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Branding = Focus

By Martin Lindstrom

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Over the years I've frequently been asked what the secret formula is for successful branding. What people are really asking me is how to make their brand a global leader, like Coca-Cola.

Well, sorry guys. There's no magic hidden in the process of building a brand. What successful brand-building is all about is following three simple principles. These form the crucial guidelines that help ensure you build a successful brand.

Branding is all about focus. When I say focus, I mean a lot of things. But the most important points are:

- your focus on a specific audience;
- which is reflected in your focus on a specific values;
- which is reflected by your clear focus on a specific tone-of-voice.

I know it sounds banal, but defining your unique target group is fundamental. Let me give you a couple of examples.

McDonald's has always been a family restaurant, and never a burger bar. What's the difference? None. But the family focus is a positioning strategy that's reflected in everything the corporation does. McDonald's knows that by targeting families it hits one of the most attractive, loyal consumer groups available: they get into the parents' wallets via the kids' minds. Knowing the strength of this strategy, it's no wonder that McDonald's has become what it is. And, by the way, the audience focus doesn't mean that McDonald's misses out on attracting teenagers, tweens or grown-up singles to their restaurants. Obviously, McDonald's restaurants are full of such consumer groups. But, by attracting a target audience, McDonald's hasn't scared off other consumer groups away. Just imagine McDonald's targeting teenagers. Do you think any families would show up?

A famous vodka brand decided to take targeting to the extreme by focusing on alternative audiences, like the gay community in the USA. By hitting this community in trendy bars in Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York, the product became fashionable and, so, a wider and wider audience was attracted to it. By now the vodka in question is one of the world's best-known brands, yet it's been raised in a very alternative background.

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Having considered the importance of your brand's audience focus, let's look at its message. What is it your brand wants to say? What tracks should it leave in the consumer's mind after exposure? What are its values? If I were to ask you what impressions spring to mind when I mention the word "Lego" you'd probably speak of "a creative construction toy", or simply "colorful plastic bricks". If I mention "Rolex" you'd probably respond with something like "high quality Swiss watch". "Mercedes-Benz"? "A high quality German car".

The principle is simple. What would you like the consumer to think, and not think, when they perceive your brand? Don't be too ambitious. You can't make the consumer say everything you want. For example, you probably didn't say, "Just Imagine..." when I asked you to respond to the concept of Lego, even though that's the product's slogan today. Focus on your brand's values, and communicate

these consistently.

That's the third important factor in a healthy branding strategy: communications consistency. Being consistent means delivering your brand's message using a tone-of-voice that becomes recognisable as the voice of your brand: that communicates the brand's values to its target audience day after day, year after year, everywhere, anywhere! A good rule of thumb to consider is this: when you start feeling sick and tired of your brand's message and voice, its connection with the consumer's recognition is probably just beginning. Remember, you are exposed to your brand thousands of times more frequently than your customers are. So don't let your own frequency of exposure affect your communications decisions.

Consistency is applicable in every facet of your brand's consumer communication strategy: ensure your brand targets its audience consistently, that it communicates the same message to it, that it personifies and transmits the same values, that it is exposed with the same vocabulary, nomenclature, design elements and graphics every time.

Many companies fail on the consistency prerequisite, even the big ones which you'd think would know how to handle this fundamental branding challenge. Take Swissair for example. I bet you know the name, but do you know that Swissair is also known as Crossair, Flightline, Jumbolino and Swissair Express? Each of these sub-identities are accompanied by a version of the Swissair logo, even though they all fly internationally. I'm sure there's a logical reason behind the airline company's divergent branding strategy. But I wonder if Swissair's customers understand it.

So, why didn't I define design consistency as a factor in its own right: the graphic design, the logo, the look that surrounds the brand? Well, because these elements are not what creates the brand. They support it and can help accelerate recognition and therefore, speed up the branding process. The "look" is a necessary element in the consistent communication strategy, but it's just an element. If your brand possesses the most beautiful logo and is associated with perfect identifying design, yet it has no clear audience focus, no value focus and no tone-of-voice focus with which to deliver its well-honed message, I doubt you'd ever succeed in building your brand. However, by following the guidelines established by these three principles, you're likely to score the brand-building goal, even without a fabulous logo.

Strong branding has nothing to do with a beautiful logo. But it has everything to do with your brand's message.

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 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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