



## Branding

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers.

Therefore it makes sense to understand that branding is not about getting your target market to choose you over the competition, but it is about getting your prospects to see you as the only one that provides a solution to their problem.

The objectives that a good brand will achieve include:

- Delivers the message clearly
- Confirms your credibility
- Connects your target prospects emotionally
- Motivates the buyer
- Concretes User Loyalty

To succeed in branding you must understand the needs and wants of your customers and prospects. You do this by integrating your brand strategies through your company at every point of public contact.

***Your brand is the sum total of their experiences and perceptions, some of which you can influence, and some that you cannot.***

A strong brand is invaluable as the battle for customers intensifies day by day. It's important to spend time investing in researching, defining, and building your brand. After all, your brand is the source of a promise to your consumer. It's a foundational piece in your marketing communication and one you do not want to be without.

## Determining Your Brand's Objectives

Critical to effective brand management is the clear definition of the brand's audience and the objectives that the brand needs to achieve.

What are the objectives that you hope to achieve with your brand?

Your brand should be comprised of the company personality, image, core competencies and characteristics. The impressions that you make as well as the words people will use to describe your company to others, are the basic framework of your brand. With a strong brand you build credibility, have more influence on your market, and motivate customers and clients to purchase from you.

To determine your brand objectives ask yourself the following question:

- What is it that you want your brand to do for your company?
- What do you want others to know and say about your products or services?

Sample objectives may include:

- Being recognized as a company that cares for its customers well being
- Having the perception as a technology leader
- Gaining a specific number of new clients in the next year
- Positioning your company as an industry leader in

You will find that by defining your objectives with it is easier to develop a plan of action to achieve those objectives. By defining your objectives you are able to map out a plan on how to achieve those objectives. And these activities will reinforce your Brand. Say for example your objective is to position your company as an industry leader. How can you go about doing this? You could:

- Have members of your team speak at Trade Shows
- Schedule lectures at professional group gatherings within your industry
- Write and publish articles in newspapers, magazines, or online media

Once you've determined your objectives the next step is to build and develop your brand strategy by listing out how, when, and what you are going to do to accomplish and meet your brand objectives.

Use the questions above to determine your brand objectives. List each objective and map out how you plan to accomplish and succeed in meeting those objectives.

### **How to Define Your Brand?**

This is the first step in the process of developing your brand strategy. By defining who your brand is you create the foundation for all other components to build on. Your brand definition will serve as your measuring stick in evaluating any and all marketing materials and strategies. You will begin this process by answering the questions below.

1. What products and/or services do you offer? Define the qualities of these services and/or products.
2. What are the core values of your products and services? What are the core values of your company?
3. What is the mission of your company?
4. What does your company specializes in?
5. Who is your target market? Who do your products and services attract?
6. What is the tagline of your company? What message does your tagline send to your prospects?

7. Using the information from the previous steps create a description or personality for your company that represents your products or services in just 1 or 2 sentences. What is the character like? What qualities stand out? Is the personality of your company innovative, creative, energetic, or sophisticated?
8. Use the personality that you created in the previous step and consider how it relates with your target market that you defined in Step 5. How does that personality react to target audience? What characteristics stand out? Which characteristics and qualities get the attention of your prospects. Is there a connection that can build a relationship between you and the target audience?
9. Review the answers to the questions above and create a profile of your brand. Describe your company's personality or character with words just as if you were writing a biography or personal and be creative. This will be the core of your branding activity going forward.
10. You should incorporate the characteristics that make up your company's personality – Brand, in every aspect of your business.

## **Brand Packaging**

Branding is your identity in the marketplace, is yours saying what it should? Your company image is all about the appearance of your packaging. What is your company image saying to the marketplace?

It's important to realize that packaging always either has a negative or positive influence on the purchaser. A negative impression can detour a potential customer, just as a positive reaction can influence a customer to buy. A time to pay special attention to your packaging is when you are in the launch of a "new" brand.

How can you package your brand so that it is an integral part of your business and represents a strong identity? Packaging can be judged and represented by the following common business tools:

- business cards and stationery
- web site
- answering system
- email address

What image are you putting across with these business tools that you use every day? What are they saying about your company? Take a few moments and let's look at each one of these.

What are your business cards and stationery saying? Are they saying we are strong, we are confident, and we can succeed in helping you? Or does it reflect an image that says we are flimsy, our dynamics are minimal, and we will try but we cannot guarantee continuity?

What does your web site say about your company? Does it reflect professionalism, clarity, and show them that you respect and care about them? Or does your web site confuse viewers or project an unorganized image of your company and your product or services? Can potential customers clearly and easily understand what you can do for them and the benefits to them of doing business with you?

What does your answering system and call return policy say about your company? Does it say we are here to help, eager for you business and will do what it takes? Or is it putting across the message that you are too busy to cater to new clientele?

Does your email marketing reinforce your branding message? Does it reflect the professionalism and knowledge that your website and personal interactions project? Email campaigns are an excellent way to demonstrate your company's core values and competencies. If they are not focused or don't provide useful information and aren't delivered on a consistent basis this is the wrong message to be sending.

What does your email address say about your company? Does it suggest your role in the company, is it easy to remember, and does it say something about you and your business? Or does it project a meaningless or generic emptiness?

As you can see all these things speak volumes about your image and they either strengthen or weaken your brand. Your image is all in the packaging. Would potential clients take a second look or is your message getting lost? Clients and customers will make assessments of your company based on these things and while not always conscious, that customer appraisal says much about your business, your attitude and your priorities.

### **What Role Does Your Logo Play in Branding?**

When I speak about branding, it's not uncommon for people to mistake their logo as their "branding". Your logo is only one piece of your branding strategy. Your logo is a symbol that can provide consumers with instant and powerful brand recognition of your business and the services or products that you offer.

Before beginning the process of logo creation be sure that you have developed your brand strategy. Why? Your logo is like a small ad for your company, without the strategy behind it a logo can put across the wrong message and in return weaken your strategy. You want to keep your brand message consistent to help increase consumer recognition.

How do you know when you are ready to move to the process of having your logo created?

- The mission of your logo is to portray the values and goals of your company. Make sure that these are clearly established before designing your logo.
- Be clear about the message you want your brand to convey so that your logo can clearly reflect that message. You must have a strong association between your brand and your logo. Remember it is only one piece of your branding strategy.
- Your logo should reflect professionalism and growth no matter how small your company is.
- If you are designing your logo in-house to save money be sure to market-test your efforts.
- Make sure that the logo you select is not dated but can be used effectively year after year. Keep in mind it is how consumers will recognize your company.

The conclusion of the role your logo plays in your branding strategy can be summed up in the following statement.

Confident branding and a strong branding strategy uses design to communicate a message that attracts the target audience that you want to attract - a message that creates confidence in your brand while differentiating between you and your competitors. Does your logo fulfill this mission? If your answer is no it may be time to consider strengthening your brand strategy and looking at a new logo to re-position your company.