

The brand is the business

 By [Janice Spark](#)

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The biggest issue facing marketers today is not integration, synergizing channels, or driving a 360° marketing campaign, but rather, having a brand-led business.

Marketing has gone soft. By turning strategic business issues into soft, self-serving notions, marketers are keeping themselves out of the corridors of influence. Branding and competitive differentiation are not marketing concepts that should be used to drive more sales or create advertisements. Rather they are the business strategy that should sit at the heart of an operation. A brand can only be a sustainable business advantage when it becomes the business - when it is the very DNA on which that business lives and breathes.

The truth is that marketers and advertising agencies have hi-jacked what is a business fundamental and rendered it impotent by turning it into self-serving jargon. By doing so, they have become their own worst enemies and could be alienating themselves from business decision-making. Once upon a time advertising agencies and captains of industry engaged each other freely and often to chart the course of business. Today advertising agencies are largely engaged by Marketing Directors at best and by brand managers or marketing executives. By downplaying the role of the brand within the organisation, and by divorcing themselves from the responsibility of business operations, agencies are distancing themselves from the corridors of power. This is primarily because the brand is touted as a marketing concept, rather than being viewed as the very DNA that business should be built on. Simply put - the brand is the business.

A case in point where the brand is the business, is local insurance success story, Outsurance. The entire operations and whole business is designed to deliver on Outsurance's brand value - realising the best customer service possible. The insurance company's systems are geared at extremely high service levels, while staff are rigorously trained and ongoingly measured according to key criteria. Customer retention and the building of a customer base that has the right profile and claims records is an operational imperative. By putting the brand at the heart of its operation and making it the very DNA on which its business functions Outsurance's has created significant barriers to entry and achieved enviable market growth and loyalty.

ABOUT JANICE SPARK

Janice Spark is a founding director of Idea Engineers, a company that identifies then engineers ideas to build both brands and reputation. Idea Engineers provide marketing solutions that are better than advertising and more powerful than PR. In doing so, they guarantee a return on ideas that boost the bottomline. Spark is the former Marketing Director of Adcock Ingram and General Manager of Aramis for Estee Lauder. In a career that has spanned some 18 years Spark has pioneered South African marketing innovations such as the introduction of banking products and sell-through videos. She launched 15 new brands for Adcock Ingram and took the company to local market leadership. While at Estee Lauder, Spark launched Tommy Hilfiger and DKNY into South Africa.

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