

## **A Better Brand of Business**

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“We need a new logo. How much will that cost?”

That’s generally how the conversation starts. Usually it’s a phone call from an agitated business owner, possibly the CEO or a marketing manager. Somebody just like you. You try to stay calm while you tell your story. You know you’re talking to a consultant, and you don’t want the concern in your voice to translate into dollar signs in his eyes. It’s a common story that I’ve heard many times: The company has changed during the course of the last several years and needs to reposition itself in order to regain market share. Or perhaps the company has lost touch with its customers and needs to get “out there” with a fresh new image. Even more likely, the organization itself is unsure of what its message should be all about and the employees are having a difficult time putting the brand into practice on the front lines of the business. These are all common issues we hear about.

When our firm is invited to submit a proposal on creating a new logo, we always encourage the client organization to step back and evaluate what it is trying to accomplish from a business perspective. A new logo may not be necessary, and I’ve seen many an existing logo unnecessarily retired or thrown out in favor of something more “of-the moment,” when really the logo was not the problem at all. Usually the problem is an overall corporate identity crisis—more along the lines of a “we-know-who-we-are-but nobody-else-does-not-even-our-employees” kind of thing. That’s when we usually start talking about “branding.”

Tom Peters and Fast Company likely did more than anybody to take the concept of branding out of ad agencies into the everyday business lexicon. With articles on everything from corporate branding to building your personal brand, the business media has been dominated by this concept in recent years. But as tired as many marketers may be of the buzzword effect, the fact remains that thinking about your corporate image as a brand can be useful and profitable even for the smallest of organizations.

The starting point for creating a brand or visual identity is often the proposition of convincing senior management (read: financial management) there is value in investing in a strategically sound positioning strategy and a well-articulated corporate brand. Done properly, branding involves research, thinking, creativity, strategic planning, design and marketing. It’s an investment of time and money.

The CFO will want to know up front: How is this going to affect us? How is this going to increase our revenues or make our balance sheet look more attractive? How is a new logo going to change what customers, shareholders or employees think about our business? How is that going to affect our cash flow and how much is this going to cost?

All the creative and strategic services in the world serve no purpose if they do not improve the value of a business enterprise. So we anticipate these questions and strive to help our client organizations understand the potential value of what we do.

Brands are built to promote recognition and create emotional bonds in the competitive marketplace; to make a company's products and services attractive to its customers; to create trust and goodwill. Branding allows customers to feel like they know you – to become friends with your organization and buy into the ideas for which it stands so communication becomes more fluid and sales more predictable. The bottom line of branding for any organization is most often a need to create revenue growth. Can a brand do all this for your organization? Good question. We think the answer is a resounding “yes.”

A well-crafted brand serves to create a more positive experience of dealing with your company – before, during and after the purchase decision. By attracting attention, providing stronger interactions and validating the decision to purchase, your brand is a key business tool.

When it's built correctly, a strong brand will also create a more energetic atmosphere within your business. If, for instance, you choose to involve an employee group in the process of articulating the brand story, the brand becomes an integral part of the culture, motivating staff toward a new level of productivity and loyalty. It gives them reasons to believe in what they are doing beyond just earning a living.

In its most complex form, branding can involve in-depth research and market analysis, testing and multiple layers of refinement. Many cost-conscious businesses determine that the output – the graphic design – is the only key requirement and end up skimping on the preliminary strategic background work. We've found that the branding process can be adapted to meet virtually any corporate environment and budget, but first it must start with a sound strategy and a compelling brand story.

To do that requires a major investment from your company. Not the money you'll pay consultants and designers to develop and implement your new visual identity, but time. The time it takes to understand how the brand is going to be articulated, to participate in the creative and review process, and to implement the brand throughout your organization.

This series of articles will explore and illustrate through tried and tested methodology how you can create a brand that adds value to your company, creates loyalty with customers and creates an energized and enthusiastic workforce.