

Blossom Your Brand into Profits

By Patty Schmucker

We continue to hear about this illusive thing called “Branding”. What is it? Why is it important? How can small business owners seize the opportunity? Branding according to Al and Laura Ries (authors of *22 Immutable Laws of Branding*) is “. . . owning presence in the mind of your consumer.” For a business owner, this means your target customer thinks of your company first when acquiring the services or products offered in your industry.

Branding is all around us. When we think of soda, we think of Coca Cola. When we think of tissue we think of Kleenex. When we consider buying a luxury automobile we look to Mercedes, Lexus, or maybe Cadillac. For each of these product categories, distinct brand names own a presence in our minds.

We achieve branding by communicating to our target customers. Communication occurs through the obvious things like a unique logo (which should be consistently used in the same color and format) consistent fonts for all documents and images, word choices, advertising methods, business and staff appearance, attitude, and approach to service.

There are elements of branding that are not so apparent and makes successful branding illusive for many business owners. Branding begins with clearly defined mission and vision statements for your company. The mission and vision statements define the purpose for the brand and justify its existence. This is often overlooked by businesses not versed in the business of building brands and should be embraced even when developing a sub-brand (like a line of personal care products). In order to build a compelling sub-brand, the same branding diligence must be applied to the sub-brand’s mission and vision statement defining the brand purpose.

After the development of a mission statement, an examination of your organization’s culture is necessary. Your culture must support the mission. If your organization’s structure, (i.e. daily operations, tools, facilities) and staff knowledge do not buy into your mission, the communication of your brand message is lost and the effectiveness of your branding effort will diminish by at least fifty percent. I have worked with businesses which lose as much as 10-15% of their potential profits because they refuse to see the value of this activity. This is why branding is illusive to so many companies.

Is branding important to your business? If you operate in an industry where there are competitors offering similar products and services, Al and Laura Ries tells us it is “. . . imperative for building products or services into a world class brand.” After sitting in the classrooms of top marketing professionals, the message is the same . . . in a highly competitive market, where everyone offers similar services and products, branding provides the opportunity to differentiate your offerings from others.

How do you effectively brand your company? The first “to do” is to build a strategic plan. This begins with gathering all of the existing materials that currently communicate to your target customer. Define what you want to communicate about your brand, and then conduct tests with your existing customers (staff and clients). This helps to determine if what you want them to hear and think about your business is what they perceive. Finally, with this information, reevaluate or build your mission statement for your company and then apply it to any planned or existing sub-brands. Once this work is complete, it is time to evaluate. Are you clear on your target customer? Do your daily operations, tools, and facilities support your mission? Does your staff have the right level of knowledge and buy into your new mission? You can now build a plan of execution to address all of the above and once aligned with your mission statement, look to align unique logos, fonts, images, word choices, advertising methods, business appearance, service approach, staff attitude and appearance to brand your business.

We continue to hear talk about this illusive thing called “Branding”. A business is a living, growing entity. Applying a holistic approach is the best means of building a successful brand. We often want to jump to the fun part (logos, fonts, images) however, proper planning, crafting the interaction of all the parts and cultivating operational systems will turn your illusive brand into an authentic brand that blossoms into profits.

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Patty earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management from Pepperdine University Graziadio School of Business. Patty serves on the board of directors for the largest non hotel YMCA in the US, and the Independent Manufacturers and Distributor’s Association (ICMAD.) She is a certified trainer with Franklin Covey and The Chopra Center for Well Being.