



## Our Services

- **Consulting Services**
  - Investor Relations
  - Strategic Marketing
  - Strategic Planning
  - Internal Branding
- **Creative Services**
  - Copywriting
  - Graphic Design
  - Web Development
  - Pre-press Production

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# Leveraging Your Community Investment Contributions

Social marketing was “born” in the 1970s, when it became an important additional strategy for companies wanting to re-position their brand and/or build more meaningful relationships with their customers. It uses the same marketing principles that are used to sell products but rather “sells” ideas, attitudes and behaviors. Social marketing uses the benefits of doing social good to secure and maintain customer engagement.



There is an increasing amount of confusion around the terms being used to rationalize this type of marketing. Some companies refer to it as “community investment” and others refer to it as “cause marketing”. There are many nuances that reflect differences in all of these, but we shall, for ease of understanding, use the term, “cause marketing”.

**Cause marketing** or **cause-related marketing** refers to a type of marketing involving the cooperative efforts of a for-profit business and a non-profit organization for mutual benefit. The term is sometimes used more broadly and generally to refer to any type of marketing effort for social and other charitable causes, including in-house marketing efforts by non-profit organizations. Cause marketing differs from corporate giving (philanthropy) as the latter generally involves a specific donation that is tax-deductible, while cause marketing is a marketing relationship generally not based on a donation.

### Sponsorship vs. Philanthropy

Sponsorship/Cause Marketing	Philanthropy
Undertaken for the purpose of achieving commercial objectives.	Support of a cause without any commercial incentive, e.g. in the form of a grant.
Involves a fee paid for promotional rights, including rights to logos or association and an emphasis on consumer recognition.	Usually involves limited donor recognition.

## Leveraging Your Community Investment Contributions (cont'd)

Important guidelines to consider when developing a cause/social marketing investment:

- The ultimate objective is to influence some kind of action;
- Marketing efforts must incorporate the "4 P's" of basic marketing;
- Know your target audience and understand their needs. Be clear on what you are trying to achieve and work to develop alignment with their needs and yours;
- Analyze and beware of your competition; and
- Monitor your involvement and maintain flexibility to react when necessary.

To survive today's highly unpredictable and competitive business environment, leaders need to utilize every opportunity to "talk" to both internal and external stakeholders to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

**Leveraging your cause marketing investment** is often a difficult task. To position your brand in a way that does not appear to be self-serving can be challenging and complicated. To communicate or market your involvement takes finesse and a strategic plan to ensure a maximum return.

The questions to ask include:

- Does your organization have a cause marketing plan?
- Does the marketing department have a budget for cause marketing or sponsorship?
- Do internal team members understand the difference between cause marketing and philanthropy?

- Are the causes that are supported in alignment with the beliefs and interests of the internal team?
- Have measurable goals been established for cause marketing expenditures?
- Are the causes you support held accountable for delivering all contracted marketing support?

It is statistically proven that approximately 85% of people who have a choice between two similar companies, will lean towards the one that is standing for something good. This differentiation is also vital for potential new employees.

Merlin can help your company identify the internal and external influences on marketing planning as it relates to cause and/or sponsorship marketing. The Merlin Edge **Marketing Audit** is a process which Merlin Edge has developed in which our strategic marketing experts, who have many years' experience working in the corporate and not-for-profit sectors, work with you to evaluate the impact of your current cause marketing expenditure and make a variety of recommendations if necessary.

**A topline version of this service is being offered to you on a complimentary basis.**

**For more information please contact**

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## The Significance of an Employer Brand Strategy

It is often said that an unsatisfied customer tells 10 people about his experience while an unsatisfied employee will tell 100!

### **What is Employer Branding?**

An **Employer Brand** is the image of an organization as a great place to work in the minds of its current employees and key stakeholders. It is the development of an organizational culture which fosters a sense of belonging with the company and encourages those employees to share the organizational goals of success. It represents the core values of an organization. It requires a lot of introspection by the company: answering questions like, "What kind of company are we and what kind of company do we want to become?"

Employer Branding is all about marketing an entire company as though it were a product. Instead of selling a specific product or service, the company is selling the people and employee experience that can be found at the company. Be assured that Employer Branding is all about business and ensuring operational effectiveness. It reflects the work culture in an organization and contributes to developing pride, attachment and trust towards a company.

### **What is the process of developing an Employer Branding strategy?**

Merlin Edge has developed a four-step process in building an employer branding strategy:

1. **Assessment** – We will gather pertinent data about the organization including information on the core business, the brand promise and employer profile (the brand promise is what the employee perceives they can expect from the company).
2. **Strategy development** – Merlin will facilitate a group of employees to organize and articulate research findings into a marketing and communications strategy which will include:
  - a. Research in developing a unique, compelling and believable brand promise
  - b. Develop a marketing icon/slogan that will bring the promise and brand to life in a unique and exciting way
  - c. Design and develop marketing support materials in a variety of media that will best communicate to the target stakeholder groups
  - d. Survey and evaluate success periodically to understand how well employees can articulate the employer brand promise and whether they know how they can positively impact the company's success
3. **Implementation** – Establish and prioritize the elements and drivers through a creative communications and marketing approach.

Now, the question is...which is first: The chicken or the egg?











It is important to understand the correlation between realizing corporate business objective and high engagement and performance objectives. Can you wait to implement this strategy at another time or should you do it now? ■

### **FACT CHECK!!**

- By 2020, there will be a shortage of 1 million skilled workers in North America
- Only 53% of employees surveyed say they trust their organization's senior leaders
- 1/3 of managers do not fully leverage their employees' unique capabilities each day on the job
- Disengaged employees cost companies as much as \$350 billion annually in lost productivity in the United States alone
- 57% of North American employees do not know what they want to do next

# What is “Brand Management”?

**TOP TEN INTERNATIONAL CONSUMER BRANDS IN 2010**

		(\$ millions)
1		70,452
2		64,727
3		60,895
4		43,557
5		42,808
6		33,578
7		32,015
8		29,495
9		28,731
10		26,867

Source: Interbrand.com

A question often asked of those of us working in strategic marketing and communications is: “What exactly do you do?”

Simply put, we help companies manage their brands in a way that will effectively communicate their business positioning and business strength and/or capacity.....AND, do it in a way that is inspiring, relevant and different from their competitors! It is a challenging and exciting business and those of us at Merlin Edge thrive on the challenge.

**Good brand management is:**

- ALL about defining the personality of the company
- It is about the way a phone gets answered, about the way customers are followed up with, about the way business is done, about the way the employees feel about who they work for, about the way people look or react when the brand name is mentioned!

In other words, it is all about...everything! Your brand is a promise. Merlin works to help you deliver the perceived promise in a way that will meet your overall business objectives, but do it in a way that is creative and inspiring.

If you would like to begin your own brand assessment and explore your operational strengths in creating, communicating, living and managing your brand, you should take a few moments and answer the questions we have listed. Score yourself, and find out where you stand! ■



**Rise Up**  
 Our values of respect, integrity, service and excellence are the foundation of a thriving culture with limitless possibilities.

 **Superior Plus**  
 Energy Services  
 Our Energy Serving You

# PERFORMANCE

#	Question	Rating 1 = poor 2 = below average 3 = average 4 = above average 5 = excellent				
1	We actively investigate what is important to our external stakeholders using research, face-to-face interviews, questionnaires	1	2	3	4	5
2	We understand how our external stakeholders feel about our company, our business strategy and/or our products and services	1	2	3	4	5
3	We understand how our employees feel about working for our company	1	2	3	4	5
4	We understand the attitudes of our external stakeholders and their changing views and needs	1	2	3	4	5
5	We have aligned our organizational structure, operations and culture with our brand values	1	2	3	4	5
6	We have a strong brand positioning statement that is easily understood by anyone who reads/hears it	1	2	3	4	5
7	Our induction program includes education on our brand and the role it plays in enhancing our competitiveness	1	2	3	4	5
8	Everyone in our organization understands what our brand stands for and can articulate it simply and clearly	1	2	3	4	5
9	Everyone in our organization knows what they have to do to deliver on our brand promise	1	2	3	4	5
10	Branding is championed by everyone in our organization, from the CEO down	1	2	3	4	5
11	We receive regular internal communications detailing what our brand is about	1	2	3	4	5
12	Our branding strategies are proactively driven and do not depend on what our competitors are doing	1	2	3	4	5
13	Details of our brand and the strategy that drives it are well documented and that information is available to those who need and desire it	1	2	3	4	5
14	We actively engage our external agency(ies) as our strategic partner and actively engage them in organizational and communications planning and review sessions	1	2	3	4	5
15	Our marketing and communications teams have an integrated understanding of our brand and are in constant communication over brand-related activities and issues	1	2	3	4	5
16	Our brand messages are 100% consistent in all of our marketing and communications materials	1	2	3	4	5
17	We review our brand and what it stands for with our agency at least once a year	1	2	3	4	5
18	The value of our brand to our business is included in our financial reports	1	2	3	4	5
19	We have a brand management program in place that is continually looking for new and more effective ways to protect and enhance our brand throughout the organization	1	2	3	4	5
20	Included in our performance management systems is an assessment of the contribution each individual makes to growing and enhancing the brand	1	2	3	4	5

Scoring your brand management performance:

0-20 Poor      21-40 Good      41-60 Average      61-80 Above average      81-100 Excellent

# Quick Tips for Improving Your Website

- Each website or e-marketing program we develop is based on a thorough strategic and technical analysis of your company and is then brought to life with the imagination and enthusiasm of our creative team. Your website or interactive campaign will be as unique as your business.
- How to build your website takes 360-degree thinking because users don't navigate in a linear fashion.
- The website can be used as an interactive medium and should encourage the viewer to stop, read or listen to the messages you want to deliver in an exciting and informative way.
- Merlin Edge designs user-experiences based on a deep understanding of your business's value proposition, the external environment, your intended audiences and your strategic marketing purposes – all of which form the basis for your website's core contents.

## **Search Engine Optimization?**

Many of you are very familiar with Search Engine Optimization (SEO). We still have many people asking us to explain SEO and how it works.

Simply put, SEO is the process of improving the quality and volume of web traffic to a website by employing a series of proven SEO techniques that help a website achieve a higher ranking with the major search engines when certain keywords and phrases are put in the search field.

To put this into context, consider your own Internet search habits. When you want to find information, your first instinct is to use a search engine because it is the fastest and easiest way to get it. Once the search results are posted, you're far more likely to explore the links on the first page of results because they are the most relevant to what you are looking for and allow you to find what you're looking for easily.

Getting you on that first page, as high up as possible, is the goal of SEO. To optimize your website so that the major search engines rank your site as highly as possible which, in turn, leads to a greater volume of qualified traffic. SEO can level the playing field for your business, whether your business is a Fortune 500 company or a brand new business venture trying to get noticed in a competitive field. Done properly, SEO puts your site on the left side of the page where it gains instant credibility with the very people whom you wish to reach.

As an Internet marketing strategy, SEO considers how search engines work and what people search for. Optimizing a website may involve editing its content and HTML and associated coding, both to increase its relevance to specific keywords and to remove barriers to the indexing activities of search engines. Promoting a site to

increase the number of backlinks, or inbound links, is another SEO tactic.

Another class of techniques, known as black hat SEO or spamdexing, uses methods such as link farms, keyword stuffing and article spinning that degrade both the relevance of search results and the user-experience of search engines. Search engines look for sites that employ these techniques in order to remove them from their indices.

Google says it ranks sites using more than 200 different signals. The leading search engines, Google and Yahoo, do not disclose the algorithms they use to rank pages.

## **Increasing your ranking**

A variety of legitimate methods can increase the prominence of a webpage within the search results. Writing content that includes frequently searched keyword phrases, so as to be relevant to a wide variety of search queries, will tend to increase traffic. So will updating content so as to keep search engines crawling back frequently and giving additional weight to your site. Adding relevant keywords to a web page's meta data, including the title tag and meta description, will tend to improve the relevancy of a site's search listings, thus increasing traffic.

Search engines' algorithms prefer that web page files are really descriptive and relevant to the information displayed on the page.

SEO is merely effective marketing, making efforts to deliver quality content to an audience that has requested the quality content. It can make a major difference to the success of your organization and should definitely be considered as part of your ongoing marketing activity. ■

# *Merlin's Clients:* **Flint Energy Services Ltd.**

Flint Energy Services Ltd. was originally started in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1910 by the Flint family, making wooden derricks for the oil boom in Oklahoma and Texas. Like scenes out of the movie "There Will be Blood", wells were drilled using primitive wooden derricks which were left over the "hole" after wells were drilled and completed. In time, Flint shifted technologies to making steel derricks which were used on multiple well completions, and added other services like construction of pipelines and other field facilities.

In the early 1950s Flint Construction followed drilling activity into Alberta after the Leduc discovery by Imperial Oil, near Edmonton. Flint's Canadian operations grew rapidly and in time revenues from Canada soon eclipsed revenues being generated in the United States.

In 1998 the Flint family sold their oil field construction companies in Canada and the United States to SCF Partners. After a series of acquisitions the modern Flint Energy Services Ltd. was created with the Flint brand recognition taking precedence over the other acquired Companies.

The Flint brand had been left more or less unchanged since the inception of the company; however, in 2008 Flint started working with Merlin Edge and began a process of understanding the Flint brand's recognition and power in the market and capitalizing on this recognition.

One of the more interesting insights of this process was Flint's unique position as a public company without clear comparable peers in the market. Some investors and industry



analysts felt that Flint's stock value was being affected by Flint being too diverse and not being able to measure Flint against a "pure play" peer. In 2009, Merlin Edge suggested Flint turn this negative around. Flint proudly communicated that it was "Incomparable" in large font on the cover of its 2009 Annual Report. Management then opened investor meetings and conferences by saying that Flint was a unique, incomparable investment opportunity and using this as the basis of differentiating the company from its pure play peers.

In 2010, following on the success of the investor communications, Flint's business development and sales team worked with Merlin Edge to come up with a new branding slogan to help reposition the company with its customers. After reviewing many potential slogans, the one that resonated with the market and management was "Tough and Trusted". This built upon Flint's long history and

reputation for getting things done, many times under difficult conditions, and never letting customers down. The Tough and Trusted slogan and related communications materials were rolled out across Flint's North American operations in September 2010, and additional steps were taken to register and copyright-protect Flint's name, logos, and new branding slogan in Canada and the United States. This in itself was significant, as Flint had never before developed a company-wide branding and communication strategy for operations in Canada and the United States.

After 100 years, Flint has built a strong reputation and a recognizable brand. The work Flint has done with Merlin Edge has helped to further capitalize on its brand to position the company with unique branding and communications messages. ■

# THE TALON



## PROFILE

### ■ LAURIE WATSON

Laurie Watson is one of Calgary's leading independent marketing communications entrepreneurs. A co-founder of Merlin Edge 17 years ago, she has grown the company into one of the city's most respected strategic business-to-business marketing and communications agencies – one that has a deep understanding of the energy business and culture. Her day-to-day focus is leading the communications strategies and creative direction for all clients.



Laurie believes that the purpose of all marketing and communications is to provide clarity around a company's value to all stakeholders, whether investors, customers, employees or communities in which a company operates. She is well-known for delivering creative solutions and innovative brand positioning for annual reports, websites, corporate profiles, presentations and other critical investor relations communications support materials. And she drives the communications and creative for a wide range of business-to-business clients.

Under her creative direction, Merlin Edge has won numerous Oil Week/ATB Financial industry awards for design and strategic communications, as well as awards in the business-to-business marketing space.

Laurie is a member of the Board of Trustees for the Canadian War Museum and Canadian Museum of Civilization and is passionate about photography, birdwatching and flyfishing.



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### Merlin Edge Newsletter Fall/Winter 2010

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