

## Branding...is it Genius or Madness?

By Patty Schmucker

There are times when the atmosphere is thick with the potential for change and works of genius (or madness) have the best chance of being received. History has proven the decade that closes an aged century and begins a new century is fertile time to accomplish long neglected tasks.

In the professional salon market, we have witnessed a thinning, of the once definable lines, between the professional salon market, medical doctors, boutiques, department stores, direct retailers (like QVC and HSN) and mass marketing retailers.

If you were actively involved in the professional salon industry in the early 90's, imagine the madness you would have perceived, if you knew that before the century's end, eight out of ten professional salon brands would be owned by large conglomerates (like P&G and Este Lauder). Could you image salon brands sold in high-end malls similar to the Aveda Lifestyle Stores? It would have seemed outrageous that less than five distributing companies would distribute eighty percent of professional salon product brands in the US. Certainly you would have declared the world gone mad knowing salon owners would continue to carry brands sold on QVC, HSN, the Internet, or at your local mass retailer like Wal-Mart or Target.

The vision of exclusivity (where clients develop a loyalty to our products and services because they are available only in our salon) is a business model that has achieved limited success. Proactive business owners are taking responsibility for branding their company first. They recognize the process of owning the presence in the mind of the consumer. Branding is paramount in an industry with similar services and products. Pick up any industry magazine and you will read about industry leaders who are achieving unprecedented financial success. What separates the handful of powerhouse companies is their process of establishing a clearly definable brand? The product and services offered is a *function* of this branding process, not *their* brand image identity.

You will find three specific branding strategies employed. The first is an exclusive strategy where a strictly defined theme is offered. One nationally recognized brand of products and one modality of services are offered to support the defined, core theme. The second is a niche brand strategy. This strategy consists of three or less blended themes (with common elements) woven together through consistency in operations and marketing message. The third strategy embraces the development of a unique brand identity for which unique, innovative services and products are created. Additionally, market leaders are recognizing the importance of exposure through multiple channels of distribution including Internet, boutiques, retailers (such as salons and medical doctors) as well as direct retailers and catalogs. The exposure through multiple channels (which builds brand recognition) draws customers to market leader stores and results in higher sales volumes. It is crucial to realize that your clients need repeated exposure to a theme. Therefore, when clients come into your place of business, their high level of trust in you easily transfers into purchases they don't make anywhere else.

In this atmosphere, which is thick with potential for change, what is your work of genius or madness? During this time of change, make sure you don't neglect the task of defining your business's future?



Patty Schmucker is President and CEO of Performance Branding Services. Her primary focus is helping businesses develop sustainable operating models through effective branding strategies. Prior to launching PBS, Patty accumulated significant experience in business management and development. She has been an Organizational Development consultant under her consulting practice, Inspiring Leadership, from 1998-2002. Prior to 1998 she served as Vice President of Sales, Education, and Marketing for Caesar's Beauty, a wholesale distributor for the Aveda Corporation. Ms. Schmucker also held the position of National Director of Sales-West for the Aveda Corporation from 1988 to 1990 and served on the Aveda Advisor Committee from 1985-1998.

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.

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