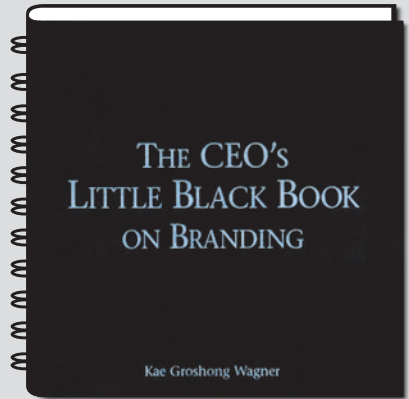


The CEO's Little Black Book on Branding

By Kae Groshong Wagner

Polaris Press, 2005: Pp. 137

(Spiral Bound)



In a competitive market, brand and price are the only determinants of buying decisions. Brand is the bulwark separating a company from the anarchy of commodity markets. A brand is an understanding. It is about the relationship between an enterprise and everyone else. It is the result of data arranged in minds to become information that leads to tactical decisions. It's a dynamic perception—as variable as the weather in March.

A business's brand illuminates all of its products and services. It simultaneously clarifies what customers, employees, vendors, and community expect. A brand is an assessment based upon reputation. Built from perception, a brand is as fragile as crystal, as perishable as strawberries, yet as potent as emotion. A brand is an intangible which is made flesh through logo and slogan. Powerful forms, shapes, and colors are married to words which bring all that people know about a company to top of mind. The I Ching says, "Whether there is food in the kitchen is not determined in the kitchen." A company's mark or logo is a trigger, but the power of its charge and the direction in which it's aimed are determined elsewhere. To mix metaphors, the mark and logo are the tail of a dog called Brand.

Kae Groshong Wagner's little handbook has become a classic for understanding the strategies for managing how markets define a company. It explains what an enterprise can do to create and protect the most powerful brand protection and positioning. Wagner appreciates that brand is built from stories about experiences and how the difficult work of 360 degree branding can herd those stories as usefully as possible into a profitable brand buzz. Wagner makes clear that, into the long run, a brand is all that a business sells.