



Branding: Use Four Basic Steps

By Elaine Lauria

Branding is developing a mindset in the marketplace. Branding is not about colorful logos, catchy jingles you can hum, clever product names or bells and whistle features. It is simply about establishing your company as the best and most obvious choice to meet consumers' needs. When they ask: "Who?" "How?" and "Why?" They should instinctively turn to you for the answers.

If you are a start-up, it takes a lot of effort to develop this response, but even if you are an established business, it requires as much effort to continue that response. A good product, excellent service and lots of market exposure is not enough to generate it. First, you need to make your company visible, but then you need to draw explicit and compelling directions to it. Values are personal, intangible gains gotten from products and services, and they are subjective. Branding is all about creating an image based on the values the consumer seeks and the development of relationships based on your ability to provide those values. A successful brand is the very first place an individual goes to because that brand is the recognized signature of particular qualities and advantages. The ultimate goal of branding is really to elicit personal choices and bring consumers to you.



Step One

Strategize and Invest: *Use a plan.*

Branding is meant to position your organization as the destination spot for purchasing, and that requires a strategy. You need to map out a plan — short and long term — work it and modify it often. The adage "it takes money to make money" is a truism. Certainly, your first investment is to create the best of a product or service, but that is not enough to ensure buyers. To be successful, you have to put equally as much into the process of driving a market to you.

Step Two

Follow-up and Identify: Use what you've got.

To build a brand identity, you need to first identify the values of your products or services. Obviously, your best resources for this information are your own customers. Find out what they were looking for originally, why they chose you, and why they continue to do so. Develop perceptive questionnaires that will provide you with ongoing insight into their buying motivation. Present these from your website, mailings, or through follow-up calls. While you continuously gather data to build new relationships, you will also strengthen your existing alliances. Customers, flattered and better-served by your ongoing interest, will remain loyal, while your products and services will remain relevant and fresh to changing markets.

Step Three

Focus and Promote: Use what you get.

Analyze what you're told, and then focus on the primary sources of your customers' satisfaction. These are the value-add-ons which go beyond features and cost. They are the keys to drive the market to you. Within any industry, product and pricing are often similarly competitive, but value-add-ons give you the edge. Incorporate them into all your marketing efforts because they are the core of the image you will create in the marketplace. These value-add-ons will define your brand and will be the deciding factors for consumers' personal choices.

Step Four

Optimize Opportunity: Use an expert.

Of course you are an expert within your industry, but unless you're staffed with MBA's from Wharton and Harvard who also have Madison Avenue know-how and time to apply it, you may not be able to establish a brand identity all on your own. Branding is a complicated process requiring a myriad of skills, knowledge, and experience, so find a good marketing/design firm, like Morningstar Design, to help you. Whether you utilize them only in planning stages or in some or all phases of implementation, they will save you time and money and help provide you with the results you're after — brand identity and bottom-line success.