

## TAG LINES AND AD COPY

### WHAT YOU SAY SHOULD SUPPORT YOUR BRAND VISION

So you've developed a professional image in your logo and the style of your presentations, ads, and web site. You use it consistently in all your communications. What do you say about your company?

Your brand *message* is the set of words that you use to communicate about your company and its products or services. A tag line that accompanies the logo can be important, but it's only one small piece of the total message. All your communications should convey the same message about your business and your products.

To develop a really effective brand strategy, you need to develop a clear set of messages that capture your brand promise, your business strategy, and your core values. These must be known by all your employees and consistently conveyed to your customers and business associates. Most importantly they must address the questions and concerns of your customers.

#### **Tag Line**

As with the logo, many companies try to develop a tag line that "says it all." Something that captures the essence of the entire company. Something that is as memorable as those of the huge consumer brands that have been around for decades. "You're in good hands." (AllState Insurance); "The Real Thing: (Coca Cola); Just Do It (Nike).

It's a hard task to come up with something that is ageless. As a young company you can afford to try out some tag lines before you make a commitment to one. We recommend that you choose something that is Appropriate and Believable. Test it with your first customers. See if it sticks. See what customers say – they may come up with something better! Unlike changing the logo which has a huge visual impact your communications, modifying a tag line can be accomplished with less disruption to the overall brand strategy.

#### **Beyond the Tag Line**

The tag line is only a few words meant to be catchy and memorable. But what do you say in all your other communications – both written and oral? By developing a message platform you create a set of clear consistent messages that underlie all your communications -- whether presentations, print media, or electronic communications and web site.

The key elements of developing a message platform are:

- Understanding your fundamental business and core values
- Understanding what's important to your customers.

The first element requires looking inside the company to understand what messages best communicate what your company is about. The good news for small businesses is that the brand is already there. It lies in the staff, their expertise and conduct; in the product and its qualities; in the values that the owners and company management imbue in the employees and exemplify in their behavior. It is a question of finding that essence and putting it in to words.

To complete the second element you need to take a look at yourself from an external point of view. Talk to customers if possible. Find out what questions they ask, what their primary concerns are, what attracted them to your product or service. Use their input to craft message that talk to what's important to them.

Whether you agree with them or not, you need to take people's interpretations, beliefs, opinions, behaviors and emotions in to account when developing messages. Words have many connotations. How they are perceived depends on the person reading or hearing them, the context in which they are presented, and any subliminal messages that come along with them. As you develop messages should, have people with different backgrounds and points of view read and analyze the words. Identify and avoid words with negative connotations.

The message platform supports promotion of both the company and its products and services. In crafting the messages specifically aimed at attracting customers, there are several important questions to answer before you start to write. These are:

### **WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO COMMUNICATE?**

If you walk through a trade show, count how many booths make it obvious what their products or services are and why you should buy them? Companies are often guilty of creating messages that only they understand. They are so enmeshed in the details of their product and service offerings that they create messages that make sense to the internal people who already know about the product, but not to customers. Technology companies are most guilty of this. Or they try to tell a potential customer everything there is to know about a product rather than what they need to know.

A customer wants to know what are the benefits of a particular product and how it will improve their life.

### **WHAT'S RELEVANT? WHAT'S NOT RELEVANT?**

Are you talking about product features that really resonate with potential customers? In the early days of the computer color printer business, manufacturers hyped resolution and number of colors. They showed photographic images in their brochures and at trade shows. This was long before there was any software available to create those kinds of images. Long before the invention of the digital camera. What customers really wanted to know was could they print their document with a color bar chart? How long would it take?

As with your top level messages, find out what's most important to your customers. Distill your message down to the key points that develop a potential customer's interest in your product and that encourage them to consider buying it.

### **WHAT'S UNIQUE?**

Unless you want to be in a commodity market, you need to be able to differentiate your offering from the rest of the market. You need to make your message stand out from the noise. Maybe you really do have a better mouse trap – is that clear from your messages? Maybe your product is similar to competitors but you have outstanding service – does your message convince people that's important? Maybe you have a really novel new product that's never been done before – can you persuade customers that they need to try it?

### **WHAT'S BELIEVABLE?**

This one is critical. If you put together a great advertising campaign, slogans, images that create a brand promise, you better be able to deliver on it. Consider the examples we used for what's unique. Does your mouse trap really work better? Do you consistently live up to your promise of better service? Is your new product really something that customers will want to buy, repeatedly? There are many examples of companies who have not lived up to their advertising messages.

This is the worst thing a company can do. Building customer expectations and then not meeting them destroys the trust required to build brand loyalty.

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This article is the fourth 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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