

CEP Magazine – June 2021

Leveraging branding concepts to drive an effective compliance program

Adam Balfour

Adam Balfour (balfouradam@bfusa.com) is a Vice President and General Counsel for Corporate Compliance and Latin America for Bridgestone Americas in Nashville, Tennessee, USA.

- [linkedin.com/in/adam-balfour](https://www.linkedin.com/in/adam-balfour)

Even before the pandemic hit, compliance professionals faced a challenge of how to effectively connect with and engage employees on compliance. Employees nowadays are inundated with emails and other communications (according to a 2019 *Harvard Business Review* article,^[1] the “average professional spends 28% of the work day reading and answering email”), working longer days (one study indicated an increase of 8.2% since the pandemic began^[2]), and trying to balance the new normal of working during a pandemic (I suspect my kids will interrupt my makeshift workspace at least three times before you finish reading this article). Asking today’s average employee to sit through a mind-numbing training or read endless and lengthy compliance communications/policies is not going to deliver an effective compliance program. Rather than simply providing training and communications to today’s overworked and overstressed employees, we have to find ways in which we can cut through the other noise to ensure those trainings and communications are affecting behaviors and resulting in learning and engagement.

In this article, I will share some thoughts and ideas on how using branding concepts such as brand relevance and resonance can help to engage employees in a more meaningful and effective way.

But have you read it?

How many of you are aware of Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*? I would expect that many readers are aware of its existence, but how many of you have actually *read* it? Perhaps not surprisingly for anyone who knows me, I (and I suspect a number of readers) have not read *War and Peace* (the first edition is a whopping 1,225 pages). *War and Peace* may be a great book, but asking about awareness of the book is a very different question—and likely provides a very different answer—to how many people have read it.

So what does *War and Peace* have to do with compliance? If your efforts and marketing of your compliance program only focus on making employees aware of your compliance program elements (including your code of conduct), then you are missing opportunities to really engage your employees on compliance. If 95% of employees tell you they are aware that your organization has a code of conduct, what does that tell you? It tells you employees know you have a code of conduct, but it tells you nothing about whether people have actually read it, whether they understand it, and whether they know what is expected of them in their role.

Brand relevance and resonance

Scott Bedbury is a former Starbucks and Nike brand and marketing executive and the author of *A New Brand World: Eight Principles for Achieving Brand Leadership in the Twenty-First Century*.^[3] His book has been influential

in changing how I think about compliance, especially the first principle in his book, “Relying on brand awareness has become marketing fool’s gold.” Bedbury argues that brand *strength* is more important than brand *awareness*, which is no longer considered the brand indicator that it once was. He comments that “brand *relevance* and brand *resonance*, two measures of brand strength...are much more valuable than mere brand *awareness* can ever be. Perhaps this is the greatest single change in the concept of ‘brand’ in recent years. Where we once looked at brands on a surface level, we now view them in more intimate and multidimensional terms.”

When it comes to ethics and compliance, we should not simply look at employee engagement at a “surface level”; instead, we need to view their engagement “in more intimate and multidimensional terms.” Rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach and training and communicating with all employees in the exact same way, we need to find ways in which we can help make compliance relevant and resonate for each employee and their role. How would your employees respond if you asked them, “Are you aware of our code of conduct?” compared to, “Is the code of conduct relevant, and does it resonate with you and your role?” The two questions may seem similar, but they may produce very different answers.

Making your compliance program relevant and resonate with employees is not easy and will require investments of time, creative and mental energy, and perhaps some money, but the return on investment is worth it. If we want to have an effective compliance program, we must learn how to leverage the branding concepts of brand relevance and resonance to truly connect with and engage employees. The rest of this article will share some examples of how this can be done.

This document is only available to members. Please [log in](#) or [become a member](#).

[Become a Member](#) [Login](#)