

Opinions & Papers

DEFINING A SANDWICH

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Not long ago we were in a client meeting and in the middle of the presentation a debate broke out over a single word and its meaning. Just to be coy, we'll substitute the actual word with "sandwich". Right there, among senior business heads, there was a debate about what a sandwich is.

Operations thought sandwich meant panini, research and development insisted it meant two slices of bread with different things in the middle, marketing wanted to know how their target defined sandwiches. The company's core business? To sell sandwiches.

More often than not, words get used and defined internally in different ways. The inevitable result is that those words then get used in a range of ways externally, which gives consumers an inconsistent—and therefore confusing—message. **Consistency is critical, whether you're making a great sandwich or a great brand. Getting everyone in an organization to use the same words the same way takes effort and discipline.**

Sometimes going back to elementary school lessons helps. After our clients agree to the words that best expresses their brand's promise, we actually diagram the statement so everyone understands the meaning and intent of every word. Armed with common language, everyone internally can communicate externally across all touch points consistently over and over again so that if, occasionally, sales has a hankering to sell a panini, someone is there to remind them that's not how they define "sandwich."

Getting to consistent language is not easy, but it's a necessary part of getting the sandwich you want.