

## **Stop Marketing, for now, and Start Branding! How Businesses Define it. Create it. Build it. Profit!**

*By Suzanne Tulien, Principal and Co-Founder of The Brand Ascension Group*

When most people think of the term *Branding* they often associate it with the term *Marketing* or in some cases a cattle ranch. When they think of the term 'brand,' generally an image or a symbol such as a logo, or a tagline or a memorable slogan comes to mind. In fact, none of these associations are truly accurate. This is one of the most confused issues in business today. Knowing the difference can translate to rapid growth. That is why so many companies, particularly smaller to medium sized companies need to better understand the nuances and distinct differences of Marketing vs. Branding and leverage both to their advantage.

### **Marketing vs. Branding**

**Marketing** is the *act of communicating or disseminating* the message of your brand. It is all about the creative vehicles you utilize to leverage the message: print ads, electronic ads, trade shows, press releases, website, direct mail campaigns, etc. **Branding** is the *process of creating and living* the message of your brand. The two work hand in hand. However, if you don't have your message clearly defined and a flawless, consistent practice in place that reflects and affirms that message, then you will spin your marketing wheels and squander valuable budgets in the process. Our advice...? Stop marketing, at least for now, and *start branding* by getting crystal clear on the message you want to convey to your customers.

Creating and living the message to build a powerful brand must be approached in a **conscious, strategic and holistic way** that starts from deep within an organization. Do you have a clearly defined **Brand Platform and Promise**? Do your company's core values and behaviors reflect your brand promise? Do your operational standards of service and quality reflect your promise? Your brand promise is a unique and specific *internal commitment* written as a statement and used to convey and commit to your *way of being* throughout every aspect of your business.

*To be successfully positioned in the market place, a brand must promise differentiated benefits that are relevant and compelling to the consumer. The benefits can be functional, experiential, emotional or self-expressive...you promote it internally and externally...<sup>1</sup>*

Branding (creating and living the message), therefore, can not be an afterthought when your goal is to grow your business...it must be a conscious, strategic process embedded in methodical and deliberate practices congruent with YOUR brand's message.

Everything you do in your business has a **Cause/Effect Relationship**. Think about all the facets of your business from your values and behaviors, to your vision, mission and strategy, to your products and services, operational processes and systems and how integral all of these are to building a successful brand. How do these facets of your business show up in a conscious way to building and sustaining your successful brand ensuring **Relevance, Consistency and Distinctiveness**? These are not new ideas and are part of any "Branding 101" course or book,

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<sup>1</sup> Brad VanAuken, *BRAND AID: An Easy REFERENCE GUIDE to Solving Your Toughest Branding Problems and STRENGTHENING Your MARKET POSITION*. 2003 pp 8-9.

but somehow companies lose focus on these three key attributes in building a successful brand, and continue to dilute their dollars on marketing programs that are not Relevant, Consistent or Distinctive in their brand's key message.

## **Why focus on Relevance?**

Brand RELEVANCE is matching and satisfying YOUR internal and external messages and values congruent to YOUR brand promise...which leads to attracting relevant customers to your brand.

What values do you espouse to live up to that reflect your brand promise? Do all your employees understand the values and behaviors needed to live up to your brand promise? How do your values show up in a RELEVANT way in delivering on the promise you commit to internally within the business and how you want to show up externally to your customers? What do customers see, hear, touch, taste, smell and intuit that is RELEVANT to your brand? How do you illicit symbolic behaviors that create emotions and draw the right customers to your brand? Think about how you define RELEVANCE. Why is RELEVANCE important? Do your customers care about the same things you care about?

You want to eliminate those customers that are not aligned with your messages and values. Walt Disney had a vision for his brand. His core values of imagination and wholesomeness stemmed not from market requirements but from his inner belief that imagination and wholesomeness should be nurtured. Disney's brand promise and essence lies within the simple statement: *Fun, Magical, Family Entertainment*. William Proctor and James Gamble didn't instill in P&G's culture a focus on product excellence merely as a strategy for success, but rather it was part of their core beliefs. Nordstrom's service to the customer goes back a 100 years, way before customer service improvement became a focus for companies.

How relevant is WAL-MART® to its customers? What is their tagline? *Always, Low Prices, Always!* What about Best Buy? Relevance is explicit in their name? They provide the *best price* or the *best value* for the deal. Their name is relevant to the internal behavior and promise they deliver with product and customer transaction.

Your authenticity must be consistently congruent with your core values, not everyone else's. The truer you are to your brand the more authentic you are and the more loyal your customers will be. Trying to be something to everyone will weaken YOUR brand. No brand is universal! You cannot and will not appeal to everyone. So take some time to profile your perfect customer.

## **So what about Consistency?**

How do your operational processes and systems reflect your brand promise? How do you (collectively) show up CONSISTENTLY and flawlessly in delivering on your brand promise? What standards have you established to show up CONSISTENTLY in every customer interaction? What are the characteristics of your brand that demonstrate CONSISTENCY? What do your customers see, hear, touch, taste, smell and intuit that create a CONSISTENT experience with your brand? What behaviors do you demonstrate to consistently capture the hearts and minds of your customers? How do YOU define CONSISTENCY?

Brand CONSISTENCY is showing up the same way every time, talking the talk and walking the walk, being true to your brand promise.

Why is Consistency so important to sustaining your successful brand? What it boils down to is one simple word: *Trust*.

*Honesty is expected. Trust is engaging and intimate. It needs to be earned. Honesty is required to be in business today...Trust is something else altogether. It is one of the most important values of a brand and it requires real effort from corporations.<sup>2</sup>*

What would it be like to have to go to a different hairdresser every month? What would be like to have to change dentists or doctors every check-up? Get the drift?

How you show up consistently in the various facets of your business...from how you answer the phone, to how all aspects of your physical location shows up, what customers see, hear, taste, touch, smell and intuit must be congruent with your promise. How many of you have been in a wonderful restaurant only to find the bathroom is not consistent with the rest of the décor or the overall experience of the restaurant? This is one of the most often overlooked areas in the restaurant industry. It is called Cognitive Dissonance!

On the other hand, let's talk about Oprah. Oprah is the Queen of Consistency. Her market influence is incredible. Thirty million people totally trust her. The hallmarks of Oprah's brand are her straightforwardness, soulfulness and concern. You hear it in her voice; you see it in her face and the expression in her eyes. Her whole focus is to help people lead better lives...through everything she does.

Oprah's Angel Network – is a private foundation supporting organizations in the U.S. and around the world. One initiative in particular was helping 50,000 children in South Africa with donations and gift packs from various providers covering (shoes, books, book packs, food, toys, etc). This initiative generated \$5.1MM dollars from viewers, \$7MM from celebrities. The point here is that no one would donate that kind of money if they did not **trust Oprah** and know that she would **consistently** follow through on her promise.

## **Even You can Create Distinctiveness!**

What products or services do you provide to create DISTINCTION in the minds of your customers? What sets you apart from others offering similar services? What is the one word you "own" in the minds eye of the market that distinguishes your brand from others? What do your customers see, hear, touch, taste, smell and intuit that creates and affirms that DISTINCTION in their minds eye? Ask yourself, how I do show up distinctively in ways that create the desired emotional connection with my customers? What does DISTINCTIVE mean to you in building your successful brand?

Brand DISTINCTIVENESS is all about standing out uniquely and unequivocally different than your competition both internally (within the day to day inside operations) and externally (how your outside messages are leveraged) , and being congruent with your Brand Promise.

Think about Southwest Airlines. What are they most known for that sets them apart from their competitors other than the fact they are about the only profitable airline. How does Southwest Airlines show up distinctively? They do it through their *personality* as an airline. They refer to themselves as being in the service business, not the airline business. Their distinctiveness starts at

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<sup>2</sup> Marc Gobe', Emotional Branding: The New Paradigm for Connecting Brands to People, 2001 p. xxix

the top with their leadership team. They empower and encourage their employees to be themselves and express their individual personalities. What they are most known for is sense of *humor* and how they use this to conduct themselves and engage their customers. They dress casual and genuinely express their emotions. Fortunately, they would say, they don't take themselves too seriously, like their stuffy counterparts in the industry. Granted, not every customer who flies appreciates everything that Southwest has to offer...which is low fares, no assigned seating, no frills, etc., however, that's not the point...what's important is they are distinctive in their category.

How many of you shop in a typical grocery store. Most of them do nothing to entice or captivate the senses, not to mention they are like iceboxes and unimaginative in every way. Contrast this to Whole Foods. They do everything to show up distinctively in their category. Price is not an issue for those who shop here. You know what you are getting at Whole Foods. They are distinctive in their category.

Take a look at FedEx. What makes them so distinctive in their category is their "unrelenting commitment" to overnight delivery. Think about Google and how they have transformed the experience of browsing on the internet, and Amazon and eBay with their unique approaches to ebusiness. Hundreds of thousands if not perhaps millions of businesses and individuals buy and sell through their web sites daily.

Our advice is to Stop Marketing and Start Branding! Focus on a few things and do them well such as:

- ◇ Make sure your brand's message is crystal clear and authentic to your core values.
- ◇ Make sure every employee understands and lives your Brand Promise.
- ◇ Capitalize on the power of the human senses to create a RELEVANT, CONSISTENT and DISTINCTIVE experience for your customers.

Creating and living the brand message cannot be overemphasized. Branding is a powerful lever for any business when it is approached in a **conscious, strategic and holistic way** to show up **relevantly, consistently and distinctively** in the minds of your market.

## **About the Author**

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