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# Brand Identity



## The Most Influential Element

The epitome of marketing goals lies in one term, branding. Webster's dictionary defines a brand as "a class of goods identified as being the product of a single firm or manufacturer." The term 'branding iron' was not created coincidentally. In fact, the idea of a specific name or symbol showing ownership and uniqueness is precisely the way the term is used. However, a brand does not refer to an actual product. Instead, it represents an identity, a personality, or a promise. Stephen King of the WPP Group in London says, "A product is something that is made in a factory; a brand is something that is bought by a customer. A product can be copied by a competitor; a brand is unique. A product can be quickly outdated; a successful brand is timeless." So, in effect, creation of a brand does not imply the invention of new products. On the contrary, branding deals with communicating certain attributes and qualities of a product to a specific market segment. As Jim Gardner, author of an article entitled "Beware of Brand Semantics" says, creation of a brand and its identity are not built by marketers. Instead, 'branding' is done in the minds of individual customers when they attach value and personality to products. These characteristics are factors in differentiating the products from each other.

Morgan Anderson Consulting wrote an article entitled "How Marketers are Refocusing to Protect and Enhance their Companies' Brand Assets". In it, it states, "Consumers don't buy a product blind. In fact, consumers don't buy the product at all, but rather the brand and all its associations in life and legend." The role of advertising in the brand creation process is pivotal. Its task is to promote the corporate brand to the market in an attempt to sway the peoples' attitudes. By focusing more on the quality and identity of the brand, the customers will be less persuaded by price competition. In this facet, advertising's goal is to impact the corporate reputation. It relays messages to customers about the company that makes the product, painting a picture in the customers' minds of an organization that is reliable in making quality merchandise. Once prospects have formed an alliance with a certain company, they will continue to buy its products. This is the ultimate goal since it leads to an impact on the company's bottom line.

To show how advertising directs strategies toward improved margins for a company, it is logical to follow the steps in the process. At the least, advertising leads to brand awareness. At this point the prospects learn about the brand, its benefits, and its products. This will hopefully bring them to try the commodity and compare it to similar products. From this point, the customers perceive the relative quality of the item and maybe even begin to develop a preference for the brand. When they have started using a certain brand, and established it as their favorite, it has obtained some worth in their eyes. The product has established value for them, whether it is measured in price or quality. This stage leads to premium pricing and/or increased market share. Both of these guide the company toward improved margins. This sensible process shows just how advertising can be profitable for a company, but the way in which it is done is also very important.

When making any advertisement, it is important to observe the creative guidelines of the brand promise. When these items are not in place, it is very probable that the advertisement will not be successful. First, the ad itself should be attractive. In order to attract the customer into spending a minute to read or hear about the product, the advertisement must have a high degree of visual magnetism. When this is not implemented, the prospect will not even notice what the advertisement is endorsing. Having worked hard to create an attention grabbing display, the advertisement strives to keep its audience's attention. This can be done by explaining its advantages to the customer in an easy-to-read manner. By clearly informing the prospects how they will benefit from the particular product, they will be more easily influenced to buy it. Overall, when customers do not receive the message that the company intends to communicate through the advertisement, they will be lost.

Another key to creating a successful advertisement is to focus on the people. Selecting the right audience is the most essential part of this process. "Once you know your target, you can add something to the brand and make it a part of [people's] lives," states vice-chairman and chief creative officer at Leo Burnett Worldwide, Michael Conrad. Before delivering any message it is necessary to know for whom it is intended. After this is understood, further steps

can be taken to win those people over. One step is inviting the customer into the scene. This can easily be done by sharing information with them, or telling them how they can benefit from using the product. Talk to them "person to person," and attempt to begin a relationship with them. Avoid sounding like a distant and intellectual company, but instead strive to sound amiable. This will cause the prospects to feel more comfortable with your company and aid them in comprehending the message. Furthermore, by clearly defining the target market, a company will be able to concentrate solely on the tactics that should be used to influence those people. Instead of trying to reach the greatest amount of people, the goal should be to persuade the largest number of people in the target group.

Directly tied to the product, the copy of the advertisement should be the pivotal link between an interested prospect and a satisfied customer. Present the product proposition in a logical sequence. If one point does not lead to another, most likely the customers will not understand what message is being conveyed to them. In addition, a successful advertisement should promise a reward. This does not have to be more than the benefit of the product, but should be clearly stated. In addition, the emphasis of the advertisement should be on the service of the product; what it can do for the customer, and not on the source. By first creating a desire for the product, and then offering a way for it to be fulfilled, prospects will believe that the company offering the solution is the best in its field.

Finally, the last criteria for a successful advertisement is related to the company itself. The ad should always reflect back on the company's character in a positive light. A brand is more than just the product; it is attitude, credibility, and loyalty. By being true to the soul of the brand these positive qualities will be reinforced and strengthened.

It is as important to pick the right medium to convey the message as the message is itself. For the focus of this article, the medium discussed will be magazines. After having determined the target audience, research must be done to determine the target market's preferences. Specifically important is their magazine of choice. To be effective with an advertisement, a company must select the magazine that the customers and prospects prefer the majority of the time. Once this is discovered, further movement toward delivering the message to them is

possible. Statistics show that the leading magazine relays a message to 66% of the target group. Based on the law of diminishing returns, the second magazine reaches 20% of the people. The third, fourth, and fifth publications reach 7%, 4%, and 3% respectively. This data shows the benefit of advertising in the most popular magazine.

One other consideration in choosing the most effective delivery system for a message is to exploit its strengths. The competitive triple threat is a term used to define the combination of ad frequency, ad position, and ad size. When a company determines the best ratio of these elements, the advertisement is boosted toward success. Based on the fact that humans tend to forget 90% of what they learn from a message only thirty days after hearing it, frequency is the key. By continuously refreshing the audience's memory, they will be more likely to remember the message. The fact remains, as exposure increases, retention improves and awareness expands. Position of an advertisement is also very important. Though there is not one reliable page in a magazine that always points to success for an ad, a constant position is beneficial. This is the reason that companies may choose the same pages to display their ads on in each magazine issue. The readers of the magazine can rely on the fact that a certain company's ad will be on the back cover, or the first page for example. Ad size is also important. This can be an attribute that proves successful in attracting attention. However, ad size does not come before position in terms of importance. In finding the right blend of these three elements, the magazine can be used to its highest potential, and the advertisement will be successful.

The prime element branding attempts to acquire is a relationship with the customer. In his article, "Building Relationships in Business to Business," Richard Gerstman lists five advantages of such an affiliation. First, brand relationship reduces a company's dependence on costly, elusive product superiority. "Even if you have a superior product, you won't have the advantage for long," states James Heckman of Lippincott & Margulies, a brand identity consulting firm. The fact is, the highest quality product could be replaced immediately if something better came along. Staying at the top is costly and precarious.

Gerstman's second advantage is that brand relationships provide added value to help customers in navigating

categories. If a customer has bought a company's products in the past, they are linked with the company. If performance of the product meets their expectations, chances are they will continue to do business with them. When shopping for a different product, they might first look to those created by the same company. The perceived quality of the product reinforces the messages delivered by the organization. However, when the product does not live up to customers' expectations, they will most likely look elsewhere in the future. "[Companies] can spend millions on brand-building ads, but the perception from an inconvenienced [customer] is indelible," say Jim Gardner.

A third reason to establish brand relationships is because they help differentiate products in parity categories. When all the products are very similar in a certain classification, every chance to flaunt the differences could prove to be a profitable opportunity. Don E. Schultz, author of *Integrated Marketing Communications* shows this to be accurate. "In a parity marketplace, the only real differentiating feature that a marketer can bring to consumers is what those consumers believe about the company, product, or services and their relationship with that brand." If the choice arises for a customer to choose between doing business with a friend or stranger, it is likely that person will turn to the acquaintance.

A fourth convenience to brand relationships is that they protect investment. Once an alliance between a company and its customer has been formed, loyalty is strengthened. According to Morgan Anderson Consulting, "What drives profitability is the behavior of loyal brand users. What drives their behavior is the perceived value of the brand to them: the sum total of all their impressions of, experience with and exposure to the brand." This cushions the venture from a competitor's lowering of price. Dave Stewart, a professor of marketing at the University of South California at Berkeley says, "Part of reinforcing a brand image is suggesting that you may need to pay more to get superior performance." The added quality of the product is what the brand stands for, and what keeps the customers returning. When customers recognize a product as being the best in its class, they will not compromise on quality in order to save money.

The final application of establishing brand relationships is the creation of long-term customers as opposed to one-

time sales. Jim Gardner, in his article, wrote that many companies focus on positioning as their sole branding technique all the while ignoring the more important process of building positive company perceptions. That is the difference between creating good feelings at that moment and creating a lasting relationship of good feelings with the customer. If the company makes a customer feel good at the time of the purchase, and then that same person goes home and discovers the product is unsatisfactory, the company will lose a customer. However, by sustaining a friendship with customers, the organization will continue doing business with them even if a product is disappointing. A relationship built on trust and experience will keep the customers coming back.

There are a couple formulas that should be remembered when dealing with issues of branding. First, the message is the summation of both brand promise and corporate personality. Though tied with the product, the message always incorporates known brand characteristics and reflects back on the company. And second, the audience is a combination of the best customer profile and market priority. By focusing on the most promising customers, the company will be pointed toward success. Knowing what both the message and audience mean when beginning a branding strategy will allow the company to accurately target the most promising segment using the best message.

Referring to the Internet, senior vice president of marketing and business development at E-Loan Inc., Joe Kennedy says, "I believe that changing into an industry with a totally different dynamic probably offers the greatest opportunity to learn and grow as a marketer and, ultimately, the greatest opportunity to contribute in a big way." Indeed he is right. E-Business is opening new doors that had previously been closed to marketers, allowing them the chance to expand their businesses. It is a completely different venue, and should not be treated the same way traditional marketing companies are. In an article appearing in "Marketing News," Michael Krauss explains, "We don't feel that the same people who develop your advertising should be developing your web site; the issues of copy and look and feel and getting into a consumer's mind are different from information architecture, design and content strategy. We also don't believe that those people are the best people to do your e-mail and relationship marketing."

What worked before does not necessarily work now. A different perspective on the marketplace must be held when transferring companies to the Internet. The organizations must keep an open mind, and be susceptible to change or else they will not succeed in the new venue.

Though admitting their differences, Kennedy points out two main similarities between the industries. First, any company depends on creating a strong bond with its customers through brand awareness. "(With businesses) on the Internet, branding becomes more important, because the switching effort is so low and (the) proliferation of options is great." The other similarity relates to customer service. Both industries seek to transform negative customer experiences into positives. They try to change negativity into satisfaction and repeated interactions.

The most notable difference between Internet and traditional marketing says Kennedy, is the retailing distribution service channel. On-line, companies form networks of alliances allowing users to travel from site to site, even through different divisions, with ease. "Those alliances and relationships, and the potential for moving customers from one site in one category to another site in another category, are part of the 'new world.' That doesn't really exist to the same extent in a non-e-commerce world--in the 'old world.'"

In an article named "David.coms Challenge Goliath Marketers," writers from "Marketing News" approach a situation that is inevitable. It tells the story of Douglas Spink, a young entrepreneur and founder and CEO of Timberline Direct. He mortgaged his house to pursue a dream and created a web and catalog based company on the Internet. It became very profitable and larger marketing firms began to see it as a serious threat. Eventually, Spink sold his company for over five million dollars to G.I. Joe's. This situation is representative of emerging e-businesses. They allow the same benefits as traditional markets and offer more. Spink finishes his story by giving his formula for success in e-business. The first steps deal with customers. He says to live your customers' lifestyles and build a brand reaching their souls. Though easier said than done in some cases, the point here is to start a relationship with your customers. Find out their desires, and establish a brand that meets their needs. Secondly, believe in your product and pay attention to details. Commitment is the key here. Help

customers develop a brand identity for your company; and allow its message to penetrate every business interaction. Finally, turn your sights inward. Create a buyer driven corporate culture; always put the customer first. Hire great, dedicated, and creative people. Put an obsessive-compulsive at the helm in order to ensure everything will run smoothly. Ultimately, trust your own counsel. Do not let doubts arise, but always be confidently focused on the customer and you will find success.

Branding is one of the most influential marketing tactics. After creating a loyal following of customers, a company can capitalize on their allegiance. An effective brand also focuses back on the company. Therefore it is necessary that the credibility and quality of the company are emphasized through the brand. This continues to be the theme when moving operations toward on-line business. Continue with solid branding strategies, and your company will be successful.