

Understand Brand

By Beth Brodovsky

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Branding has been defined, explained and examined extensively. There are books, articles, publications, seminars, and groups all dedicated to exploring the meaning and use of brand today.

Interestingly, with all this wealth of information, some of it developed by the greatest minds in the industry, I still hear "but what is branding?" Considering the multitude of sentences that begin "branding is..." it's an understandable question. What I believe people are looking for is not another definition, but rather understanding, and an idea of how and why this tool fits into their business.

The Brand Equation

Visual + Verbal + Experiential = Brand Perception

What you show, what you say and what you do adds up to what people know about you and what they think of your service, product or company.

Imagine a person you know. When asked to do that, the first thing that pops into your head is an image of that person. If that person walked up to you, you would recognize her, and if known well, recall her name. If you were describing that person to another you would list her features, offer her name and describe what she is like with both factual and subjective information. "You remember my friend Tracy from college, the one with the dark hair and the big smile? Now she's married and lives in Maine. She's an amazing photographer and so much fun, I really miss having her around. You'd love her."

The image you recognize, the words you recall and the references that make up your experience all add up to an impression. That person you thought of -- in addition to her face, name and your mutual experiences -- you also recalled how you felt about her, your impression. That's brand.

A visual image, a verbal message and experience with something leads you to form an opinion. So, in reality, brand exists whether we address it or not. Every interaction brings about an impression. In a business, however, crafting and controlling that impression mean the difference between reaching your goals and missing the mark.

It is sometimes thought that a great logo like the Nike "Swoosh," a catchy tagline like "Got Milk" or a well-known product like Coke is the brand. However, each of these major brands has carefully planned all three areas of their impression to guide their audience toward their ultimate goal -- loyalty. You recognize them, you can recall what they do and what they say and you know how you

feel about them. If they have done their job well you will refer them "You have to try Coke, it's the best," affiliating your preference to their company "I only wear Nike's." This is the power of "Brand."

Brand Value

What's the value of "impression?" Huge international brands are used as examples because of their recognition, however brand is valuable to companies large and small, product and service, for profit and charitable. What's in it for you:

Identifying your specialty makes you an expert in your niche.

Developing a unique quality separates you from the pack.

Crafting the impression you want helps customers see all you can do for them.

Maintaining a constant message builds long-term recognition and recall.

Attracting customers through referral is the cheapest and best marketing around.

If you are clear, consistent and creative you will attract the right business. Why waste time handling interest from unqualified buyers and receiving none from ideal contacts?

Who's Using Brand?

It's not just industry giants with multi-million dollar ad budgets. The power of brand is being harnessed everywhere. Our local school district launched a brand initiative a few years ago. Their mantra "Above and Beyond" is woven into assemblies, included in all written communication and demonstrated in curriculum changes. The latest email announced a 22% improvement in the standardized test scores of disadvantaged students.

Whether your aim is greater sales or better reading skills, brand provides a focus, streamlining your effort to achieve your goals.

Getting There

You can't prepare an effective image, message or experience until you decide what unique quality you're selling and to whom. Getting the right people to recognize, recall and refer your company is a process.

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