

How to Create a Brand that Sticks

By Eileen Turtle Parzek

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Most people, when they hear the word branding, think logos - but in fact, branding is really much more than that. A brand involves blending the image, purpose, and focus of your business, with your core marketing message, and coming up with something which will stick in the minds of people who encounter it. As a business or an independent professional, it is who you are and what you do, packaged neatly, clearly, and memorably. A logo is only a tangible representation that works to reinforce a brand.

So - what kind of personality does your business have? Is it conservative and solid? Outgoing and fun? Or robust and strong? And, what is your business focused on doing? Whom do you want to work with? How does your business differ from the competition? And what makes it so special, after all? Do not try to name every special quality or unique selling point - you can actually build a brand on just one unique quality! Once you can answer these questions, you can begin to create your brand. The question is what you want YOUR brand to leave behind in people's heads.

Practically any business or professional can benefit from a strong brand. But branding is even more important for micro businesses and independent professionals because they face tighter competition. A well executed brand and identity can help them compete on a larger playing field, appear more professional, and stand out from the hordes of competitors.

Once you determine how you want to be remembered, your image and your message will need to communicate that. The image can simply be a consistent look used in all your correspondence, a logo that marks everything that comes from your business, and the identity you use on your web site and brochure. The message can be a tag line, your 30 second "elevator speech," and woven through the content on your web site.

A logo is only one manifestation of brand identity, used to create a memorable impression, but it is useless if you have not clearly defined your audience and the focus of your business. There are plenty of clearly branded businesses using only consistent fonts or colors in their marketing collateral. But whatever you decide chose one image to stick with through all your business communication, and make sure that image is professional. In other words, if you do not have the resources or finances right now to have a professional image developed for you, work with less, rather than using badly formatted clipart or a layout that makes you look amateurish or cheap. That approach can only hurt your business and your brand, so find the level that works for you without a negative effect.

Once you determine what brand you want to create, and have developed an identity to accompany

it, the work has just begun. You will need to vigilantly reinforce your brand every moment you are in business. Your brand needs to affect everything your business does, everything you and your employees say, and every bit of information that comes out of your office. Letterhead, invoices, proposals... these should all consistently promote your brand. In your voice mail, in your email sig, and every time someone says, "What do you do?" your brand should come out to shine. Domain names and web site content should, again, reinforce your brand. Everywhere you use your brand with consistency, you are communicating with the voice of your company.

Be aware, though, that this does not happen overnight - your brand will need to build over time. Develop a strong brand, and use it consistently, and more and more often, your brand will pop into people's minds when they have a need that you can provide.

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Eileen 'Turtle' Parzek is a veteran web designer and an online marketing & communications consultant who has been working from home and virtually since 1995. Her first business, Turtle's Web, was responsible for approximately 250 web projects. Her current business, SOHO It Goes! (<http://www.soho-it-goes.com>) specializes in providing technology driven design, marketing and communication services to small businesses and organizations.

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