



IT CLICKS. BUSINESS AT THE SPEED OF A CLICK.

BRANDING BASICS OR BRANDING 101



Today's saturated marketplace is full of innovative products and services that are lost in a sea of messages. That's why companies that succeed build relationships with customers that transcend their products and services. This is branding!

Your brand is basically shorthand for what your company is all about to your customers. With all the volume of competing images, you need to have something that strikes a chord with your customers in a simple, concise way. Your brand creates a belief about what your company delivers to them.

The purpose of branding is to articulate your brand's promise – your promise to customers. It is a way to differentiate your company, products and services from competitors, and to provide it with a personality that is both unique and appealing to customers and other audiences. It is a multifaceted, multilayered process and discipline. It's much more than simply marketing slogans and icons.

Benefit – Well-focused and consistent attention to branding is the most effective way to compete, to rise above the noise and become a factor in your industry.

Importance – Branding has taken on a greater significance in this decade as companies now see their brands as assets – as valuable and as tangible as their factories and patents. It's the cornerstone upon which brand equity is built.



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Challenge – Managing your identity so it is an accurate reflection of your company is an ongoing process. Brand management has sound disciplines that make significant differences for how well a brand is protected and presented. It means focusing on the big picture – the brand's essence, mapping out competitors in your brand's category, identifying new obstacles or opportunities to ensure building your brand's value. Brand management is the ultimate protector of profit margins.

1.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR AN ESTABLISHED BRAND

Your brand needs to do three primary things:

- Communicate a positive, accurate and credible image of your company in terms of benefits to your target market.
- Differentiate your company from your competitors.
- Give the target market a reason to do business with you instead of your competitors.

A brand represents your commitment to sustain value over time. First, it must communicate a compelling, differentiated value proposition. Second, it must establish credibility for that value proposition in the marketplace. Failure to perform either of these, results in a weak or nonexistent brand.

Your company may have many complex services and value propositions. In order to establish distinctive brands, you must separate your brand identity from your services and brand-attach your customers at a higher level, a process much easier said than done.

Your value proposition, which is what makes you stand out from your competitors, generally will include one of these three – the best total solution (customer intimacy); lowest total cost (operational excellence) or best service/product, period (product performance).

The first step in branding is to decide what your company's value position is.

This is where your slogan comes in – it needs to be one showing best total solution. It can't be every service. It has to be short. It's a description that quickly distills the "key" promise / benefit you provide your customers.

Later on you'll need to establish your key messages / positioning statements – here's where you get to be a little more descriptive. Develop a series of short messages that express your services' functional and emotional benefits. These statements will succinctly and effectively describe your company using language that supports the brand.



TIP

To build a strong brand, you have to determine the specific components of value within your top-line value proposition, keeping in mind that different customers will value different service attributes.

2.

YOUR BRANDING STRATEGY

Although strategies differ in tactics from industry to industry, you should develop your brand along these lines –

Identify the brand – All the distinctive elements associated with your products and services must be identified. Why customers care or should care about what it is you offer and what makes it different from your competitors. This is the identity that you are creating for your customers.

Build the brand – After the distinctive elements are identified, it must be framed in succinct messages that people can understand and relate to. This will reinforce your brand.

Promote the brand – What good is a message if no one hears it? Your company must make a strong pledge to consistently market its products or services, and, over time, to solidify its identity in customers' minds.

Be the brand – The message is chosen; marketing, advertising and public relations campaigns are busy promoting it. The entire organization also must be living it. There must be a direct connection between your brand and the customer's experience – when he/she walks in your door, talks to your sales team and purchases your product or service.

3.

YOUR BRANDING PROCESS**TIP**

It's important to conduct a study and analysis of your company's image in various key markets. Develop survey internally and externally to analyze overall patterns of company's image and status.

Immediate Goal – Align your image and identity.

Phase 1 – Learn what the market's perception is of your company

Do the research –

Internal – review existing materials, interview management, conduct internal focus groups. **External** – do competitive analysis and / or an Internet survey.

Questions to include:

- How do you feel about company's overall reputation?
- What image should your products communicate and to whom?
- With which public is it most important to develop a strong image?
- How would you want your target public to describe your company?
- What are the company's major strengths?
- What are the company's major weaknesses?
- How would you like to see your products distributed and marketed?

- Would there ever be a point at which the corporation would subordinate itself visually to the individual brands?
- Do you feel that the present brand / product identities project the image you want them to? If so, how has it succeeded? If not, how has it fallen short of your communication objectives?
- What qualities should your company convey?
- Which of these qualities is most important?
- What kinds of images do you think should be explored?
- What are the positive aspects of the current company trademark? Do you think it will be effective in years to come? Should it be retained as is? Should it be modified or modernized in some way?
- Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth in your market?
- In what way do you think changes in the company image might help you to realize these growth opportunities? In what ways might a change be harmful? What kinds of changes should be avoided?
- Have you detected any changes in consumer habits with your company? Is the typical consumer getting older or younger? Are products moving up or down on the economic scale? Are young people moving toward or away from the products? Are new products needed to meet the requirement of the youth market?
- What are the differences in the market strategies of the company's competition?
- What do you consider to be the most immediate threat to the overall company image? Where do you see the business, say, ten years from now?

Phase 2 – Establish or fix your identity by developing unique brand elements

Develop the branding and positioning elements relative to your particular need and situation.

Each element strengthens the ability of your company to communicate its mission and message, as well as provides a visual relationship between your audiences and everything that is associated with your company.

Name / Signature – Create or refine how your company name is presented. It should be unique, memorable and distinctive and represented in a specific style.

Logo / Icon – Create or refine your logo, an icon that vividly expresses your brand's identity. It's a graphic image that provides a strong and recognizable element for your company.

Slogan – Create or refine your slogan, a descriptive phrase that tells customers where to place your brand in their mind's eye, and that always appears with your signature and logo.

**TIP**

Your slogan should represent a positive feeling about your business. It should take into account what makes your company different than your competitors, and also current trends and attitudes.

Slogans are words or phrases used to sum up and express the spirit or aim of a company. It's a core statement of the essence of what your company is.

A slogan is important for branding, and will become part of your identity. It's the ultimate expression for what your brand stands for, and what you strive to deliver continuously. Permanence makes your slogan effective, because customers become familiar with it. It will be used on all your marketing materials.

Slogans should be short and catchy – something that is easy to remember.

A great slogan is difficult to forget after being heard, is neither general enough that it doesn't mean anything or specific enough that it pigeonholes your business. A slogan should not be forced, artificial or contrived. A slogan should direct people to act.

Slogan versus Tagline – A slogan is very different than a tagline for an advertising campaign. A tagline is a message that can be developed for a specific period of time and to achieve a specific action.

Taglines / Positioning Statements – Develop a series of short messages that express your products' or services' functional and emotional benefits. These statements succinctly and effectively describe your company using language that supports the brand.

Additional Considerations – Consider your registered trademarks and other symbols that will be used to support your brand, such as a seal, mascot symbol, product or service symbols and identity bars for your Website.

All of your symbols and elements need unity in graphic design, this includes:

Typography – Choose the specific fonts that will be used in all your materials and applications.

Color Palette – Choose primary colors to represent your company in all materials and applications. Also, select secondary colors that will be used only as accents with the intention to provide special emphasis and flexibility in graphic design and communications.

Photography – Select the style and type of photographs, illustrations and other images that are critical to present your brand. Decide on the main imagery to use in all your communications, such as groups, individuals, environment, still life, style and lighting.

Visual Style – Recommend certain visual elements for both print and digital applications. These include elements such as – organic shapes, curves, lines, layering shapes and much more. This will create distinct and consistent visual representations of your brand.

Phase 3 – Develop company identity standard guidelines

Put together your identity and graphic standards for all applications – print, electronic / digital and communications in a manual. By consistently applying the guidelines, everyone in your company will have an important role in protecting and strengthening your most important asset – your brand.

Phase 4 – Materials

It's now time to do your advertising, marketing and public relations activities. This will include traditional and new media marketing and communications materials such as packaging, ad content, promotional specialties, tradeshow booths, literature, Website, e-marketing and many more activities as planned.

Long-term Goal – Establish a strong brand over time through consistent efforts.

Phase 5 – Ongoing

The mix of elements and environment make branding a complex and ongoing activity. It can lead to focused, consistent, powerful and cost-effective marketing performance that in turn will lead to increased market share and profits.

Generating an orderly and systematic buildup of support for your brand is important. Refining methods to meet any new objectives and suggest changes to ensure that all activities are presenting a consistent, quality image to build your brand recognition is an ongoing process.