

The Basics of Branding



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Chapter 1: What Constitutes Branding?

You may have heard something about 'branding' in regards to marketing, but perhaps you've wondered what that means exactly. Some people think branding is like positioning, but it is different. The main difference is that positioning is a fluid concept. In other words, you can position yourself at different times in different markets as different things. Branding is more set in stone- it's a hard-core recognition factor. Branding is more about the following of rules because if you don't follow those rules, things don't look the same and people won't remember you. When you put out your marketing pieces, you want to create a similar look and feel so that people remember you. And you want that similar look and feel on every thing you put out. The good thing is that you get to make the rules...colors the same, style of lettering the same, logo etc. And there is some flexibility as long as you follow the rules. You can't go too far out of bounds, but you can change some things within the frame of what others can still recognize. Branding in your marketing has to make you feel something. A technology company can't have an old style font - you might not think they were very far advanced. Branding is just like the old coat of arms that families used to have connected with their name. It would instill respect, fear, and wealth - whatever. Likewise, a country's flag gets people to feel a certain way about their country. Think about what message you want to portray. What do you want recipients of your promotion to think about you? What image of your company do you want to put out there? That is your brand. When people see you continually as one thing, they begin to expect the same from you and they get used to you.

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Chapter 2: Why Brand?

Branding is a marketing technique that has the potential to elevate your business to the top. It involves helping your customers to form a recognizable association with you. Link your business with a design, logo, slogan, and/or color and observe the positive results.

Brands create a feeling of familiarity. If customers have seen your logo, insignia, or company name, they are more likely to continue to select your product or service. Also, they are more apt to suggest them to others. Referrals through word of mouth can be an extremely powerful form of advertising.

A brand helps possible customers remember your business. People may know little about your philosophy or reputation. However, if they can recognize your brand, the chances are greater that they will do business with you. Branding creates memory in the mind of the public.

When the public remembers your brand and familiarizes themselves and others with it, they will come back. Customers are more likely to remain devoted to your business and are apt to buy further products or services from you based on the brand of the initial product with which they had success.

People are willing to pay more for products or services that they highly regard. This means that customers are likely to pass up cheaper prices with competitors if your brand has made a positive impression on them. If clients believe in your product, they will pay for it.

When you have distinguished your business through branding, the marketing has the capability of becoming so profound, that little else is necessary. Developing your brand takes time and effort, but after it has been solidified, and after customers have had the chance to identify with it, your sales can increase naturally.

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Chapter 3: Benefits of Branding

Your business needs to create a positive image in the minds of consumers. Contrary to what most people believe, branding isn't just a logo. Your businesses purpose, focus, and image all combine to create your brand. Why should you make this effort? Below are a few benefits:

*You are remembered. It's hard to remember a company with a generic name. You may not be able to distinguish their purpose and business focus. And why would you call a company if you couldn't tell what they did? Branding your business ensures consumers will know what you're about.

*You gain customer loyalty. The fact is, people build close bonds with brand identities. Consumers want quality products they can trust. So, your business should have an identity that your customers can cling to. If your company delivers great products and services and has a great brand identity, people will remember you. In addition, they will often refer you to friends and family.

You become well known. You want the people who have not done business with you to still know who you are and what you do. If they see your ads on billboards, hear them on radio, see them on television, or any other media, they will know your brand identity. And when the time comes that they need your product or service, your company will be the first to come to mind.

Consumers pay for image. We are a very brand aware society. People commonly associate brand names with quality and may only buy certain brands for that reason. If people only want one brand of a particular product, they are willing to pay a higher price. Having a great brand will make your company have a superior image and cause consumers forget about the competition.

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Chapter 4: Have You Been Branded?

The personal brand you project affects others' decisions as to your intelligence, character and ability, and determines whether or not they want to do business with you. The way you dress (and act) has a remarkable impact on the people you meet professionally and socially. This greatly affects how they treat you.

Humans think with their eyes. A UCLA study proves that 85% of all decisions are made with our eyes. That's right: the visual you have has the most impact.

If your personal brand is not professional and congruent, attractive and attracting you will be passed over - guaranteed. To be competitive, to have a greater influence on others, to attract more business and be more successful it's essential that you develop a well-thought-out personal brand.

Before you sell anything -- your product, company or service -- you sell yourself first. Shift the balance of power in your favor. When you brand yourself correctly, you are seen as more desirable and in demand. Now take large, successful companies for instance. They understand the power of "branding" a product. They spend a lot of time, money and energy to create a "brand" that is eye catching and appealing enough to sell their product through to market. They want to make sure that the buyer has a strong connection with that brand.

Now think of yourself as a company with one employee -- you. How much time, money and energy have you spent in developing a "personal brand" that is unique enough to sell through to your market? An individual who has a well-defined personal brand has more status and a tremendous advantage over the competition in the market place. With a great personal brand, you are already half sold and thus far above the competition.

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Chapter 5: Three Key Ingredients In Branding

Personal Branding can be the most influential tool for success in your self-marketing toolkit. You can identify, package and sell who you are to build a personal brand that results in business growth, influence, and income.

Here are three key things you need to develop a strong personal brand: 1. Get clear on your personal strengths, talents, values, and core area of expertise. Understand how you connect best with people. Consider what your target audience needs and wants, and then identify the value and the experience that you can deliver to meet those needs and wants.

Communicate in ways that reach into the hearts and minds of your target audience and connect with their core values and deepest desires. 2. The personal branding process is about having self-awareness of your strengths and talents, and then letting everyone know about your gifts, talents, and experience. It's about giving a clear impression of who you are, what you value, what you're committed to, and how you can be counted upon to act. Your branding statement must provide a clear, concise view of your unique set of strengths and tell why you can do it better than anyone else. You need to be able to state clearly and unequivocally why you are different than everyone else, and what services you offer that make you unique and set you ahead of your competition. 3. Consistency is one of the keys to building a strong personal brand. Be aware of being consistent in every interaction you have, both in what you say and how you respond.

Establishing a Professional Brand is absolutely critical to long term, sustainable business growth. In an overcrowded marketplace, if you're not standing out, then you're invisible. Branding your products and services will give you an edge over your competition and enhance your value to your target market.

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Chapter 6: Ten Branding Musts

Branding is not just your logo or tagline or the "look" and "feel" of your marketing communications. Branding is the sum total of your customer's experiences and perceptions of your products, services, and employees. In actuality, your brand is what everyone else thinks your company and product are - it's what people say about your company behind your back. A branding strategy is the beginning of all customer contact behavior. When the budget allows, the branding strategy can become the basis for better advertising communications such as multi-media advertising, direct mail, trade shows, and expanded public relations. The undertaking of branding may seem scary; however there is strong proof that branding is worth the effort. Listed here are some benefits of a strong brand. *Branding is what gives your company value and separates you from your competitors. *Enhanced perceived value allows for top pricing and shelters you from price competition. *Branding will provide protection in times of negative press. *A strong brand enables you to launch new products and services more quickly and cost effectively. Your brand will come to pass with or without your effort. Branding and managing a brand is tough work. Here are some no-nonsense guidelines on how to get started. *To succeed, you'll need to get everyone involved from top management on down. *Research the successful competitors. Study their communications and how they position themselves. *Study what values are most significant to customers. Develop a questionnaire and interview key customers and prospects. *Develop a strategy from the information you gathered. It must be achievable and differentiating. *Leverage brand strategy by integrating marketing communications. Check for consistency of all communications from every department. Sending a cohesive message will build brand equity. *Evaluate and measure performance. Make changes as needed but be patient.

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Chapter 7: Initial Steps of Branding Yourself

Branding is much more than just a thoughtful logo or slogan and it's more than just a unique color scheme. Below are the initial steps that need to be taken in order to start your successful brand image.

Step 1: Examine the Competition

One of the keys to creating a successful brand image is to separate yourself from your competition. You will need to know how consumers see your competition. You need to recognize how your competitors differentiate themselves from others. Also, you should know your competitor's strengths and weaknesses. Your business can benefit from knowing this information by learning from their weaknesses, and learning how to differentiate your company from the competition.

Step 2: Identify Your Strengths

Now that you know your competition's weaknesses you can begin to focus on your company's strengths. Perform a target market analysis, learn from it, and use it to your advantage. This is a useful tool to confirm your company's strengths are in fact important to your target market. Once you've realized your strengths, and what strengths are important to customers, you can think about ways to successfully market these to the public and involve them in your branding campaign.

Step 3: Know Your Customer

Learn more about the customer. Know their purchasing behavior. How often do they buy? Do they buy only during sales or promotions? Do they buy an array of products or services or just a select few? These are questions you should ask to better market to your customers. Also, know your customer's lifestyles, needs, mindsets, and attitudes. Knowing and working with these personality traits are also key to marketing success.

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Chapter 7: (continued)

Step 4: Be Your Brand

Make sure your company truly represents what your brand identifies you with. For example, if one of the traits your brand identifies your company with is politeness, be polite. This means every employee from the receptionist all the way up to the CEO needs to live your brand.

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Chapter 8: Creating a Corporate Image

For any corporation it is very important to create a distinct image in the market. This is known as Corporate Image which distinguishes the corporation from its competitors and provides a picture of it to the general public. It depicts the principles, beliefs, productivity of the company. This image is responsible for increasing the sales of the product and to achieve brand equity. Corporate image creation is a strenuous and time consuming process and is carried out by experts qualifying in perception management. Basically, the creation involves marketing experts who used various kinds of promotion methods and public relations. Since this image is targeted to attract the customers it should be highly appealing. Besides the marketing experts critics play an important role too.

The name of the corporation and its catch line should reflect its belief like Wal-Mart, which says that it sells for less. A logo should also be designed accordingly. Like the corporation FedEx has an arrow incorporated in its logo which depicts its fast and efficient service. Once the image is created by the corporation the next step is advertising and product distribution in the market. Like if the corporation creates luxury products, they should rope in big names in the advertising experts and the models to be featured in these ads should be super stars. Likewise, they should not distribute their products to every other store; instead they should target more hi-fi malls. Time to time, advertising and branding budget should be reviewed to cut down on cost and to be in-sync with the technology. This also helps in revamping the corporate image according to the fast changing demands of the consumer.

Testimonies of news papers, magazines, and labor union can deteriorate a well-created corporate image. Simplest of controversies can be exaggerated by the media and spoil the name of the company. Controversies are born by the interference of organizations related to environment, religion, crime, politics, education and charity. Government, too, is another powerful and influential organization by itself.

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Once the corporate image is created, it should be retained. It should not be like here today and gone tomorrow. This image should be reflected in all the brands and product line of the corporation. Even if one of the products isn't up to the mark, it will lead to confusion among the consumers and will hit the sales of the company. Like recently there was controversy about a particular contact lens solution of a company. It was supposed to be infecting the users with a rare disease. This not only affected the sales revenue of that particular product but also made the customers think and raise question about the authenticity of other products of that particular company.

Another company's products had hidden non-vegetarian ingredient in a vegetarian product. This led to the decrease of trust among the customers. In such a case the company should either advertise itself as a company selling non-vegetarian food or it should invest in promoting the company as vegetarian by introducing more vegetarian products. So the image of each individual product of the company makes up for the complete image of the corporation. And last but not the least, the image should be very realistic, truly representing its values and should leave a personal touch with the consumers.

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Chapter 9: Internal Branding

A brand is recognition of a company and its products. It can be in the form of logo, symbol, color or just a name. This recognition helps differentiate a company among its competitors. Creation of a brand is not just creating a logo or byline statement or a symbol. It is the creation of an experience that will make the customer want more and more of your. An experience, which can create strong positive emotions, something that can lead the customer to trust and become loyal to it. First thing that qualifies a company or product to be a brand is the ability to create emotions. A brand has to be associated with or should trigger emotions. Logos, colors, symbols, statements, advertisements and promotions are the main tools for the communication of a brand. There is yet another step in your branding process-that of creating an image upheld by your employees. Internal Branding or promoting the brand internally among employees so that they are aware of the capabilities of the company and are proud to be working for it is one of the most important branding tasks. With the help of internal branding, a new source of powering the brand comes to force. All employees are people who connect with the outside environment after office hours. All positive vibes sent out by employees to their friends, neighbors, relatives, etc creates a compounding effect on the image of the company. The pride the employee shows to be working for an organization itself speaks volume about the company. The manner in which employee behaves itself portrays or communicates something about the image of the company. Make sure all of your employees are aware of the image you want to create. The best way to do this is to go over it during the hiring process. In the end, it will save much stress and perhaps customers.

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Chapter 10: Become an Expert at Something

Establishing yourself as an expert in your field will help you gain both recognition and respect. That recognition and respect often leads to an increase in sales for your company. If people trust that you truly know what you are talking about, they will feel good about investing in your product.

A website is the best place to start. Build a professional looking site with sound and informative content and you'll have a source of expert information to direct customers to. Remember that it is okay to give away some of your precious knowledge free of charge. Offer the customer something useful up front and they will label you as a legitimate source to go to for whatever your company may offer.

Article marketing is an especially effective method to achieve that expert status because it gives you the ability to distribute a small number of articles to a huge number of content-rich sites. The more places your name pops up, the more people will be exposed to your site and product. Another way to show your expertise is through online forums and blogs. This is a bit more casual than article writing. It allows you to remain in the first person and talk candidly with interested web surfers. The conversational tone used in such settings will put many potential customers at ease.

Not only will they view you as an expert, they'll also feel connected to you as a real human being. Also, such places give customers the opportunity to ask questions and give you the opportunity to back up your product in the face of criticism. Find the right places to gain recognition. Put yourself out there and command respect through that exposure. Highlight your achievements and successes. Branding yourself as an expert is all about getting other people to recognize something about you that you already know.

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Chapter 11: Be True To Yourself

If your online marketing material stimulates an image in your mind that is just not you, likely you've been trying to model your approach after someone else or you've been using work produced by someone else without giving them the benefit of knowing you, learning your approach, sharing your ideas and interjecting your personality into the material. So, what's the solution? The solution to this dilemma is to be yourself and let your personality show through in your online marketing materials. If you are writing a blog entry in the midst of a snowstorm and it is "a bit nippy outside" don't hesitate to say so. When you let your personality shine your image will be your own, not one you have crafted that will change from day to day depending upon what you have read most recently. There's lots of talk about branding in regard to online marketing. The basic principles of branding are to decide on the image you wish to portray and what message you want to drive home. While some people could write a book on how to brand your business, there are really only a handful of factors to consider - your image, your purpose and your message. The purpose of a brand is to craft something that will stick in the minds of people and help them to remember your business. Creating and building a strong brand does not have to compromise your personality. The only real decision is whether you want to be casual or professional. In the world of online marketing, retaining your personality and your identity will go far in branding your business. You'll be much happier with the long-term effects of your online marketing if you don't try to be someone you are not. Be yourself and have fun.

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Chapter 12: How To Sell With Branding

When you think of the Coca Cola brand, what comes to mind? Does an image of a red can with words Coca Cola written in white display in your mind's eye, or perhaps a coke bottle? Likewise we must pick our niche on the internet and brand our name accordingly. Be known for doing good in 1 area before moving on to the next project. Here are the things we need:

- 1) A website that belongs to you.
- 2) Auto Responder and Opt In box. Your visitors will most likely not make a purchase on the 1st attempt and when they leave your site, you will not see them again. So do capture your visitors details with an auto responder opt in box and follow up with a series of emails. Follow up emails reinforces your brand name in the mind of your readers. Respectful persistence wins sales.
- 3) Photograph & Signature. Scan a groomed, smiling photo of yourself and your a penned signature. This adds that personal touch to let your audience know you are a real person.
- 4) Audio. Do you have a nice speaking voice? If so, combine this with your photograph and signature to humanize your website and establish rapport with your audience.
- 5) Blog. A blog can be an add-on to your main website or be used as a free alternative to a website, at least until you are generating profits. You can combine every aspect of name branding mentioned in the above points into your free blog. Update your blog at regular consistent intervals with content specific to your vision. Refrain from writing about off topic content so as to keep your message and theme consistent. One way to keep your readers posted about your content is to use RSS feeds.
- 6) A Domain name. You can register a domain name and forward it to point at your Blog. Use the domain masking feature that allows your website to have a professional look.

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Chapter 13: Increasing the Business with The Help Of Promotional Gifts

Gifts are loved by one and all. Gifts are a way of expressing gratitude and marketing gifts are given to customer to thank them and most of the customers are more than happy to receive gifts from companies they pay patronage. The thank you gifts cannot only be presented to existing customers but also to potential customers when they try a new product of the company. This would encourage them to buy other products, which will increase the company sales. This practice can be made more advantageous by making it as marketing and branding strategy, which helps in expanding business along with earning customer goodwill. To make it marketing oriented, a lot of planning should be put it in so as to not to lose its essence.

Sending promotional gifts is a means of rewarding clients to appreciate their kind cooperation thru out the years; they will make customers feel that they are valued. Flyers are discarded the moment they are received, and are seldom read. But when a person is gifted with something that he/she can use, there is a probability that they will not only enjoy it, but they will also keep it for sometime, might be for several years and until the time they have it, they will remember the company. One of the better methods is to print the name of the company on the gift. This doesn't involve any strategy and can be implemented even if there is lack of imagination. Name and brand recognition can be established by getting the logo of the company or information of the company printed on the gift. This also helps build recognition among potential customers.

Also give the customers the gifts that last long. The longer the gift lasts the longer the customer will remember your company. Gifts like pen, key chain, coffee mug, calendar, refrigerator magnets, etc. which not only lasts forever but are something that is observed and used many times a day. There are certain gifts, which can fit the budget, promote marketing and at the same time serve the purpose of gift.

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Chapter 13: (continued)

Calendars are one of the most opted gifts by small companies as promotional products. They aren't expensive and are used year round. Following them are office supplies. Stationary tub, embedded pens, sticky pads and diaries containing the logo of the company are very good gift ideas too. Desktop accessories are the next best things. Things like pen stands, paperweight are hot giveaways.

For home gifts like fridge magnets, coffee mugs and thermo-flask make ideal gifts. They, too, get noticed many times a day. The good thing about them is they can be modeled in different colors, shapes and styles and can be unique when compared to other's promotional products. And hence, they are more like collectible items. Innovation can increase the interest of the user in this regard.

Key chains are also something which is carried everywhere and they don't even cost too much. Usually people use the promotional ones to store spare keys. T-shirts and cap are a bit expensive, but are worth the investment. They are usually worn outside and people around can easily sight the company's name and logo and they function like a walking billboard.

Creativity is the key to selecting a right gift to market your and so is the money. The more the money invested, the better the gift, but the gift should be selected such that it earns maximum returns.

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Chapter 14: Promoting Your Brand

Remember the importance of branding. If you haven't already initiated a brand for your company, now might be just the time. Use these simple techniques in the promotion of your special brand

Make your brand as unique as possible. Catch the eye of the public by creating something different- something that people have not yet seen. Instead of doing what has already been done, go the opposite direction and be creative. Don't forget the legal dangers of copyright infringement related to borrowing or stealing from another firm's design.

Display stability. Take time in the development process to establish your brand and accomplish the look you really want. It's better to spend sufficient time in the beginning fine-tuning your design to the desired outcome, rather than to play with it after it's been revealed to the public. Changing your brand, and all that's involved with it, including colors, slogans, logos, and tag lines, doesn't support an image of reliability and long-lastingness

Stability should be maintained with branding. If you have integrated a brand into your company's marketing, then use it all over the place. It should appear on all of your marketing materials, business cards, web site, and printed items. The same is true for your packaging. Your brand should appear on all of your products. .

Brands are an extremely effective marketing tool. When working with your concept, consider the above to ensure the development of an effective brand.

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Chapter 15: The Loyalty Factor

What exactly is a brand? It's a question that has confounded the academics for decades and eluded the most erudite of scholars. So, coming from the trenches of the real world of branding, we've defined the term and given it a comprehensive meaning.

A brand consists of eight basic building blocks:

- The Name - The Logo (brand icon) - The Brand's Colors - The Slogan and Brand Messaging - The Sound of the Brand - The Overall Look and Feel = The Brand's Position - Packaging the Brand - The Brand Experience

A Brand is the greater sum of its parts. It is always more than just the nuts and bolts, the pieces; great brands are always the result of the whole equaling more than the sum of its parts.

Branding is about making me, the consumer or buyer, more hip, more in the "know," more cool than anybody else. We are a generation and a nation wanting to be special. We want to be richer, more beautiful, better dressed and more effortlessly gorgeous than any other generation that we know.

We want everything to mean more. We want everything to have meaning. That's why we flock to the reality shows. Why we love "The Apprentice" and "American Idol" and other top realistic shows. We crave authenticity in this age of fabrication and falsehood. We "just want to be real."

We want to be able to trust what we buy and whom we buy from. That's why Coke is still the number one brand in the world. The more we know about a brand, the more we trust it. The more we trust it, the more we buy it and continue to experience it. The more we experience it, the more loyal we become.

Loyalty is the currency that cannot be traded for dollars.

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Chapter 16: Your Ultimate Ambassadors

Brand Identity is a promise. Whether that promise involves product quality, service, price or some other variable, this helps grow a strong brand identity. This strong brand identity can place a business above its competition all by itself. But having a brand that's strong takes time, money and effort to grow. It's not as easy as just creating a logo or writing a tagline. Brand identity is the reason you give your customer to pick you instead of your competition. Successful re-branding involves "evolution," not "revolution." You must make an impact on upon your existing customers that your new brand is just a new and improved version of the same you. It's vital to not get too extreme with a re-branding effort because you could end up destroying delicate emotional ties and customer loyalty. Having a brand identity that resonates with your market is imperative, but not at the expense of the people within your company. They need to not only get it, but also be your brand's most ardent ambassadors. Do your employees believe in your company? Do they feel like they have a vested stake in its success? Companies with solid brand identities can say yes to these questions. Can yours? If not, here's some things you can do: 1. Get every aspect of your company on the same page. Get all your departments talking to each other and understanding each other. 2. Give everyone a common understanding of the company, its mission and their part in it. They should feel like they have ownership-even if they don't. 3. Reinforce brand values and behaviors. Constantly promote these fundamentals until they're second nature. Your employees will ultimately determine your success or failure. You, as leadership, must earn it. But once you do, you'll have a company that is full of happy, motivated successful brand ambassadors.