



Brand Called You

By Steven Van Yoder

Every company has a reputation. Everyone you meet will form an opinion about your company, even if they have not done business with you yet. The challenge is to manage your reputation so that the opinion that people have of you is positive. This is what creates a brand.

Brands have a number of strategic functions, enabling you to:

- Differentiate yourself from your competition
- Position your focused message in the hearts and minds of your target customers
- Persist and be consistent in your marketing efforts
- Customize your services to reflect your personal brand
- Deliver your message clearly and quickly
- Project credibility
- Strike an emotional chord
- Create strong user loyalty

For small businesses, branding is not about slick advertisements. Small-business branding is about getting your target market to see you as the preferred choice. Building a slightly famous brand is not just about what you do; it's about what you do differently from everyone else.

Building Your Brand

A brand is a promise of the value your clients will receive. In an amazingly complex and competing world—where it's increasingly hard to know what's real and what's not—having your customers not only acknowledge but support the promise of your brand is the key to building a thriving business.

To become a brand, you've got to become relentlessly focused on what you do that adds value. Do you deliver your work on time, every time? Do you anticipate and solve problems before they become crises? Do your clients save money and headaches just by having you on the team? Do you complete projects within the allotted budget?

Branding integrates customer service, sales promotion, public relations, direct mail, newsletters, discounts, event sponsorship, word of mouth and other communications tactics to present a unified message about the company, its products or services.

Your brand will integrate all your marketing around a core idea and vision. As a result, you will find it easier to sell yourself, because your message will be uniform and powerful. Every business needs to evaluate its brand identity against the following criteria:

Relevance to the Market

A brand must stand for something that is meaningful to members of a target market. Your brand encompasses the total experience of doing business with you.

Consistency of Behavior

Customers must be able to depend on the brand to deliver the same experience every time. Because your market experiences your values through your brand, the only way they will truly become loyal to your brand is through your dedication and consistency.

Relationship-Building

A brand is not a logo or an advertising strategy. "The strength of any brand is in the relationship it has between a company and its customers. The stronger the relationship, the more business they will do, and the more likely it is that customers will refer them to their friends and business associates.

Loyalty to the Customer Is Returned

The test of a brand is, in fact, the strength of loyalty it generates. If you have a strong relationship with your target audience, then you have a strong brand and a strong business.

Reputation Is Priceless

The only way to be successful in business is by establishing a good reputation, and a brand can help you do that. Your reputation works as your strongest marketer by communicating the relationship you have with people who've done business with you, and your target market in general.

Good brands stand the test of time. To develop a brand that will last a lifetime, go beyond what you do right now. Think long term. Look at Coke, Ford and General Electric. No matter what they sell or how they change over time, they can rely on their brand equity built on a foundation of customer trust to take them deep into their customer's trust quotient and keep them there.

If you establish a place of trust and relevance in prospects' minds, you're already in the door. The more people believe in your brand, the more it will spread throughout your niche market without your pushing. If your brand is clear, distinctive, and easily understood, and expresses a unique, compelling benefit that people believe in, it will bring you all the business you can handle.