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Corporate Identity: Put Your Best Face Forward

By Steve Yankee

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How you present your company, particularly in a first-time situation, has a lot to do with how you're perceived in the marketplace.

Sad but true, you may be an absolute whiz with your equipment and you may be a virtual expert in your chosen field, but if your company looks like a bunch of amateurs, you personally may be treated like one, and not get the respect (or the big budget projects) that you so rightfully deserve.

If you've ever worked for a big corporation, no doubt you've been specifically told how to use their logo, what typeface to use for their name, and what corporate colors you must use for reproduction of same. You may even have been handed a bulky "Corporate Graphics Standards" binder, replete with color swatches and exacting dimensions of everything from door signs to envelopes. The name of the game is "corporate identity." And it's just as important for you as it is any Fortune 500 company.

When you strip away all the clutter and marketing gobbledygook, the real purpose of a corporate identification program is to produce a system of graphics that is professional, attractive and that will enhance the image of your firm. Such a program should encompass all aspects of visual communications --including your stationery, advertising, packaging, brochures, signage, trade show booth design, and other printed material that will be viewed by both current and potential clients.

Okay, so you're not quite at the level of General Motors or Microsoft. It doesn't matter what size you are. Establishing and maintaining your corporate identification is very important in your marketplace --whether you're doing business on a local, regional or national scale.

Why? Simple. Because whether you're a company of one, or a company of 100 people, you want people to remember you; you want to look like you know what you're doing; you want to look stable, creative and --most of all --professional.

Let me tell you how we made my last company look much larger than life.

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Great Lakes Video Services was incorporated about a dozen years ago. At the time of our inception, the staff consisted of yours truly, my partner and two part-time technicians, and we had two dinky offices on a side street office building.

We were little. But we wanted to look larger than life. We wanted to look like we were well-established (which we weren't), savvy (which we were), professional (yep), businesslike (ditto), and creative (fer sure!)

So one of the first things we did after setting up the videotape dupe rack and plugging the editing suite together was to hire a professional designer and had him develop a logo. Simple, strong, colorful and eye-catching, it features our name and a graphic device that resembles both a wave (Great Lakes —get it?) and an artfully draped piece of videotape. We decided on our corporate colors —strong shades of

blue (for water) and green (for money), and locked in a "corporate" typeface —one that would not vary, regardless of where it was to be used.

And then we proceeded to put our new corporate identity/logo on EVERYTHING we could think of. Our shipping boxes. Our letterhead. Even our second sheets carried the simple wave device on the left-hand side. Our business cards, envelopes, order forms, mailing labels, tape box labels, cassette top and spine labels, rate cards, service brochures, invoices —even our equipment identification stickers carried the message in a consistent fashion. And even though my partner (the business and finance guy) winced at the cost of three-color printing for "throwaway" shipping labels, I persisted. If we wanted to convey the image that we were big and slick and could deliver, we had to consistently look that way.

And it worked. The corporate identity we established accomplished its purpose. We were perceived as having our act together.

The frightening thing about public perception is that we in reality could have been totally unhinged and thoroughly unprofessional, working in our garages or basements with antiquated equipment, but our graphic identity made us look like we knew what we were doing. Hence, people trusted us with their work. And when we did a good job, they kept coming back. And we prospered for it.

The lesson here is to remember to present your customers and prospects a strong, consistent image. Fragmented or sporadic adherence to this idea ultimately damages your corporate credibility. So decide what you want to be in the mind of your public. Take the time to develop a corporate identity program that says who you are and what you do, and exudes professionalism.

And when you've got it, use it!

Emblazon your name on everything from labels to baseball caps, ads to vehicles, business cards to building signs. Remember that synergy is strength, and consistency is the name of the game.

Steve Yankee is a copywriter and independent advertising and marketing consultant for small and medium-sized businesses. Need help promoting your company? You can contact Steve at

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Corporate Identity Management

By LeeAnna

Competition is great in the market world today and in order to get your business noticed, you will need good corporate identity management. You need to bring together all of the good qualities of your company as well as emphasizing what a great benefit your company will be to those who use your services. Good corporate identity management will do just that if handled properly. It will give your business a clear positioning towards your customers and prospective customers as well as your staff, suppliers, authorities, and even your competition. By making your business easily recognizable to those who want what your selling, corporate identity management will also play a key role in the development and maintenance of your business, and keep it running like a well oiled machine. In today's world, we are all bombarded with information, every waking minute. Globalization increases competition, products are interchangeable, and new products come to the market at an ever faster rate. Every business is competing for our attention. Selection of a supplier is not solely based on price or availability anymore; customers have the luxury to choose suppliers they can identify with. That is why your company will need an edge of some kind so that when people decide they need the service that you're offering, either your logo, or a witty saying, will automatically pop into the consumers head, in turn, they will seek you out. However, your business image is not the only thing that will get you noticed. How the press and advertisers perceive your company will rub off on the public also, so you will always need to stay consistent and make a good impression.

Consistency is very important in the business world today, unless you want to loose your business before it even gets off the ground, you can't say one thing then completely do another. In order to ensure consistency in communication, you may need to ask for help from someone who know what their doing when it comes to corporate identity management. There are many good organizations that can help you do just that. They can take your company and create something that will be distributed all over, no matter what you're selling. Another important aspect is that your staff needs to be able to identity with your company's corporate identity so they feel comfortable with it. >From your company's reception area, to telephone manners, the design of all printed materials and Web sites, to public relations, every aspect of a business has to breathe its Corporate Identity to be believable and distinguishable. Only then will your business have the chance of being taken seriously in the market, and ultimately to succeed. The primary idea behind a corporate identity program is everything your business does, own, and service it provides, should project a clear idea of what you and your business goals are. A good corporate identity management system works well and keeps the important things on tract.

LeeAnna is an expert author who writes for Corporate Identity Management

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