

## **Marketing Minute ~ Brand Yourself or Get Branded**

I'm sure you've heard the statement, "Brand or be branded." Well, it's true. If you don't go about the process of creating a personality for your company, one will be created for you. And that brand may not be what you want. Do you want there to be a brand 'out there' on purpose, or by accident?

Your BRAND is everything! Don't think that just because you're not Nike or Coke that you don't need to have a brand. YOU ARE a BRAND. Yes, the logo or symbol of Coke symbolizes a successful soft drink. But it goes beyond that, they made promises they kept. The company delivered, not just door to door back in the late 1800s, but directly to the GIs no matter where they were in the War.

Your brand is NOT your advertising. Your brand is NOT your logo. Your brand is NOT your company name. Your brand is NOT your product. Your brand may not be at all what you think it is. Your brand may not be what you intended for it to be. You do NOT own your own brand.

Your BRAND is 'owned' by your customers, the people you work with, and anyone else who has an impression of you. Your BRAND is other people's perception of what it's like to do business with you, work with you, or be with you.

That perception is also made up of your tangible images, with consistency through your logo, your website, your stationery, as well as all communications with the public. Nothing is more important than your brand, because it is what defines you, regardless of the work you do. It has equal importance whether you are one employee of a worldwide company or a one-person business working out of your home.

Nothing is more important than your brand, because it's what defines you, regardless of the work you do. It should be your top priority to build, protect, and represent your brand to the best of your ability in every interaction you have with others. The essence of building a strong brand is simply this: keeping your promises and creating great experiences for others.

Most feelings about brands are based on comparison. You may think that your competitors are the other companies that do what you do, but customers don't limit their comparisons like that. All customers may know is that someone else in a business completely different from yours did something great for them that you, in their opinion, were unwilling to do. You may not think it's a fair comparison, but who cares? It's the customer's call. Anything that another company does for your customer can have a strong influence on how the customer rates your brand.

It takes an on-going commitment to take your personal brand to the "Category of One" level. It doesn't happen by accident. Once brand takes hold, however, with proper attention it becomes the essence of who you are and what you do. It transcends policy, which enables you to transcend commodity. Brand becomes the way you do everything, almost without thinking.

Brand is everything. One more time—it should be your top priority to build, protect and represent your brand to the best of your ability with everyone you meet. And remember, it's all about keeping promises and creating great experiences.

How do you establish or re-establish an effective brand? Branding, creating a distinctive corporate and business culture identity for your business, is critical to your success as an entrepreneur. You can, and must, use the process of setting up and managing your business entities to establish your own distinctive brand.

The world's greatest companies have mastered this art of branding. You don't need even to see the name of the company to recognize the Mercedes or MacDonald's logo, so effectively have these companies imprinted their identity into the minds of the consumer.

But remember, branding is not just about a logo. It's also about making sure that you have a consistent identity. Individual entrepreneurs often use a haircut, accessories, even style of dress—as the 'Man in Black' Johnny Cash did — to imprint their identity into the minds of the public. Even a small business owner doing business on eBay will profit from having a consistent, memorable image as an established, reliable firm associated with expertise in its niche.

But there's that question again — what are some of the ways I can establish the kind of brand I want to? There are some simple ways to make sure that your brand doesn't happen by accident. Keep in mind that any time someone comes into contact with your company and you, whether through written materials or personal communication, its intended personality should come through every single time.

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Start with two lists. One should contain words that describe your company's current personality; the second should describe the company you want to be. They might be similar lists, in which case they'll help you to focus on consistency as you grow. If they differ, you can make a conscious, concerted effort to move toward the brand you envision.

Determine what your company looks like. From website design and taglines to colors and logos, make choices that work together to build your brand.

Reinforce the brand throughout your organization. It can't be an act, you have to make sure, just like your mission statement, that you can easily carry it off in everything you do, from marketing to advertising, client service and employee relations. And give your team the resources they need to make this happen—otherwise, they'll devise ad hoc solutions that might send the wrong message about your brand.

What does your brand stand for? There's a lot of talk about having brand values. What are they and why are they important? There are many benefits to having a strong brand; but where does that brand come from and how is it developed?

Everything that exists begins as a vision in the mind and heart of the creator. We build many things in our lifetime, including homes, careers and families. We have hopes and expectations for the long term outcomes of those things, and we have hopes and expectations for the success of the businesses we build.

Even though there are similar businesses in similar market segments, no two businesses can or should be alike. A baby is made from a mix of DNA, she receives from not just her parents but from all of her ancestors. A business grows from a base of the core values of its owner and all the people who've contributed over time to make the owner who she is today.

Your brand is defined in hundreds of moments of truth each day. People used to tell an average of 13 people about their experience with poor service. The growth of technology gives them the power to tell millions through the use of email, social networking and blogs. You can't afford one unhappy customer!

Regardless of your industry, every interaction with a customer is an opportunity for you to bolster or diminish their perceived value of you, your service or product, and your brand. The important issue upon which you should focus is the fact that one's reality equals the conversation they have with themselves about you.

Your **branding 'face'** can lead to loyalty. I know I've already said it, but it bears repeating—branding is perhaps the most important facet of any business—beyond product, distribution, pricing or location. A company's brand is its **definition** in the world, the name that identifies it to itself and the marketplace. A model may be beautiful, but without a name, she's just 'that girl in that picture.' Where would Norma Jean be without Marilyn Monroe, or who would imagine Coca-Cola as just a soft drink manufacturer?

If you have an interest in learning more about Branding in your business, I have a White Paper that I wrote and that is available through EOTO Marketing & Communications Solutions Company. If you would like a copy to be emailed to you in PDF, let me know. Drop me an email and it will be on its way.

For other marketing and business subject material, please check out my website at:

<http://www.marketingandbizpro.com/WhitePapers.html>

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