

The Culture of a Winning B2B Brand.

All B2B marketing is cross-cultural.

When it comes to branding and business, you must go cross-cultural even when you are not crossing borders.

No two organizations are the same.

Your business is unique. So is ours. So is everyone else's. The fact is that no two companies are the same, even when they produce exactly the same product. They are staffed with different people, they have unique priorities and constraints, and ultimately they have unique cultures. In a B2B world, your prospects operate within the confines of their company's culture.

Culture drives behavior.

Some businesses (like some countries) have very open flamboyant cultures (like advertising agencies). Others are more conservative (like heavy manufacturing companies). How people behave, how they make decisions and what is important to them is in large part dictated by what is acceptable to the culture in which they exist. This is precisely why Erickson Barnett has developed a culturally based approach to branding and brand message development.

Culture drives decisions.

Each business you sell into is unique in terms of the information it needs, and the processes it will go through in order to make decisions. As marketers, it is our job to ensure that we match how we present ourselves and our products to the business culture we're selling into. The information, the process, the language and the emotional needs of the organizations should be taken into account. Backed by cross-cultural research* the Erickson Barnett model provides a messaging guide for communicating with diverse business cultures.

Going cross-cultural.

The best way to connect is to immerse yourself in the communication style of the organization you want to reach out to. Here are some tips on how to accelerate that connection.

1. Start with the extremes.

When you begin to think about cultures, look to the extremes. Is the culture of your target fast moving, entrepreneurial and individualistic (like a high-tech startup), or is it one that is more rigid, conservative and actively seeks consensus (such as a government agency). In the Erickson Barnett B2B Brand Message Model™ we would define these as "Visionary" or "Fundamentals" based cultures respectively.

2. Speak in the language of the culture.

"Vision oriented" and "Fundamentals oriented" cultures do not speak the same language. Vision oriented cultures talk in terms of big, innovative and leading edge concepts, they get excited by potential and like to be challenged. Conversely, fundamentals oriented cultures seek out certainty and actively avoid ambiguity. They feel comfortable when discussing more constrained and measurable outcomes. Be sure to match your message and approach to the culture you're talking to.

3. Accent your speech with the language of your offering.

What you are selling adds another layer of complexity. At one end of the scale we have tangible products such as computers and equipment. Whereas consulting services for software development are far more conceptual. We define these extremes as "Concrete" and "Abstract". The language and proof points we use at each of these extremes will differ greatly.

**Journal of International Marketing Vol.13 No.3: Determinants of Customer Benefits in Business-to-Business Markets: A Cross-Cultural Comparison.*
Christian Homberg, Sabine Kluester, Nikolas Beutin, Ajay Menon

4. Step four: determine your messaging quadrant.

By layering the extremes of buyer culture orientations and that of the seller's product offerings we arrive at four distinct ways of talking about the brand. We call these the Erickson Barnett Brand Message quadrants™. The quadrant you choose is a critical strategic decision. The quadrants are:

- » "Measurable"
- » "Adaptive"
- » "Process"
- » "Collaborative"

5. Step five: communicate.

Armed with an understanding of your brand and of the culture you are talking to, you are in a perfect position to create communications that truly resonate with your audience because you are now speaking their language.

Be Cross-Cultural

For any brand to be successful it needs to embrace the voice of the customer. In the case of businesses, the easiest way to do so is to speak the language of their organizational culture.



EB B2B Brand Message Quadrants™

About Erickson Barnett.

It's a web-centric world. At Erickson Barnett we leverage this new landscape to create smart marketing programs that drive measurable results. Our clients depend on us to create:

- » Clear Messaging
- » Remarkable Identities
- » Unique Campaigns
- » Engaging Web Sites
- » Influential Rich Media

The world has changed. Get results.

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