



## Article Reprint

### **Corporate Image Development: Asking the Right Questions by Steven Howard**

A key aspect of the initial phase of the Corporate Image Management development process comprises qualitative interviews with internal and external audience.

The internal interviews are conducted at all levels of the organisation, from front-line staff and backroom support personnel to senior management and the board of directors.

The interviews with external audiences will include key customers, end users, joint venture or other business partners, shareholders or other stakeholders, suppliers, distributors, retailers, prospective customers and partners, government officials, senior media people and other outside influencers, competitors, and members of the general public.

These interviews focus on how the organisation is currently perceived by these key audiences and what perceptions are held about the company's directions for the future and its capabilities to handle or execute change.

*A sampling of the types of questions that should be explored through the qualitative interviews includes:*

#### **Executives, senior management and Board members**

- What is the organisation's mission statement. Do you see a need for change? How?
- What are the two, five and ten year plans for the organisation?
- Who are the company's key target audiences?
- How does the company market itself to these target audiences?
- What is the single most important marketing issue facing the organisation?
- What are the three most pressing marketing communications issues facing the organisation at present?
- How is the company organised? What changes would you make in the organisational structure if you could?

- Who really plays the role of marketing the organisation? What is his/her role in the strategic management process?
- How would you describe the organisation's corporate culture? What are the shared beliefs, expectations and values found within the organisation? How are these learned by new employees?
- Is there a corporate philosophy? If so, describe this in your own words? Does it need changing or updating?
- How would you describe the organisation's external image? Its internal image? Would you say that you are proud to be associated with these images? Do you see a need for change in the image? How?
- Are the activities, products, services and image of the organisation adequately communicated through the current name?
- What makes this organisation unique?
- Who are the organisation's main competitors? What are their strengths and weaknesses compared to your organisation? Are you likely to have different competitors in five years time?
- Why do people choose products or services from competitors instead of those offered by this organisation?
- Describe the organisation's change management system and how you personally feel about this system.
- What do the organisation's customers look for or consider before establishing a relationship with this organisation?

### **Customers, Partners, Prospects and Competitors**

- What is your impression of the organisation's products and services?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of this organisation?
- Would you care to be employed by the organisation? Why or why not?
- Please describe the various products and services offered by this organisation. Which ones do you use the most? Why?
- Have you ever dealt with a similar organisation, or an organisation offering similar products and services? Why or why not?
- How would you compare the quality of products and services provided by this organisation with that of other organisations with which you are very familiar?
- Who do you think are the organisation's main competitors? Why? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these organisations?
- Please describe the organisation in your own words. Do you see a need for change or improvement? How and where?
- What does the name of the organisation mean to you?

- What's the first thing you think of when you hear the organisation's name?
- What makes this organisation unique?
- Please describe what you think the corporate culture is like at this organisation.
- What do you think is this organisation's corporate philosophy? How is this corporate philosophy expressed by its products, services or corporate behaviour?
- Do you feel loyalty towards this organisation? Why or why not?
- What type of loyalty do you feel towards this organisation?
- What criteria would you use in determining whether or not to enter into a long-term relationship with this organisation?
- What does the word "relationship" mean to you, when applied to your interactions and dealings with this organisation?

The number of interviews required for this process to be effective is usually between 25 and 40, depending upon the size and complexity of the organisation or the anticipated likelihood by management or the consultants that a major corporate image change is required imminently.

This methodology will yield tremendous insights into the present corporate image of the organisation, as perceived both internally and externally. Because of the open-ended nature of the specific questions used, the feedback can be readily interpreted into specific observations and recommendations that can be actioned late in the corporate image management process.

### **The Author**

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