



WHAT WENT WELL – PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES IN MARKETING INTERNAL AUDIT IN ORGANISATIONS

Everything we do sends messages about us to other people. And they filter what they see and hear through stereotypes or even prejudice. So if we as internal auditors want the people in our organisations to understand our work there are three areas to address:

- Understanding our customers, their needs, wants and stereotypes
- Projecting our value through our work
- Knowing how want to be seen and influencing the stereotypes

Understanding our customers

Forget post audit questionnaires asking for numeric scores on audit staff. (They make great spoof documents for the intranet sites.) Instead, call them up or drop in and ask how the audit went, get their ideas for improvements. In two companies I sent out an annual customer awareness survey to managers who had experienced an audit and others who had not. I asked them to list six adjectives describing internal auditors, plus their comments on what went well and where we could improve. As a team we analysed the adjectives (spread out on paper on the floor) to see what ideas they had about us and how their perceptions changed over time. Selected concepts were followed up with short interviews. The fact that we were asking humbly for feedback was itself an influence on how customers saw us.

Projecting our value through our work

What our customers see of us are memos, reports and auditors. If we want to be seen as commercial, professional and astute, this has to be reflected in the appearance of our documents and ourselves.

There's no excuse for poor layout and mis-spelled reports any more than inaccurate, clumsy or strident ones. Of course, the content should come first but why spoil a good book with a tatty cover? Every auditor should take responsibility for issuing meticulous work with excellent look and feel.

A few years ago my team attended a corporate year end presentation. We walked in as a group, all wearing dark blue suits and holding the standard stationery issue red A4 notebooks. The reaction was immediate and I realised it wasn't the message I wanted our colleagues to have about internal audit: all staid conformists. Dressing down has been both friend and enemy. It gives the chance to show we are individuals not mechanical tickers but at the risk of looking unprofessional.

Influencing the stereotypes

So you've designed a logo, written a brochure, created a web site, coined a strap-line: you can also boost team identity through T shirts, mugs, mouse mats. Does this prove internal audit is human? Try entering the office pub quiz. We won the trophy dressed as Buffy – played by our cool blonde administrator – and the Audit Vampires. We lost the charity 5-a-side football as Blackburn's Rovers. Both times we showed we could laugh at ourselves.

That was trying to break down the negative image. For the positive we worked through the same brand values exercises that our company used to help business units develop brands – a process that started with trivia and got into some deep stuff about audit ethics.

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