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**Branding**

**By Phillip A. Ross**

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Branding

Often the more a thing is discussed the less it is understood. Words have a point of diminishing return. That point is crossed when the effort to be clear and precise counts every tree standing, but misses the proverbial forest. Such is the case with branding.

Because the idea of branding is all the rage, people are tempted to think that it is a new idea. It is not. It's roots reach back into history.

**The Old West**

Let's go back to the Old West where brands were burned into the hind quarters of cattle. The thing branded was the cow, the product produced by the ranching endeavor. The brand itself was the twisted iron logo on the end of the rod that left its image or mark on the hide of the cow. Cows were roped, tied and branded in order to identify them, should they be stolen. The brand was a mark of identity, as it is in the corporate world.

Some ranchers also used their logo as a welcome sign wrought in iron over the gates of the corral or over the road leading to the rancher's home. Again, the brand identified the ranch. Some ranchers even got their cowhands belt buckles with the ranch logo to identify them as employees. And over time logoed merchandise began to pop up on boots, hats, shirts, etc.

**Identity**

The brand is essentially a mark of identity. It identifies the ranch or company, and has come to represent or suggest the values and character of the company, and of its leaders. The brand is associated with the character of the company, as well as its products.

The early history of branding was always personal. Where does the ranch or company get the values and character that are associated with it? From its owners and leaders, and from their business practices.

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Branding as we know it today is the art of instilling and communicating the values and character of a company or organization through association with its logo. Psychology calls it symbolic association, and finds it to be foundational to the learning process. Symbolic association has deep roots in human experience and in history.

### Fish, Cross & Swastika

We find that branding as a practice began very early in history. The sign of the fish and the cross were symbols used by the early Christians. Over time they became Christian brands.

The Roman Emperor Constantine had a vision of a red cross in the sky before the battle of Saxa Rubra, October 28, 312, near Rome. He put that red cross on his shields and flags, branding the Holy

Roman Empire for centuries.

On August 7, 1920, at the Salzburg Congress, a red flag bearing the Swastika became the official emblem of the Nazi Party, as Hitler branded the Third Reich. While our emotional reaction to the Swastika is usually negative, both the fact and the intensity of our response to it points to the power of branding. Most people probably have an emotional reaction to the examples above. That emotional reaction is the aim of branding.

It must be recognized that a branding effort does not always turn out the way the campaign intends. The cross was intended to be a symbol of derision, but became a symbol of grace and mercy. The Swastika was intended to be a symbol of the triumph of the Arian race, but has become a symbol of evil. In both cases branding was achieved, but not in the way intended.

Of course, companies want the emotional association to their brand to be positive—even to generate an urge to splurge, or trust sufficient to sustain a transaction. But regardless of one's personal reaction to a symbol, the fundamental mechanics of branding involve soliciting an emotional response to a symbol.

There are two fundamental elements in the branding process. The first pertains to the symbol, the second to the association.

### The Symbol

The symbol itself must be familiar. The more the symbol or logo is seen, the more familiar it becomes. The most successful branding campaigns will have a lot of sustained media coverage and use a variety of advertising mediums. This does not mean that smaller campaigns cannot be successful, only that their success will be smaller. Familiarity is primarily a function of exposure.

### The Association

Secondly, the emotional content of the association also needs to be familiar. Of course it is true that new desires and/or emotional content can be created. But the effort is both time consuming and risky. The result might be other than the desired effect.

The more successful method for creating a symbolic association employs well-established and widely

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valued characteristics, like love, honor, truth, freedom, etc. Successful branding campaigns establish symbolic associations between their products and/or company and such noble characteristics. What is noble inspires people, and what inspires is remembered and discussed. It creates buzz. And buzz is branding's engine.

To discuss the art of branding apart from these foundational elements is to miss the forest for the trees. However, branding is more than a mere advertising campaign can accomplish because the symbolic association that needs to be made for the branding to be successful involves the core values and character traits of the company— its leaders and its business practices.

Prior to branding, core values, character issues and company policies need to be determined, developed and deployed within the company. Because the process of branding reveals the values, character and policies of the company, those things need to be right, and be in place before they can be successfully revealed.

### Premature Branding

A premature revelation of these things can be disastrous to the intention of the branding campaign. To be branded as hypocritical and shallow is worse than no branding at all. Again, branding occurs when an emotional response—any emotional response— is associated with a company symbol. The art of branding is to solicit the right emotional response.

So, what can be done to promote a brand? Begin by working to establish core values and character within and throughout the company. To be successfully branded is to be known widely for who you are. You want a great branding campaign? Be a great company. Aspire to the values and character traits of greatness and nobility. Herein lies the key to branding success.

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Phillip A. Ross, entrepreneur, freelance writer and owner of Business Specialties ([www.business-specialties.com](http://www.business-specialties.com)), lives in Marietta, Ohio, and provides identity products and promotional services to position companies and organization for substantial success.

### **Co-Branding For More Traffic**

**By Barrett Niehus**

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The opportunity to promote your web site on the internet grows daily. Unfortunately, so do the number

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of sites that compete for product placement and web traffic. As a response to this increased competition, many savvy marketers are turning to co-branding to provide them with an edge over their competition. By participating in co-branding programs, these web marketers can provide more tools, resources and "sticky" content than their competitors.

A co-brand program is usually an arrangement where a web page, company, or organization allows a licensee or participant to include the licensee's logo or brand on the product offered by the licensor. The benefit to the licensee is increased brand exposure, and the ability to offer a product that would otherwise be unavailable to their clients. The benefit to the licensor can be increase advertising revenue, or in many cases on the internet, increased web traffic. An example of this type of co-branding would be syndicated stock ticker that could be posted on your site, and branded with your logo. An example of this can be found at the Wall Street Trader Co-brand site <http://www.wstraders.com/index.cfm?CobrandApp=1>

The opportunities to co-brand on the internet are expanding from content to actual software and products. IP Ware real estate software <http://www.freetrainer.com/cobrand.htm> offers free co-branding and co-branded web links on the software's start page so that consumers are exposed to co-branding every time they start the software. The Internet Toolpad <http://www.itoolpad.com/> will actually insert your logo into a host of freeware for a small charge. There are also a number of organizations that will accept co-branding in exchange for cross promotion and increased traffic.

Regardless of the type of co-branding, the benefit in increased traffic and site "stickiness" is apparent. By using the branding and promotional resources on the internet wisely, the internet marketer can offer more options, better solutions, and more attractive content than their competition.

Barrett Niehus with IP Ware Wealth and Income software <http://www.realtysoftware.org> Create wealth with real estate and retire rich today. IP Ware is actively seeking partners who want to improve their financial status and promote their organization. <http://www.freetrainer.com/cobrand.htm>



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