectful and loyal associates that are so desired. Training entails teaching the fundamentals, setting expectations and thrusting trainees into their new role. When done well, it engages and stimulates associates and prepares them to meet the challenges of the position. When done poorly, it can confound and frustrate associates and set the stage for unsatisfactory performance and, worst case, associate attrition.

The following example illustrates a creative training program that appealed to a dynamic, young workforce and improved results in terms of productivity, client and customer satisfaction, and associate attrition. Developed by Sitel, training for a computer games manufacturer uses an auto-racing theme based on one of the client's popular games. The training room is decorated like a racetrack for ambience. The training class is divided into two groups with each one choosing a team name and a title sponsor. Each team starts with an empty toolbox and earns tools through the skills verification process, such as written exams or verbal demonstrations. The teams graduate from the class when they have accumulated all the necessary tools to build their racing car and complete the circuit. This fun, interactive and unique training program reflects the culture of a client in the entertainment business.

The training program for another client with a trendy product aimed at Generation Y includes trainees creating their own commercials and posters that are judged by associates. This exercise serves several purposes: 1) It

adds variety to the training routine, 2) Makes the trainees give serious thought to what the product represents, and 3) Conveys the message that the client doesn't operate by the book.

Becoming a Part of the Culture

In order to adopt a culture an associate has to *believe* in a company and its products. One way to build that loyalty is to make the brand part of an associate's everyday life or work experience. This firsthand approach can have a positive impact on a program's results.

- Access - The following examples illustrate how Sitel associates are given access to products they represent:
 - For a manufacturer of audio systems, hearing is believing. Every workstation within the contact center has an audio system that enables associates to listen to music throughout the day. Furthermore, 100% of the associates participate in a program in which they are loaned the company's products on a trial basis and provide feedback on their performance. This approach has resulted in a prideful workforce and an increased sales conversion rate. In addition, the center's management team participates in a two-week training program at the client's headquarters where they are given demonstrations of the entire product range.
 - The manufacturer of an electronic device loans every contact center associate its product for personal use. After one year, the associate assumes ownership of the device (tearing up the lease in a contact center ceremony) and is awarded an accessory as a bonus. The product also is set up throughout the center to use as a reference point.
 - An entertainment service provides subscriptions to associates for no cost. The product is on display throughout the contact center and vendors of the service visit the center to educate associates.

- **Ambience** - A client's culture is instilled through the physical appearance of the workplace. The center assumes the identity of the client with logos, signage, color schemes, props and televisions streaming content that appeals to the client's customer base. For one client, about 100 associates even got into the act, donning makeup to mimic the company's current marketing campaign.
- **Inclusion** - Clients offer price discounts on their products and services to their service provider's associates, as well as their family and friends. They also sponsor contests with financial rewards and prizes, awards programs, and center activities such as holiday parties and anniversary celebrations.
- **Support** - The physical presence and daily involvement of a client representative is vital, particularly in the formative stages of a new relationship. One company dedicated a vice president to a Sitel center for an entire year to ensure stability and quality during a heavy and extended staffing ramp. This manager created a strong link between her company's internal and outsourced operations, ensuring consistency in procedure and process across the call center network. She was the face of the client in the center every day, working to support associates, championing concerns, identifying solutions, resolving escalations on the spot and celebrating achievements. Her presence was instrumental in endearing the center's associates and management team to the client's management team, laying the foundation for an optimal working relationship. Most important, the manager-on-site arrangement resulted in improved call quality scores.

Thinking on the Same Wavelength

Is the client a 'jeans and t-shirt organization' or a designer suit company? How does the client prefer to communicate - scheduled phone calls, text messages at a moment's notice or e-mails at will? What does the quarterly performance review entail - detailed slide presentations in a conference room or general topics of discussion outside the office? These are the types of things the service provider's primary point of contact - or relationship

manager - must learn and adapt to in order to advance the relationship with the client. The relationship manager also benefits from being a customer of the client's products or services. For example, placing an order by phone or online can offer great insight into the customer service experience.

Utilizing Contact Center for Customer Feedback

The contact center serves as an essential communications link between the client and its customers, representing an ongoing focus group to collect customer feedback and gauge customer satisfaction. Ideally, the contact center and the client will work together to analyze the customer data and optimize the customer experience. For a European brand of luxury products, Sitel's expertise of the brand has resulted in favorable sales activity: 30 percent revenue increase; 5 percent sales conversion for customer service calls; double the size of the average order; and increased customer retention. Sitel's excellent customer management skills prompted the client to commission Sitel to develop a "customer service guide" to be used by associates in the client's stores. This is an example of a provider not only adopting a brand, but helping shape one.

Committed to Making it Work

Just as a company's culture doesn't germinate spontaneously, the adoption of a client's culture by a service provider requires a substantial commitment from both the provider and the client. The provider must be flexible enough to embrace a new culture, choose the right center for the business, recruit and hire to match the associate profile, develop effective training programs and infuse the brand into daily operations. By the same token, the client must do such things as express the meaning of its culture, make its products/services available to the provider's associates, sponsor contests, awards, anniversaries and activities, and have representation at the center to provide support. When both the client and the provider do their part, the relationship flourishes behind a distinct culture.

About Sitel

Sitel is a global Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) leader that meets clients' customer care and transaction processing needs by providing world-class solutions from over 60,000 associates in 155+ facilities located in 27 countries.

Sitel provides clients with the strategic insight, scale and diversity of offerings to ensure the best return on their customer investment. For more information, please access www.sitel.com



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