

The Dreaded "B" Word & Why You Need To Get Past It

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Branding is just as important for small businesses as it is for Fortune 500 companies. Indeed, many corporate brands try to look more like small companies in order to appeal to consumers that prefer to support independent brands. Regardless of what the big boys are doing, you need to develop your own brand identity.

Many small business owners already understand that branding is essential to their businesses, but a surprisingly high number of them don't really know why.

They recognize the link between successful businesses and strong branding and aspire to build a brand that emulates similar success for them. And they understand that branding is not just a logo or how their business is perceived externally. Too few realize that successful brands have this branding at the heart of their businesses. So much so that in many ways you could almost substitute the word "brand" for "business".

So what is "branding"? Branding is a way of defining your business to yourself, your team (if you have one) and your external audience (clients). It could be called the business' "identity", but only on the understanding that it embodies the core of what they business is and its values, not just what it looks and sounds like. Customers of all sorts of businesses are so savvy today that they can see through most attempts by companies to gloss, spin or charm their way to sales.



The benefits that a strategically defined brand can bring are the same as when people fall in love with each other. When customers connect emotively – because they share the same values and beliefs of a brand – it leads to higher sales and better brand differentiation. It also leads to loyalty; advocacy and can even protect your cost in times when competitors rely on promotional discounts to drive business. It can also give you the ideal platform from which to extend your offering or range of services.

Here are several tips on how to successfully implement branding for your business:

Start by defining your brand



Review the service your business offers, pinpoint the space in the market it occupies and research the emotive and rational needs and concerns of your customers. Your brand character should promote your business, connect with your customer base and differentiate you in the market.

When building your brand, think of it as a person

Every one of us is an individual whose character is made up of beliefs, values and purposes that define who we are and who we connect with everyday. Our personality determines how we behave in different situations, how we dress and what we say. For people it's intuitive and it's rare that you even consider what your own character is, but when you're building a brand it's vital to have that understanding.



Consider what is driving your business

What does it believe in, what is its purpose and who are its brand heroes. These things can help establish your emotive brand positioning and inform the identity and character for brand communications.



Aim to build long-term relationships with your customers

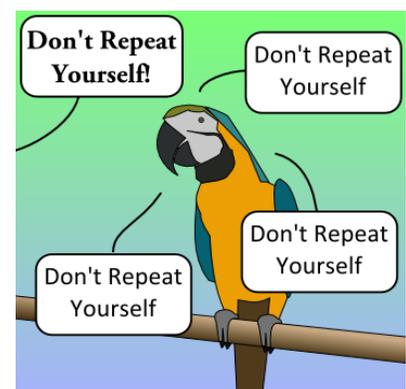
Don't dress up your offering and raise expectations that result in broken promises, create trust with honest branding – be clear who your company is and be true to the values that drive it every day.

Speak to your customers with a consistent tone of voice

It will help reinforce the business's character and clarify its offering so customers are aware exactly what to expect from your service.

Don't repeat the same message in the same way over and over again

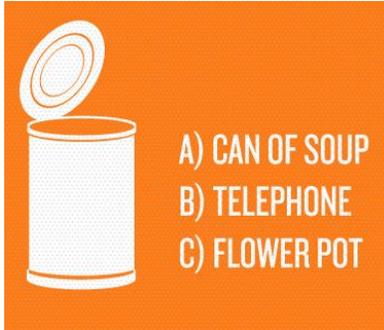
Alternatively, aim to make your key messages work together to build a coherent identity.



Don't try to mimic the look of larger companies, multi-inspector firms or franchises

Try and carve out your own distinctive identity. There is a big consumer trend towards independent establishments, and several big companies are in fact trying to mimic an independent feel to capture some of that market. Truly independent operators can leverage their status to attract customers who are looking for something more original and authentic that aligns with how they feel about themselves.

Be innovative, bold and daring – stand for something you believe in



Big brands are encumbered by large layers of bureaucracy, preventing them from being flexible and reacting to the ever-changing needs of their customers. Those layers of decision-makers can make it hard for them to be daring with their branding.

Always consider your branding when communicating with customers

Don't lose your pride or dilute your brand positioning with indiscriminate discounting. Try offering more, rather than slashing prices. Promotions are an opportunity to reinforce your brand mission.

The old way of stamping your logo on everything won't cut it

The future of branding is fluid and engaging – respect your customers' intelligence by not giving everything away up front. Generate some intrigue and allow them to unearth more about your brand for themselves. This is the way to foster ambassadors who revel in telling other people what they have discovered.

