

BUILDING YOUR BRAND INTO YOUR CORPORATE DNA

There are clear benefits for small businesses who “actively make brand building part of their strategic plans ... and develop and control brand strategy inside the organization.”

Joachimsthaler, 1994

Today’s customers are choosier than ever before. Customers in today’s marketplace are better informed and more connected than at any time in the past. They can readily access information about products and services through the internet. They can easily compare product functionality, reliability, prices, or any number of other attributes. They can even quickly perform informal on-line surveys about the experiences others have had with a company, product, or service. Customers are no longer worried about obtaining a reasonable product at a fair price; they want just the right product at the best price. And they keep each other informed.

Creating a strong Brand Presence in this new marketplace is now more critical than ever before. This has not gone unnoticed by the business consultants, publishers, and the press. The number of books and articles appearing on topics relating to the importance of branding, who should brand, how to brand, and what to brand is increasing rapidly.¹ [Cameron, 2004]. Yet, without an audience for these materials, they would not be written, distributed, and purchased.

The structures of our commercial enterprises as well as the relationships among them are radically changing. The rapid penetration of the digital computation and communication technologies are causing this change. The phenomena of powerful desktop computers and their myriad applications enable individuals to do tasks once done by separate departments. The Internet (or World Wide Web) now enables individuals to easily gain access to information that was previously difficult to obtain and to quickly communicate with others who were previously difficult to reach.

Creating business processes that successfully exploit these technologies is critical to building the infrastructure, or Brand Platform, needed to implement a brand that will thrive in the emerging marketplace. To build a strong brand presence in this new environment, concepts that have previously remained fuzzy and used by a few, must now be carefully formalized, clearly articulated, standardized, widely disseminated, easily understood and used by many. The key is to create business processes that enable the brand values to be implemented by members of the company. These business processes are the ‘Corporate DNA’ and the genetic code is captured in the Brand Platform. Thus, a well-defined, easy to use Brand Platform is now essential to establishing and maintaining a strong Brand Presence in this new fast-paced, information rich marketplace.

Brand Platform

To effectively implement a brand, a set of guidelines that govern all aspects of the Brand: visual, semantic, perceptual, and implementation are needed. They must contain the Brand Promise, the Brand Image, the Brand Message, the Brand Strategy, and means used to promote your brand. These guidelines are known as the Brand Platform.

¹ See Appendix 1 for chart showing trend.

Why Develop a Brand Platform

A clear, well defined brand platform enables your external communications to be coherent expression of your business strategy. Internally it helps to guide corporate resources in the same direction and eliminate redundancy and confusion. It 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. Even an elegant logo and a clear message can lose their effectiveness if not delivered and followed up in a manner that supports the customer's expectation.

A clear brand vision and a brand platform that supports it enable you to:

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

Not aligning your brand implementation with your corporate strategy, can negatively impact your brand value. If customers expect to be treated with respect (and they do), a pretty logo won't make up for a rude help desk.

Being able to deliver on your brand promise requires that your employees know what your company stand for, not just what the logo is and what documents should look like. This is why a Brand Platform is so important. 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 logically – by your potential customers.

What goes in a Brand Platform

All too often the Brand Platform is thought of as simply the Brand Guidelines that is a set of specifications that go into great detail about the look of the logo and other materials, but leave out other critical aspects of the brand. Having a detailed specification about how to implement the look of the brand is necessary, but not sufficient for the Brand Platform.

The brand platform must capture the personality of your company. It must capture your business vision, clearly articulate the messages you want your customers to remember, contain guidelines for behaviors when interacting with customers, suppliers, partners, etc. For more detailed information about what goes into a brand platform and the steps to creating one see [Wilcox, 2004].

The brand platform needs to be somewhat flexible. As markets evolve, aspects of your brand will have to change. It can be very expensive to undo the damage once a company has become known in the marketplace as dated or out of touch [add something about negative perceptions]. Often this flexibility is realized by associating a characteristic or property of products or service with your brand. For example safety, reliability, performance, clean restrooms, or a particular return policy.

As an exercise in determining aspects of a brand, consider a number of major companies, and aspects of their brand – how their vision is represented in messages, images, and behaviors. What happens when the message is not consistent with the behavior of executive in the company, or with interactions you've had with the company? Often comparing companies in the same market sheds light on critical aspects of each company's brand.

Who Uses the Brand Platform

Many businesses are coming to recognize that every part of their organization must be focused on the delivery of its ultimate product or service. "We are all marketers now."

Peter Drucker 2002

All interactions with your company should reflect the personality of your brand. Every correspondence, presentation, sales pitch, and fax need to carry the same corporate "look and feel". Thus, everyone must take ownership of the implementation of the brand. They must have access to the Brand Guidelines as well as the tools to implement them as needed. To determine who must use the brand platform, simply look at all the touch points your company has with customers and potential customers, partners, suppliers, the press, or any other person outside your company.

With the ubiquitous nature of desktop publishing and the "do it yourself" nature of business communications today, everyone is involved in creating "branded" materials whether an engineer, the CEO, or a salesperson. Having a clear brand platform has no value if it is not implemented by everyone in the company. The brand platform must also be made available to everyone within your company. Ideally, it should be easily accessible through your company's network. Thus the company's information technology system must support the Brand Platform.

What do Users Need to Effectively Use the Platform

Successful companies base themselves around fixed core values, but at the same time, adapt to a world that is in constant motion. The key is to understand the difference between sacred and the unsacred, between what should never be changed and what can be changed."

Gary Hamel 2002

Once the distinct groups of users of the Brand Platform have been identified, the next step is to determine what each group actually needs from the Brand Platform. The answers to some simple questions will shed considerable light on this. For each group, ask questions such as:

- Which aspects of the brand do they represent?
The senior executives, sales, public relations, and marketing teams are the primary people representing the company. However, customer service representative that answers the telephone needs a clear set of messages, and well defined procedures for how to handle specific situations. If this person also has a way to log customer complaints, things customers dislike can be systematically addressed or not addressed. An engineer may represent the company in standards bodies, at conferences, or as technical support for the sales team. Anyone who answers the telephone must know how to do it appropriately, just as anyone with email access needs to understand the important role email now plays in corporate communications.
- How are they expected to behave?
Everyone's behavior needs to be compatible with the core values. If your company stresses state of the art technology, then your engineers need to be technology wizards. If your company's edge is its good working relationships in partnerships, then your staff needs to work well with others.
- What do they need to perform appropriately?
Most importantly, each person needs to know what is expected of them. They need to know who to ask for help. They need to know where to find the necessary resources. For example, if your company places a high value on customer service, then customer service representatives need to know this so that they can properly handle situations as they arise. If you pride yourself on reliability of your products, then your engineers, manufacturing team,

and quality control folks all need to know this so that they can make the necessary tradeoffs among competing factors. Management needs to make the time to ensure the company's core values are understood by everyone.

- What messages do they need to deliver?
Beware that messages can be either explicit or implicit. Explicit messages are what is actually said and done. Implicit messages are created by the context, presentation, or behaviors around the message. For example, if your materials contain typos you deliver the message that you are somewhat careless.
- Do they need access to images that represent the company? (packaging, presentations, ads, documents, etc all contain such images)
Today, members of the sales team, engineers, and management often create their own materials. They all need access to the images and messages that are used to represent the brand. Unfortunately, all too often they have received no training in the basics of design, the use of the software, or even how to write such materials. They also may not understand the importance of creating a clear, consistent image. Thus, it is important to make it easy to access and use the correct images. It is also important to discourage the use of random images, in particular generic clip-art that detracts from the desired image.
- Are there any policies or procedures that will aid them in fulfilling the brand promise?
Such policies should make everyone accountable for maintaining the value of the brand. Example policies might be: Every presentation is read by someone familiar with the brand guidelines, before it is given; all material posted on the corporate web-site must be approved by the brand manager; or every new employee is mentored by someone familiar with the brand implementation.
- Are there tools that will aid them?
Good templates for the creation of presentations and documents will greatly enhance their quality and consistency. A lot can be done to create distinctive materials by providing a small library of clip-art that is consistent with the brand image. On-line materials that can be accessed over the internet are also extremely useful. Scripts for telemarketers ensure that a consistent message is delivered.
- Is there training that will enhance the realization of the brand?
Training can include techniques for dealing with difficult people, efficiently and effectively using software packages, understanding the brand strategy, the impact of maintaining the brand, the importance of good e-mail etiquette, project management, and leadership. All too often training is cut when budgets get tight.
- What needs to be done to monitor compliance with the brand guidelines?
Simple questions and exercises such as:
Question:
What does your Brand look like, in all its forms? Think beyond the logo! Do your presentations, documents, signs, faxes, ads, etc. capture the appropriate look and feel for your brand? Do your materials stand-out from your competitors? Remember: whether you like it or not, your complete image is what's important.
Exercise 1:
Gather a set of all your marketing materials. Lay them out on a large table. Do they all look like they came from the same company?
Exercise 2:
Get a set of your competitors' materials. Lay them out on a large table along with your materials. Do your materials "stand out"? [Cameron, 2003]
will provide insight into how effectively your brand is implemented.

Answering these questions for your service desk, sales team, senior executives, and marketing team will enable you to identify the systems needed to consistently implement your brand.

What Can Leaders Do to Instill the Importance of Using the Brand Platform

Ownership of the brand is the responsibility of the head of the company. *Everybody in your company should take ownership of your brand – starting from the top down. Management should set an example for all employees by owning the brand image, providing guidelines, and train in the use of the brand, and then holding all employees accountable for proper brand management [Cameron, 2003].*

Living the brand must be exemplified by the behavior of the senior executives, not just articulated by them. Once members of your company see that the senior executive values adherence to the brand guidelines, they will place more value on their own compliance with the guidelines. If they do not see senior management taking the implementation of the brand seriously, they will not take implementing the brand seriously.

Senior management needs to appoint a Brand Manager. *One person or team inside the organization should have the responsibility for the brand. The charge is to create a strong, rich, identity and to make sure that the implementation groups, whether inside or outside the company, understand that identity. When alternatives to mass-media advertising are driving the brand-building process or playing a substantial role, it is particularly important to have a champion with the ability, authority, and incentive to ensure that the brand identity is being delivered consistently across multiple media. [Joachimsthaler, 1994].*

Senior management needs to spend the time to educate everyone in the company about the value of delivering on the brand promise, and maintaining the brand image. Few people recognize the value that a strong brand presence brings to a company. Once this is made clear to them, and they recognize that increasing or decreasing the value of the brand can impact their pocketbook, they are much more willing to adhere to the brand guidelines. In fact it is this direct impact on their lives that will make them *zealous about protecting your brand image, using it correctly, and delivering on the brand promise in all their interactions. [Cameron, 2003]*

When Should a Brand Platform Be Built

As soon as humanly possible.

Conventional wisdom is that branding is for large established companies, and this it is simply too expensive for smaller, less mature companies. If done in the conventional way, it is indeed too expensive for most small companies. The cost of traditional focus group to gauge customer reactions to messages and images is larger than a small company's total budget.

However, if the branding process is handled differently it can be done efficiently and effectively. CattLeLogos[™] has designed a method, the CattLeLogos Method [Wilcox, 2004], that will enable companies to create a brand platform that will grow with them. Initially, a brand platform can consist of as little as a logo, business cards, document templates, presentation templates, web-site, key messages and graphic elements. By using templates for the production of materials, as the sales team works with prospects and customers, the key messages will evolve and can be plugged into the templates. Once messages have 'gelled' other needed collateral can be created, as the company matures.

Finally, by creating a strong brand platform, as well as formalizing the processes and standardizing tools to support it, a company can change the platform more easily such the need arise. In today's fast paced marketplace, companies are likely to be acquired, merged, or sold. Partnerships and

alliances are also frequently formed and dissolved. These transactions require rebranding. By paying attention to how the brand is implemented, there is potential for considerable savings.

Potential Savings from Strong Implementation of Brand Platform

As with anything else there are both efficient and inefficient ways to implement a Brand Platform. At CattLeLogos we have focused on efficient, cost effective implementations for our small business clients. They have needed primarily marketing and sales collateral and presentations. CattLeLogos designed templates for documents and presentations using the standard Windows Office tools. In a number of cases small libraries of custom clip-art was also created. We were surprised not only by the quality of the results produced, but also by the dramatic time savings in the production of these materials. Unfortunately, it is not possible to show the materials here, however what follows is an illustrative example of the time savings experienced by our customers.

Suppose that a presentation of 15 slides needs to be created, and that the creator knows the information that needs to be captured in the slides. Here we will look at two scenarios for how the slides are to be created.

- From scratch, that is all 15 slides have to be created
- By reusing 10 slides previously created by a number of colleagues, and supplementing them with 5 new slides

For each scenario, three creation methods will be used:

- No templates, no guidelines. The creator simply writes a talk however they want. Typically, this means using a number of different fonts, selecting clip art from a number of sources, and selecting backgrounds on whimsy.
Using this method it takes 15-30 minutes to create each slide. Often a reused slide will require considerable reworking to get it to look like it belongs in the talk. These changes could include making fonts consistent, redrawing diagrams, selecting colors that are consistent with the other slides. Often reworking the existing slides takes as much time as the initial creation.
- Templates, but no guidelines. The creator uses templates to produce the talk, but does not have guidelines that define how the presentation is to look. No specific library of clip art is specified. The creator will use a predefined template, or create their own.
Using this method it takes about 10-20 minutes to create each slide. A reused slide will require some 'tweaking' typically in selection of line styles, and predrawn images. However, this can be done quickly, typically a few minutes per slide.
- Guidelines, templates, and small recommended clip-art (or image) library. The guidelines clearly specify the look, much of which is built into the template. Images are selected from the recommended library..
Here creating the initial slides requires about 5-10 minutes. The reused slides can just be dropped into the presentation with no additional work.

The time spent to produce the 15 slides in each of the six cases is shown in the table below.

	No Templates, No Guidelines	Templates No Guidelines	Templates Guidelines
Presentation with 15 New Slides	3.5-7.0 hours	2.5-5.0 hours	1.2 -2.5 hours
Presentation with 5 New Slides and 10 Reused Slides	3.5 -7.0 hours	1.5 -2.5 hours	0.5-1.0 hours

Since most talks are created by reusing slides, the time savings really adds up. Today, in many companies the person who is going to give the presentation is the one who writes it. Using the brand platform will free the sales team, management, and senior technical staff to focus on sales, management, and technology – not be forced to spend their time redoing the look of their presentations and documents.²

An Unexpected Benefit of a Strong Brand Platform

In working with our clients, in addition to our standard brand identity package CattLeLogos creates custom image libraries [Wilcox, 2003]. Surprisingly few images were needed to handle each clients needs. However, the results were powerful in unexpected ways.

- The images were unique, hence by using these images in their presentations and other materials these clients created an easily recognizable, unique collection of materials.
- When others ‘borrowed’ information or diagrams from electronic collateral, they didn’t register that the look was unique to a particular company. Far from being angry about such an infringement, these clients recognized quickly that their customers would recognize what was done. It gave credence to these small companies, that larger companies would ‘borrow’ their ideas, insights, and diagrams.

Such unexpected benefits from creating a strong brand platform gave rise into our efforts in understanding the relationship between a strong brand identity and viral [Godin, 2002] or guerrilla [Levinson, 2002] marketing.

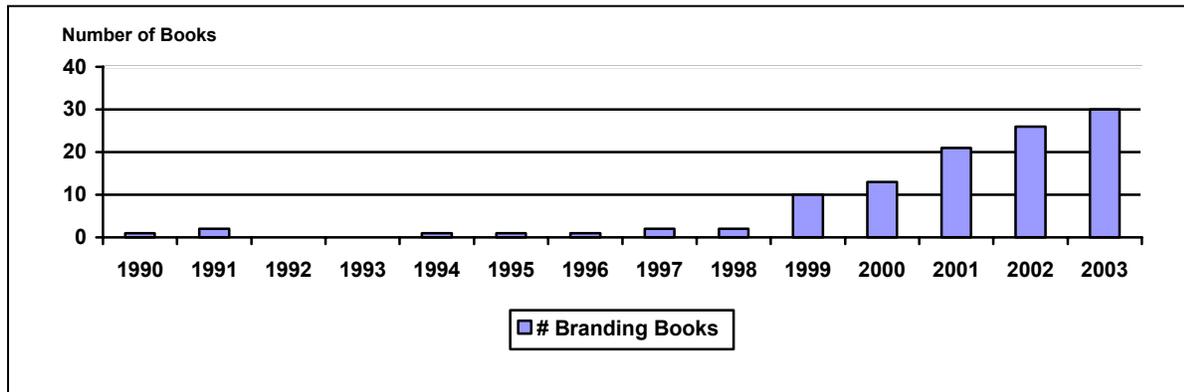
Conclusions

A strong brand presence is now a critical component for success in today’s information rich marketplace. Changes in technology, such as ubiquitous desktop computing and the internet have fundamentally changed the amount of information available to customers about any particular company’s products and services. These tools have also bombarded these same customers with a plethora of images and messages. Consistently delivering on your brand promise and representing your company’s brand image are critical components to acquiring and retaining customers. A strong brand platform provides the mechanisms to ensure that these challenges are met.

² Similar results exist for documents.

Appendix 1

A quick compilation of the publication dates of the more popular books about various aspects of branding found on Amazon.com yields the results below.



Bibliography

- Axelrod, R., *Terms of Engagement: Changing the Way We Change Organizations*, Barrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., San Francisco, 2000
- Cameron, J., *Analysis of Branding Publications*, Internal Document CattLeLogos Brand Management Systems LLC, 2004
- Cameron, J., and Wilcox, J., *AbuLLard's ABC's of Branding: 26 Concepts that Capture the Essence of Good Brand Management*, CattLeLogos Brand Management Systems LLC, 2003
- Dru, J.-M., *Beyond Disruption: Changing the Rules in the Marketplace*, Adweek, John Wiley & Sons Inc, New York, 2002
- Farkas, C., and Wetlaufer, S. "The Ways Chief Executive Officers Lead", *Harvard Business Review on Leadership*, Harvard Business School Press, 1990
- Godin, S., *Unleashing the Idea Virus*, Hyperion, New York, Dobbs Ferry, 2002
- Joachimsthaler, E. and Aaker D., "Building Brands without Mass Media", *Harvard Business Review on Brand Management*, Harvard Business School Press, 1994
- Kanter, R., *evolve! Succeeding in the Digital Culture of Tomorrow*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 2001
- Kotter, J., "What Leaders Really Do", *Harvard Business Review on Leadership*, Harvard Business School Press, 1990
- Kotler, P., *Kotler on Marketing: How to Create, Win, and Dominate Markets*, The Free Press, 1999
- Levinson, J., Frishman, R., and Lublin, J., *Guerrilla Publicity: Hundreds of Sure-Fire Tactics to Get Maximum Sales for Minimum Dollars*, Adams Media Corporation, Avon, 2002
- Milligan, A., and Smith, S. (Editors), *Uncommon Practice: People who Deliver a Great Brand Experience*, Interbrand FORUM, Pearson Education Limited, Harlow, 2002
- Perry, A., with Wisnom, D., *Before the Brand: Creating the Unique DNA of an Enduring Brand Identity*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 2003

Schwartz, E., *Digital Darwinism: 7 Breakthrough Business Strategies for Surviving in the Cutthroat Web Economy*, Broadway Books, New York, 1999

Vishwanath, V., and Mark J., “Your Brand’s Best Strategy”, *Harvard Business Review on Brand Management*, Harvard Business School Press, 1994

Wilcox, J. and Cameron, J, Triveni Examples in Portfolio for CattLeLogos Brand Management Systems, <http://cattlelogos.com/Portfolio/Portfolio-Triveni.html>, 2003.

Wilcox, J. and Cameron, J, CSC Consulting Examples in Portfolio for CattLeLogos Brand Management Systems, <http://cattlelogos.com/Portfolio/Portfolio-CSC.html> , 2003.

Wilcox, J. and Cameron J., *Brand Management for Small Companies*, Conference on Corporate Communication 2004, Wroxton College, Wroxton, England 2004.

Zaleznik, A., “Managers and Leaders: Are They Different?”, *Harvard Business Review on Leadership*, Harvard Business School Press, 1990