

# What is Branding and Why Do You Want It?

By Susan Dunn

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Talking about branding is like talking about leadership. There are coaches and courses which purport to “teach” leadership, but as we all sense – that’s why we want so badly to learn it – leadership comes from character and inner qualities. It’s an extension of beliefs and values the person holds and then acts out in their life, an integral part of their personality.

You can’t pick up “character” in a seminar. It comes from years of reading, work on yourself, exposure to great literature, great art and great people, and plain old experience.

Leadership isn’t going to a seminar and coming back saying, “Let’s do a mission statement,” it’s being so devoted to mission yourself others can’t wait to get around you, find out what it is, and partake of it. Leaders lead because other people want to follow them. There’s no other reason. Not the paycheck, not the stick ... just that feeling when we get with someone – “Hey, I want to go where they’re going. Count me in!”

Leadership isn’t a surface thing, and neither is branding. It’s what you stand for, your personality. It’s your soul and what you’re about.

Fiddling around with your logo and business card are superficial things. They make an impression on your consumer, yes, but they don’t have power; they only have “veto” power. No one ever booked your services because of your business card, but someone may have vetoed you because of it. There are some terrible business cards out there, and people DO form immediate and initial impressions. I’m thinking of the therapist I know who – believe it or not – has a neon fuchsia business card. This is not the person I want doing therapy on me or anyone I know. On the other hand, I never looked at an attorney’s business card – they’re all the same, even the same font – and said, “This is the man I want to represent me in court.”

The way you get your brand across is projecting your personality – who you ARE – in every aspect of your business. What your webpage looks like, the wording, the inclusion of quotes or not, graphics, the way you handle your customers, how well you deliver products, promises and services. Your products and your style.

We bond with businesses the same way we do with people – through their personalities.

When I think about Dave, God rest his soul in peace, and Wendy’s, I think ‘just a comfortable place to be.’ Actually I knew Dave, our kids played soccer together, and he was just the same way in

person as he was on the t.v. screen. Now THAT'S branding.

Branding means starting with your values and beliefs, projecting these into everything you do, and going forward from there.

## EXAMPLE

When I went into coaching, I did so because I wanted to help people, but in my own way, according to my beliefs and values. Coaching is not therapy, but one thing that frustrates me about therapy is the tight scheduling. You can be in the middle of "And then the man put a knife against my throat..." and your session is over.

I wanted to remove this element from my coaching practice. I wanted to be known for exceptional service, commitment and connection. I wanted to be a place people could come in their warp-speed lives and know they would receive the time and attention they deserved. How we handle "time" is an important part of our personalities. Here are some of the ways I play with time to project my brand:

- My website is loaded with information that takes a long time to read.
- My website takes a long time to load. We are not in a hurry here.
- Each of my Internet courses comes with the opportunity for unlimited email with me. Learners are free to respond, react, question and dialogue with me for the duration of the course.
- I answer each email individually.
- I don't use autoresponders anywhere in my practice.
- I don't arbitrarily limit the time of the coaching session.
- I don't require a contract. The time is open-ended
- I don't ordinarily book clients back-to-back. This isn't an assembly-line.
- I offer the Don't Die at 50 Weekly Organizational Calendar© but wait til you see it. It isn't talking about "polish your shoes."
- I deliver my ebooks personally, that is by email with a note. Sure this could be an autoresponder thing, but that's not my style. If someone has the courtesy to buy something from me, they deserve the courtesy of a personal note.

Everything I produce and the way I deliver it is branded.

How about you?

## BUSINESSES HAVE PERSONALITIES

Paul Temporal, author of "Advanced Brand Management," asked people to describe two competing companies' personalities "as if they were people" and here's what he got. People defined Company A as "sophisticated, arrogant, efficient, self-centered, distant and disinterested." Company B, the competitor, they defined as "easy going, modest, helpful, caring, and approachable, and interested."

Not surprisingly, 95% of the people said they'd rather do business with Company B, and, not surprisingly, Company B was way ahead in the competition.

## START WITH YOUR VALUES & YOUR BELIEFS

When you think about branding your business, sit down and think about what's important to you and what you want to project. Then make sure everything you do speaks of this. In other words, walk the walk, don't just talk the talk. If it's your intent to treat customers with respect, operationalize the term and make sure you're actually doing it. Respect isn't a concept; it's an action.

Modernizing your image (logo, collaterals) “won’t effect a change in brand values,” says Temporal. “The heart of the brand remains the same – what it stands for or its personality.”

Consumer perceptions of quality, service and other intangibles are your brand, and what keeps them coming back for more. Are you approachable? Are you interested? Do you care? Do your actions show it?

Your customers won’t be fooled and they have choices.

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