

AVOID MARKETING MAYHEM:

ESTABLISH YOUR BRAND VISION

People have choices about from whom to buy. Who do they choose? They choose persons or companies that offer the highest potential benefit and the lowest potential risk. How do they know which person or company offers the best balance of these factors? They don't *know*. Largely, they make a guess ... based on their instinct, beliefs and/or impressions. They purchase, that is, largely on our "brand".

What is a Brand?

A "brand" is simply a word used today to describe what people think about you and your company. What they "think" includes explicit and implicit feelings, impressions and beliefs. Examples include "Serious", "Smart", "Dependable", "Assertive", "Rude", "Incompetent", "Rugged", "Too Expensive", "Cheap" and "Cool."

Do you Have a Brand?

Every person and every business has a brand. For your business, its brand is created with each exposure others have to you, including your business' service, materials, products, messages, employees, logo, tag line, marketing materials, products, performance, stories, phone answering skills, website, word-of-mouth, building appearance, newspaper articles, etc., etc. As such, the marketplace will create your brand, with or without your thoughtful crafting. But, given the importance, why would you leave it to chance?!

It All Starts with Vision

A Brand Vision determines how you want to be perceived in the market. It's your business "personality" and the core values you build into your business. A Brand Vision is especially important for small companies that don't have the resources to support a major brand awareness campaign. Small companies with a clear brand strategy that is supported by their business processes and communicated by everyone in their company can develop a strong brand presence.

Benefits of A Strong Brand Vision

The key advantages to having a clear brand vision:

- Clear and consistent messages in the market -- whether presentations, print media, or electronic communications and web site
- Elimination of extra resources required to support multiple brand messages and production of redundant materials
- Alignment of your business processes to deliver on customer expectations
- Reduction of costs for design and production of marketing materials (print and electronic)

Failure to align your operations with your brand promise can render expenditures worthless. A pretty logo doesn't make up for a rude receptionist.

The ABC's of good branding

In crafting a Brand Vision, bear in mind three key elements of good branding practices:

- A:** Your Brand Vision must be Appropriate for your target market. You need to understand your customers' expectations and values.
- B:** Your Brand Promise must be Believable by your customers. If you promise to be the "fastest" or the "best" in the business, can you really deliver it?
- C:** You must implement your Brand Vision with Consistency and Clarity. "Good branding is boring!" The only way you will be able to influence people to remember you is by repeatedly using the same images and messages.

Your Brand is your Personality

First impressions are important – whether of you personally or your company. Statistics show that within a few seconds of meeting another person for the first time we form our opinions of them. The same thing happens with your company. How you present your company to potential clients is as important as how you present yourself.

Being able to deliver on your brand promise requires that your employees know not only what the logo is and what documents should look like, but also what the company really stands for. This is why a Brand Vision is so vital. It defines not just your logo, but the personality of your company. It takes in to account how you want to be perceived – emotionally and rationally – by your potential customers.

Know Your Audience

Part of creating a brand vision encompasses understanding who is your target market, what are their expectations, and what are the values that shape their buying decisions. Only by understanding who your customers are can you develop an appropriate brand vision.

There are two facets to your brand personality: Explicit and Implicit. The explicit parts of your brand are the things that you actively say and do to promote it – the content of your marketing materials, your web copy, and your press releases. These should be crafted to promote your key messages and, more importantly, should directly address questions that customers ask.

The Implicit parts of your brand are more subliminal things that people pick up on. For example, *how* is your message delivered? Does the *style* of your presentations and personal communications support your brand promise or detract from it? Do the colors and images you use elicit the right kind of emotional response from your customers? For example, if you are in financial services, it's not a good idea to use red ink in you logo and business cards.

Aligning Business Process with the Brand Promise

The implicit aspect of brand awareness is often overlooked but a clear, well-defined brand platform can raise awareness about these more subtle points. Your brand platform assists employees to understand that their actions can impact the market perception of the brand as much as the materials they use to promote the company.

Having a clear brand platform demands a cross-organizational implementation. It has no value if it is not implemented consistently by everyone in the company. All interactions with your company should reflect the personality of your brand. Every conversation, correspondence, presentation, sales

pitch, and fax needs to carry the same corporate messages within a common “look and feel”. Even a clear message can lose its effectiveness if not delivered and followed up in a manner that supports the customer’s expectation.

This article is the second of a nine-part article series on branding called *The ABC’s of Small Business Marketing* developed in conjunction with “The Business Owner” newsletter.

May-June 2004 Issue: *Your Marketing Message: Back to the Drawing Board*

[July-Aug '04 Issue: *Avoid Marketing Mayhem: Establishing Your Brand Vision*](#)

Sept-Oct '04 Issue: *Logo and Look: Selecting the Visual Elements that Support Your Brand Vision*

Nov-Dec '04 Issue: *Tag Lines and Ad Copy: What You Say Should Support Your Brand Vision*

Jan-Feb '05 Issue: *Guided Missile Marketing: Selecting Mediums with Maximum Payload*

Mar-April '05 Issue: *Marketing for Dummies? Build in Quality Control*

May-June '05 Issue: *Master Your Marketing: Monitoring and Feedback Enable Continuous Improvement*

July-Aug '05 Issue: *Creative Creatures: Working with Marketing, PR and Ad Professionals*

Sept-Oct '05 Issue: *Win the Marketing Game: Be Proactive or Perish*

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