

# Tips for Better Brand Building

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- 1 Analyze yourself and the competition.
- 2 Develop your brand strategy and positioning.
- 3 Create a brand design system.
- 4 Create employee brand ambassadors.
- 5 Deliver on the brand.
- 6 Send a consistent, integrated message.
- 7 Measure the effectiveness of your brand.

## **Powerful brands don't just happen—they are developed through careful planning and extensive work.**

A brand is a promise, a piece of real estate that you occupy in a person's mind, and the related impressions it leaves behind. A successful brand generates consumer loyalty and long-term financial return.

So, how important is a brand to your organization's success in the marketplace? Very. As customers are overwhelmed with brand choices, the most consistent and clear brand messages reach customers. Think about it. You never hear a doctor say, "Take two acetylsalicylic acid tablets and call me in the morning." What about "facial tissue," "cotton swab," or "adhesive bandage"? No. It's Aspirin, Kleenex, Q-Tip, and Band-Aid. And that's not all. Xerox, FedEx, Velcro, Rollerblades, and Quick Lube all stick like glue in the minds of customers. How is this possible? The following list describes the top seven tips for building strong brands.

Building a strong brand is invaluable. It is the foundation of your corporate marketing. It is your essence, your herald, your identity. Remember, your organization has a brand, but it is up to you to support it consistently, through words and actions. With the right strategy, branding can help any organization increase its customer base, loyalty, and credibility. Without a branding strategy, you are leaving the most important facets of your organization's success to chance.

### **1 Analyze yourself and the competition.**

Branding starts with the analysis of both your organization's and your competitor's strengths and weaknesses. Look at how you want to be perceived by key stakeholders and what differentiates you from your competition. Through internal research and target market analysis, uncover potential sources of competitive advantage. Determine which key benefits provide maximum relevance and differentiation for your service. Understanding the strategy and dynamics behind your own brand and competing brands will provide the backdrop against which to craft a distinctive brand with long-term competitive advantage.

**2 Develop your brand strategy and positioning.**

Strong positioning identifies the niche your organization can own and win. Brand strategy and positioning is based on detailed market research and planning, and does more than describe your product or service uniquely. It defines your relationship with key stakeholders, and clearly and concisely articulates how you want those stakeholders to think, feel, and act toward your brand. Branding positions situate your organization at the center and your products and services as the spokes. When choosing a brand position, tap into emotion, and develop accessible attributes for your brand. Your brand should readily tap into your target market's psyche and evoke an emotional response. This positioning concept then becomes the cornerstone for all communication activities.

**3 Create a brand design system.**

Today's brands and logos generate a powerful visual statement and brand representation, which set the tone for the entire organization. A strong design system reflects and personifies your organization through an immediately recognizable symbol, logo, design and/or environment. A design system is a cornerstone for branding efforts, and includes consistent design elements produced throughout business cards, stationery/letterhead, Web sites, internal and external signage, and all identity systems and brand communication services. A design system is simply crucial in supporting a strong brand.

**4 Create employee brand ambassadors.**

A strong brand gives internal audiences a common rallying point, creates a cohesive environment, and promotes a unified sense of purpose. It is critical to align your organization behind your brand because your organization can only deliver the brand promise if employees live the brand. Educate your organization on the value of branding, instill a sense of your brand by teaching all employees what the brand stands for and how to be brand ambassadors, and promote understanding, internalization, and emotional connection to your brand. Marshal this collective human spirit and you gain a competitive advantage.

**5 Deliver on the brand.**

You need to deliver on the promise you make to the market. Keeping promises is more important than good intentions. Organizational claims must link back to the brand promise and must be fulfilled. Remember, your brand symbolizes the trust relationship you have with your target audiences. Your organization's brand will succeed only when the entire organization, including its operations and culture, is aligned with its brand values. Every business practice, customer contact, and even employee attitude must support the brand positioning. If your brand says "friendly" but your switchboard operator is not, you are not. Likewise, if you identify yourself as "convenient" and you open the doors 24 hours a day, you are. By delivering what your brand promises, your organization can increase its credibility and leadership among competing organizations.

**6 Send a consistent, integrated message.**

Organizations that care about building their brand speak in a clear, consistent "voice." Visually, verbally, and through action your organization needs to build the message it is trying to create about the company's value. Consistent and cohesive use of your name, logo, and message points presents the organization in the same fashion to everyone. Every word, spoken and written, about the organization must support the essence of its brand—ads, brochures, presentations, press releases, sales materials, Web site, and other collateral. Your branding effort must permeate your entire organization. The CEO, the customer service staff, the sales force, the people who ship your product, and the people who sweep the floors at night must all know and demonstrate your brand's singular distinction at every touchpoint with your market. Done well, those messages generate a cumulative power, because audiences see them over and over again. As audiences grow to trust those messages, so grows their loyalty.

**7 Measure the effectiveness of your brand.**

To know how well you are doing in your branding effort, measure your brand equity against your past performance and competition at frequent intervals. Survey prospects and key decision makers in target markets to determine how they see the company. This should be done anonymously to find out where the respondents think the organization fits in relation to its competitors and what value the association brings to the table. These responses will help you learn whether your perception of your brand and that of the target market match. You must understand the equity your brand has in the market and also understand how your brand's image measures up against the identity you are trying to create. When the image you have in the marketplace is not consistent with the image you are trying to create for your brand, then you must refine your branding strategy and project the newly refined identity.

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