



How to Build a Better Brand

What is a brand? According to BusinessDictionary.com, a brand is a unique design, sign, symbol or words, or a combination of these, employed in creating an image that identifies a product and differentiates it from its competitors. Over time, this image becomes associated with a level of credibility, quality and satisfaction in the consumer's mind. Thus brands help harried consumers in crowded and complex marketplace, by standing for certain benefits and values.

My definition is a bit simpler and a lot broader: A brand is everything. It's your logo, your website, your images, your content, your print materials, your customer service, your view points, the way you dress, the way you explain what you do and so much more.

When you think of Apple, your thoughts might go to Steve Jobs donning his black turtleneck and glasses, who at one point was fired from his own company. You might remember the story of how he was known for holding incredibly short meetings and dismissing the least necessary person in the room. And how he believed that a business should create a product their customers don't even know they want yet.

Steve Jobs was part of the Apple brand. And after his death, he still is.

So how do you infuse yourself into your brand so when people think of your company, they immediately know what you offer and what you stand for?

Be Your Brand

Michael Kors, Deepak Chopra and Jillian Michaels are all entrepreneurs with a large staff and a big revenue stream. Not only does their business carry their name, but they put themselves front and center of their company. Whether it's behind the scenes at a fashion show or showing results of working with a client, these entrepreneurs know we are a voyeuristic culture. We like to see people create and we like to see the struggle, followed by the accomplishment.

So how is this done? The first thing you need to know is who is your target audience. The second thing is what do you want to project to them. The most important thing for them to know is how you can solve their problems and why you're the best at doing so.

Once you have that figured out, ask yourself if it makes sense to use your name for your business (ex. Tory Burch) or to have a fictitious one (ex. 24 Hour Fitness). It doesn't matter how many services or products you have, or how many employees are working for you. What matters is the message you want associated with your business.

And your business should be easily recognizable on every platform you're using. This means your social media names should all be the same and your profiles should explain what you do in an effective, simple and brief manner.

For example, if your business name is Jane Smith, your Twitter and Instagram handles should be @jane-smith or @jane.smith, not @workoutgirl77 or @sculptedarms88. That doesn't say brand, it says young person who doesn't have a business. And your description shouldn't say, "I like to work out," or "I'm a day dreamer." It should say what you do and who you do it for.

Changing Your Brand

So what if you decide to change your brand? First, don't freak out. Second, keep it simple. Brands evolve which means you don't have to be "married" to an idea or image you created your first year of business.

A great—and recent—example of this is when Hulu decided to drop the name Hulu Plus for their paid service. Hulu is the name of the company, and Hulu Plus was the name of their paid service which is \$8 a month to access their entire library of content. When they decided to drop the "Plus" part of their name, they sent out the following email:

Ramona,

We've had a blast with our old friend Plus but it's time to move on.

We just wanted to let you know that we are retiring the Hulu Plus name. From now on, we will just be known as Hulu. No "Plus."

Though the name is changing, your subscription is not. You'll still be a subscriber with all the benefits that come with that. You can keep on watching your favorite show on all your devices—without having to change a thing. Same great stuff. Slightly different name.

Thanks for watching!

Sincerely,
Your Friends at Hulu

My guess is that Hulu has more customers and brings in more revenue than most of our businesses combined. Yet they didn't feel a need to make a big shout out or launch over the name change. Instead, they opted for a message that was simple yet contained all the pertinent information to anticipate any questions their subscribers might have.

Other examples are as follows:

- Fitness and social media expert, Danny-J Johnson of Sweaty Betties, has almost half a million followers and has changed her business name to Danny-J.com.
- Famous chef and cookbook author, Diane Sanfilippo of Balanced Bites, is now just using her name.
- Life Coach and long distant runner, Nicole Antoinette of A Life Less Bullshit, is now Real Talk with Nicole Antoinette, which she announced in two sentences at the end of her last e-mail.

Brand on a Budget

You don't need to spend thousands on logos, photography and print materials to have a good brand. But if you are going to stand out amongst your competitors, there are things you must have on your website (and if you don't have a website, get one ASAP).

- First, make sure your website template is clean, organized and easy to navigate. You have four seconds to get the attention of a new customer, so don't lose them with small font and hard to find contact information. There are some amazing free and low-cost templates through Word Press.
- Second, personalize your website with photos of yourself (and team if applicable). Look on Craigslist or network through Facebook for a photographer just starting out to hire for a photo shoot.
- Third, if you need a logo troll through Twitter and Pinterest to find an up and coming graphic designer to create one affordably. And logos with images cost more than logos with a name only (ex. Nordstrom versus Nike).
- Fourth, if you've obtained press makes sure that the media logos are front and center on the top half of your website (ex. www.ramonarussell.net). This gives you instant credibility and helps establish you as an expert in your field.
- Fifth, make sure to have a testimonials page on your website—and don't just put the best five. I believe in the Amazon way; use them all. Think about it: if you went to a website of someone you were thinking of hiring and they had twenty, thirty or more testimonials, you would be blown away.

- Sixth, if you need brochures or other print materials, Microsoft Word and Apple Pages are great tools to make beautiful designs. And to save on the price of printing, use a digital printer service.

If you are worried about spending money on a new vendor, go to their testimonial page on their website and read what their customers are saying. Still unsure? Go to the websites of a few of their customers and shoot them an email asking about their experience with the business you're interested in hiring.

Remember, a brand isn't just a fancy, overpriced logo that you see on packaging and print materials. It's you, it's your company, it's your product, it's the message you project and it's what your customers are saying, thinking and telling others about your business.

About Me



I get a crazy amount of joy from seeing entrepreneurs thrive.

So when they don't, for something like not having enough people know about them so they can buy from them, my heart breaks a little.

In my 15+ years experience in public relations, marketing and sales, I've been a speechwriter, copywriter, project manager, event planner, fundraiser, negotiated million-dollar media sponsorships and media buys, executed huge branding and marketing campaigns, won awards, was a panelist a for Microsoft Small Business event and have been featured and published in a over 100 publications, blogs, websites, TV and radio shows.

All of this makes me uniquely qualified to create and teach strategies that get business owners (like you) more customers, more money and be seen as the experts they are. And it's not uncommon for my clients to get featured by the press and increase their revenue only a few days after working with me.

When I'm not showing peeps how to get media attention, I can be found snuggling my Hubby and our rescue fur baby Clyde, hanging with my nieces and nephews, decorating my friends' homes or binging a badass TV series.

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