

# CONNECTED

## A good reputation starts with identity

“Your reputation is a reflection of your identity,” says Peggy Simcic Brønn at the Norwegian School of Management. She is impressed by Conecto’s willingness to work with identity.

The importance of a good reputation is gaining respect from business and industry. Nevertheless, Peggy Simcic Brønn is of the opinion that many organisations start at the wrong end when trying to enhance their reputations.

“A lot of attention is focused on reputation, but what people forget is that identity is actually the important thing. Image is simply a reflection of how people interpret your identity,” says Brønn.

“When companies send out messages that fail to correspond with their identities, their reputations are affected.”

Brønn is impressed with Conecto’s willingness to work with identity. She is of the opinion that the company stands out as a good example, and that the work it has done can provide a firm foundation for building a good reputation.

“What Conecto has done is extremely interesting. It is my opinion that not many companies in Norway have gone through this process. I believe they are trying to do it, but this type of work is often done by marketing staff who think more along the lines of brand building. They focus to an enormous extent on the external aspects. But it all starts with a core. This involves digging a bit and finding out who the company actually is. That is quite a process. I am pleased to see how things are developing for Conecto,” says Brønn.

Reputation account  
Brønn has recently been involved in setting up a tool for measuring reputation (the Reputation Quotient) in Norway. The Reputation Institute, an international organization comprising some of the world’s top theorists in the field of reputation, last spring produced the first report from

surveys carried out in Norway. The report indicated a growing interest in reputation by businesses. This is due in part to the clear links between a good reputation and financial success, as well as the ability to attract a good workforce.

“If you have a good reputation, you need to do a lot of work to maintain it. It is possible to build up a reputation ‘account’. Because most companies eventually end up suffering a crisis, no matter how good they are, they can draw on this account and still have some ‘good will’ in reserve.”

Advertising agencies love to paint companies in their best light, but when it comes to the message they want to put across, just how firmly established is this in the true identity of these companies?

“People who work with marketing communication have to make sales. They have to sell the company, they have to sell products. They do not really think all that much about what lies behind it all,” says Brønn. “They work on one side of the equation only, without doing anything on the other side. But it is impossible to influence your reputation without doing anything about your identity.”

People  
“You can ‘buy’ a reputation from a PR agency, but this is a very short-term thing which cannot really be maintained. At business schools we use words like *corporations*, *the company* and *firms*, but we forget that these are all run by people! The identity of a company is actually made up of its people; a company is not a building or a concrete thing.”

According to Brønn, companies that have their own clear identity are the ones that are more likely to survive over the long term. These companies are so aware of their own identity that they do not even want to employ staff who fail to represent that identity.



“If you don’t fit the corporate identity, they might not hire you, no matter how good you are. These firms take the long-term view, they don’t have one identity one day and another the next.”

#### Practice

She makes no secret of the fact that a good reputation requires devotion and dedication. She is of the opinion that any company that fails to follow up will have problems with credibility.

“Conecto has set in motion a major process; once these things have been developed, you then have to interweave them into the organisation in its entirety. This means communicating them and reflecting them in what people do and how external parties experience the values in their contact with the company. This is a quite comprehensive process, and if

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companies are unable to stay the distance they have a major problem.”

In other words, companies that want to guarantee their existence over time have to take their own identities seriously.

Brønn has the following advice:

“Do not be influenced by what is popular. Focus on who you are. This is a difficult task; people also find this difficult to do as individuals. It takes time. Every year firms ask: ‘How should we market ourselves this year, what

kind of slogans should we use?, What can we do this year, what is new?’. This is utter nonsense, a complete waste of time and resources. Companies that have a platform from which to steer the process can adopt a long-term view.” ■ ■

## Responsibility as a “supervalue”

Responsibility is Conecto’s supervalue – with a sense of camaraderie, communication, a willingness to learn, commitment and happiness as driving forces. What advantages does this offer to our customers, our debtors and ourselves?

With responsibility as a “supervalue” (superior value), Conecto has uncovered a basic value that 1) the company has always had, that 2) underpins and reinforces the company’s vision of returning value, that 3) demonstrates our view when it comes to the ethical challenges of our business, i.e. collecting money, and that 4) provides a holistic view of Conecto’s history – “to link together”.

#### The Triangle

The triangular relationship between Conecto, its customers and the debtor illustrates how these values make us an even stronger agency by linking together the debtor and the creditor. We take on the role of “agent” between the debtor and the customer, by focusing on the responsibility for recovery, for maintenance of the relationship with the customer and for the welfare of the debtor. By

acting as an agent between these two, Conecto is actually trying to eliminate its own operations – fewer debt collection cases for the customer. This gives us the opportunity to become the company that changes the character of the industry. Responsibility also means that Conecto can become the company that helps people who are sceptical to their receivables becoming the object of debt collection.

By “eliminating its own operations”, we do not mean that Conecto will do away with the very foundation for its existence. Quite the opposite: we are able to take a leading role in moving towards more preventive work, focusing on reinforcing the relationship between Conecto’s customers and their customers. We want to continue doing the job that we are here to do: *to be the best company at returning value to our customers.*

#### Self-awareness

For the value base to be effective for us it is important for all of us working for Conecto to have had a hand in creating it and supporting it. but not only that, it is also important for us to develop our ability to use it. Our job in the future will involve making the identity concepts meaningful by living our values. We look forward to continuing this work and seeing its impact on Conecto as an organisation in the future. ■ ■

