

## BRANDING YOURSELF A WINNER !

### Projecting the right image to your target customers

Think for a moment about the following four words. What image comes immediately into your mind for each of them ?

*Mercedes .....*

*Pepsi*

*Tesco .....*

*IBM .....*

The chances are you think of ideas like 'style' and 'well-engineered' for Mercedes. For Pepsi you may think of words like 'refreshment' or 'young' and being 'fashionable'. For Tesco I bet you think of ideas like 'big supermarket' and 'wide choice of groceries' but perhaps you also think of 'long check-out queues' ? For IBM it is likely that you think immediately of words like 'computers' and 'large corporate'.

**All of these words, of course, are brand names. They are just words in themselves, but their strength is in the particular ideas and messages that they convey to the world. To the companies that own these names they are hugely valuable assets to be used in their marketing and business development.**

Branding is a major tool that *all* businesses and organisations should be using today. Not just large companies like Tesco and IBM but also small and medium-sized businesses, public organisations and professional people e.g. pharmacists and GPs.

### What is a brand ?

In simple terms a **brand is the overall set of attributes, feelings and ideas that people associate with a given product, service or organization.** It is the overall 'image' that people perceive in their minds when they think of a particular product, service or organisation.

Branding used to be thought of until about ten years ago - even by experienced marketing people - as really quite a narrow, mechanical concept that involved just attaching a name, term, design or slogan to a product. A brand was seen just as a label or identification tool to use with a product.

Over the last ten years – with the growth of competition and more products available in most markets – the concept of branding has ‘grown-up’ and has a much more significant strategic role to play in business. In particular, branding today is just as much about trying to help market services and organisations and even people (e.g. pop stars) as physical products.

### **The four layers of a true brand**

Brand-building is about assembling in a coherent and *distinctive* way a set of ‘**tangible**’ and ‘**intangible**’ messages to communicate to target customers. It is helpful to think of a brand as consisting of the following levels:

- i) **Brand expression / identity** – this layer includes all the **clues** that people recognise the brand by, including: brand name, lead words or slogan/tag-line, logo, use of colour or typeface, visual imagery, any slogan or jingle, person or character (real or fictional), design/shape etc
- ii) **Functional needs/benefits targeted** – this level refers to the type of needs/uses/benefits directly served by the brand e.g. relieve pain, satisfy a thirst, make prettier etc
- iii) **Emotional feelings**- the values or ideals which the brand ‘stands for’ and the particular feelings and emotions which the brand wants to stir up in the target customer/patient/user e.g. self-confidence, attractive to others
- iv) **Brand ‘essence’** - a succinct statement or **set of core words** which sum up what your brand is fundamentally about over the longer-term and, ideally what is different about it. For example, “health and beauty advice with superb personal service” or “a health store open from breakfast to supper time”

The vast majority of brands – including amongst large companies – are defined, unfortunately, without much effort at thinking beyond the first of these levels – brand name and visual look. As such they are not really brands at all, just logos or marketing hype.

If you want to be clever with branding – and yet still be pragmatic – be sure to think about what **emotional** benefits and feelings you want to stir in your target customers/users as people when they consider your brand. Don’t just talk to them in terms of the functional gains or uses of what you are selling. **Customers spend with their wallet but they buy and choose based on their emotions and perceptions !**

## The benefits of branding

You might think that branding seems rather a ‘fluffy’ concept – and it is to some extent – but if you think about it pragmatically and keep things simple, you’ll gain a hugely valuable marketing tool for your business.

Branding offers the following benefits:

- You help to **differentiate** what you are offering from competitors
- By crafting your messages carefully to present to target customers you will ‘**connect**’ better with them much more effectively and attract their business more easily
- Branding helps build **customer loyalty**, repeat business and more sales stability
- Existing branding, when applied to new products or markets, helps build up **new business**, as consumers are reassured more
- Branding usually makes it easier to charge a **higher price** compared to having no brand
- Certain attributes of a brand e.g. brand name, slogan, logo design can be legally protected (as trademark or copyright) and so give the brand-holder a robust **financial asset**

Remember that every organisation projects *by default* or otherwise some sort of image to the external world – so you might as well try and think about managing your image proactively and with some care !

How, then, should you go about applying branding to your business ? Two fundamental issues are **what** should be branded and how you are going to **present** your brand(s).

## What to brand ?

This question involves deciding what aspects of your business you should brand and how much you are going to establish a different brand for each aspect.

If you are a retailer, of course, you need to marry any branding of your own with that of the product brands you sell and any ‘corporate’ branding laid down by your parent company – if you are part of a larger chain or network – or other third-party organisations.

There are **five key aspects or levels** of an organisation for which you could apply branding:

- i) Your business overall as an organisation
- ii) The products / services you offer
- iii) The individual markets or types of customers (market segments) you serve
- iv) The different ways / channels you use to deliver or sell your services – e.g. in-store, website, private clinic, at-home, partner or distributor agency
- v) The different physical/functional areas in your store which customers / patients use

Your choice of branding strategy ranges from using a single, overall ‘house’ brand across everything your business does to several different brands each targeted at a particular product/service category, customer category, or business channel.

**For each brand you establish, remember you should be presenting a dedicated name / set of words and look/feel and ideally communicating a focused set of key benefits and/or emotional messages.**

The simplest – but invariably unconscious – approach to branding by a small retailer is to put a name plaque outside above the shop window based on the name of the business owner and then leave everything else to do with branding to your suppliers..

Very simple but rather a marketing waste !

Even small businesses should consider employing at least *two* levels of branding. As a service business, this needs to involve first your projecting a brand for your business overall and then, critically, thinking of the main way in which your business divides up and then projecting a dedicated brand for some or all of your *most significant business areas* (usually best defined in terms of type of products, customer group or sales channel).

For a small, service business it is usually best – in order to save time and money - to present and promote the company’s name and the second-level brands *together*. Thus for example, for a local pharmacy called ‘Greenside Pharmacy’ wanting to emphasize its appeal more to men as opposed just to women, it could present two sub-brands whose names might be “Greenside Man” and “Greenside Women”. Or, if the business had a strong ‘alternative medicine’ clinic or an extra wide range of ‘natural’ ingredient products in its store, it might use dedicated branding with the names “Greenside Alternative” or “Greenside Natural”.

In another situation where the business is larger with both a mail-order/e-commerce side running alongside a traditional pharmacy store, wholly dedicated (primary) brand names might be used – for example “PharmaNet” and “Greenside Pharmacy”.

Remember, in these examples I have referred just to possible brand *names*. You would need to complement each with a dedicated set of communications e.g. leaflet, signage, dedicated floor area decor.



One-level branding is not adequate in business today – for the simple reason that customers are all different from each other and prefer very much to be targeted, addressed and communicated with in as much tailored terms as possible.

If you are a clothes retailer, for example, presenting your products to young, fashion-centred men in the same way as you do old-age pensioners will **not** give you the best results ! Simply using your company's name and identical look and messaging throughout your store will mean you stand out to **no** customers in particular and your customers will focus instead on your suppliers' brands on your shelves. You will look bland or even 'invisible'.

### **Packaging and expressing your brands**

Once you have defined which parts of your business you are going to brand, you need to '**package**' them up to present something more concrete behind them. This means checking you have a suitable **product/service offer** behind your brand(s), which includes the following elements:

- what range of products and services will be available with the brand (will you offer any products under your own name or only use third-party suppliers' products ?)
- which particular suppliers you will need to use
- what pricing you will use
- how/where you will make your product/service range available
- which people you will use to offer/sell/deliver your products/services
- what merchandising aids or other equipment or tools you will need
- what operational and service processes will be needed
- any incentive offers or promotions you can use to help sell your brand

Assuming you have ticked off your marketing offer, then you are ready to craft how you are going to **express** and **communicate** your brand.

As indicated above, there are many marketing ways in which you can express your brand identity. The two primary tools, though, are a name or form of core words to identify your brand and some form of visual design or colouring scheme to sit with your brand name or words. Use the services of a professional graphic designer or else you will look amateurish.

With your identity defined, you then need, of course, to communicate and promote your brand. The range of communications tools available to you is very wide – ranging from in-store fixtures e.g. signage, display stands, wall coverings to 'take-away' or external tools e.g. leaflets, guidance sheets, letterhead, website. I will cover these in a future article. Here I would just urge you, whatever you do, to ensure you project your brand identity in a **consistent** fashion across all the tools and media you use: otherwise you will soon appear as a 'second-rate' business.



## **Keep managing your brand**

Branding is not a one-off marketing task but rather something you should review at regular intervals to take account of trends in your marketplace (e.g. fast growth of certain segments), actions by your competitors (e.g. a rival starting to compete more head-on with you), and your own sales and profit performance (e.g. sales may not have risen as fast as you wished using your present branding approach).

Do adjust your branding approach if it does not seem to be working for you. But *don't* ditch everything and start completely again: you have got to keep some continuity going over time, otherwise you will totally confuse your customers. Best to adjust the particular benefits and emotional messages you communicate about your brand or re-focus on a slightly different target audience (something called '*re-positioning*' a brand) rather than replace a brand name or its visual identity. If in doubt, try testing out new branding thoughts and ideas amongst a sample of your customer base.

Think about your branding carefully and you'll certainly increase your chances of being a winner !