YOUR MARKETING MESS:

BACK THE TO DRAWING BOARDOAD

Customers today have an overwhelming number of choices. How do they cope? They buy the familiar. More accurately, they buy the one they trust. Or, the one with whom they feel comfortable, fun, appreciated, etc. How do you make sure they choose you? Create awareness for your company, products and services. But that is not enough. You must get them to like you and trust you. How do you do this? It rarely occurs by chance.

No Pain, No Gain

Sure, some companies develop a winning "brand" without knowledge of how it occurs. In the 1700s, one smart cattle rancher began branding (a distinctive mark burned on the hide) his cattle to identify them from others. Over time, people were willing to pay more for his cattle as they recognized them as being just a bit better. Whether they really were or not is not known, but it is likely that the rancher did have a strong vision and a commitment to quality that led him or her to try to set his product apart. But it was the burned-on brand itself that allowed people to identify his product over others. Branding was born in a way that the inventor never intended.

One Way or Another

Some companies today develop strong brands and achieve success without explicitly trying to do so. Typically it is the natural result of an owner having a firm grasp on who he or she is and for what he or she stands. Further, the owner has a firm and passionate grasp on the ideals by which she will run her company, conduct business, develop products, etc. In fact, the reputation, image or "brand" of a small or midsize business is typically simply the qualities embodied by the owner or owners. Or, in another way, the company brand is simply the reputation, feel and trust that customers have for the owner himself or herself.

But many of us were not blessed with a crystal clear "winning" vision and a natural instinct for effective marketing and branding. Luckily, the process has been studied and can now be learned and implemented. It is a process that begins with setting and creating the vision that every successful venture requires. A crystal clear vision for who you are, what you stand for, and why customers will come to you rather than your competitors. Establish this vision clearly and answers to your "what to do" and "what to say" questions of your marketing, advertising and selling campaigns will more readily present themselves.

This article is the introductory article of a nine-part article series on branding called *The ABC's of Small Business Marketing*. Coverage will include the natural offshoots of branding: marketing, advertising and selling.

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This article is the first 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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