

Quick Tips – What Does Branding Mean?

A **brand** is a set of perceptions and images that represent a company, product or service. While many people refer to a brand as a logo, tag line or audio jingle, a brand is actually much larger. A brand is the essence or promise of what will be delivered or experienced.

Importantly, brands enable a buyer to easily identify the offerings of a particular company. Brands are generally developed over time through:

- Advertisements containing consistent messaging
- Recommendations from friends, family members or colleagues
- Interactions with a company and its representatives
- Real-life experiences using a product or service (generally considered the most important element of establishing a brand)

Here is the famous advertising copywriter and ad agency founder David Ogilvy's definition of a brand - the intangible sum of a product's attributes: its name, packaging, and price, its history, its reputation, and the way it's advertised.

Branding is the process of creating and disseminating the brand name.

An effective brand strategy gives you a major edge in increasingly competitive markets. But what exactly does "branding" mean? Simply put, your brand is your promise to your customer. It tells them what they can expect from your products and services, and it differentiates your offering from that of your competitors. Your brand is derived from who you are, who you want to be and who people perceive you to be.

The foundation of your brand is your logo. Your website, packaging and promotional materials--all of which should integrate your logo--communicate your brand.

Your brand strategy is how, what, where, when and to whom you plan on communicating and delivering on your brand messages. Where you advertise is part of your brand strategy. Your distribution channels are also part of your brand strategy. And what you communicate visually and verbally is part of your brand strategy, too.

Consistent, strategic branding leads to a strong brand equity, which means the added value brought to your

company's products or services that allows you to charge more for your brand than what identical, unbranded products command.

The added value intrinsic to brand equity frequently comes in the form of perceived quality or emotional attachment. For example, Nike associates its products with star athletes, hoping customers will transfer their emotional attachment from the athlete to the product. For Nike, it's not just the shoe's features that sell the shoe.

Brands need to provide customers with a consistent, compelling experience in order not to confuse them, as confusion leads to doubt.

Everyone associated with the brand must understand its key dimensions in order to deliver this consistent experience, and it helps if customers can be given a short slogan which encapsulates the essence of the brand.

Defining your brand is like a journey of business self-discovery. It can be difficult, time-consuming and uncomfortable. It requires, at the very least, that you answer the questions below:

- What is your company's mission?
- What are the benefits and features of your products or services?
- What do your customers and prospects already think of your company?
- What qualities do you want them to associate with your company?

How are you going to describe the essence of the brand to your colleagues and business partners in one short, memorable, and motivating sentence? What makes it special?

This is the last and hardest stage of the brand definition process. Try to create images of what the brand does, and preferably link it to an eternal value such as friendship, status, belonging, realising your true self (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs could be useful here).

The central organising thought is not the same as the slogan/tagline.

Once you've defined your brand, how do you get the word out? Here are a few simple, time-tested tips:

- Get a great logo. Place it everywhere
- Write down your brand messaging. What are the key messages you want to communicate about your brand? Every employee should be aware of your brand attributes
- Integrate your brand. Branding extends to every aspect of your business--how you answer your phones, what you or your salespeople wear on sales calls, your e-mail signature, everything
- Create a "voice" for your company that reflects your brand. This voice should be applied to all written communication and incorporated in the visual imagery of all materials, online and off. Is your brand friendly? Be conversational. Is it ritzy? Be more formal. You get the gist
- Develop a tagline. Write a memorable, meaningful and concise statement that captures the essence of your brand
- Design templates and create brand standards for your marketing materials. Use the same color scheme, logo placement, look and feel throughout. You don't need to be fancy, just consistent
- Be true to your brand. Customers won't return to you--or refer you to someone else--if you don't deliver on your brand promise
- Be consistent. This tip involves all the above and is the most important tip on this list. If you can't do this, your attempts at establishing a brand will fail.

Whatever you do to grow your revenue, always remember that you'll see the greatest success if you make sure whatever actions you take are integrated with, or support, your overall marketing strategy and efforts. For example, you wouldn't want to reduce your prices if you've got a premium product whose brand positioning is based on high quality.



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