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How To Brand Your Web Site

By Said Rouhani

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What's your favorite search engine?

Mine used to be Infoseek. For a while Infoseek was the only search engine I used, and the name "Infoseek" was fixed on my mind as the place to go whenever I wanted to find something on the Internet.

But I could care less about Infoseek nowadays.

I never use it anymore.

After Disney bought Infoseek in 1998, they changed the name to Go.com. "Alright", you might say, "can't you take a name change?" Well, problem is, it wasn't just a name change, it was a total elimination of the Infoseek brand.

The whole visuals of the site were changed, and what's even worse, the Go.com site became an entertainment oriented search engine. It was still a search engine, but it neither looked nor felt the same as good old Infoseek (and the search results were not the same as before).

Infoseek was struggling, which is why Disney bought it. But it was still a heck of a brand name, an asset which Disney completely neglected. The result is that a lot of people who used Infoseek before have now switched to other search engines.

In fact, the brand kill was so destructive that Go.com doesn't maintain its own index anymore (it serves results from GoTo.com). Infoseek/Go.com is as good as dead, and the brand change by Disney had without a doubt a profound role in the failure.

What can be learnt from this? Well, first point: branding is very important. It can make or break a business venture.

Second point: branding is psychological. It exists in the minds of customers and prospects. When I say, "Image is nothing. Thirst is everything", I can bet that the name of a popular fizzy lemonade will pop up in your mind. That's the

power of branding for you.

And third point: repeated exposure to the brand is vital to producing a successful brand. When the Infoseek brand was gone, the search engine somehow lost its "meaning".

And just to make it absolutely clear what Web branding really is, here's a short definition:

The purpose of branding is to get people to recall your company/product/service from memory. The ultimate aim is to get people to trust you more than the competition, and to think of your Web site before they think of the competition's Web site.

Branding isn't just for the big companies. It's just as important to the small business entrepreneur, especially online business owners. With cutthroat competition on the Web, those who don't brand will probably go out of business.

Here are several hands-on branding strategies for you to apply to your own Web site, using your business name and your own name:

1. Repetition – This is very important: keep all of your design elements the same from page to page. Most importantly, display your logo at the top of each page, consistently throughout your Web site. Your Web site must have its own distinct "feel".

2. Newsletter/Ezine – Use your mailing list to push your domain name and slogan (consisting of your Unique Selling Proposition). If you have an ezine, create a header that contains your domain name and your slogan. Use this same header in all issues of your ezine.
3. Domain name – Use your domain name as your brand. Put it on all of your stationary (letter heads, business cards, post cards, statements, etc.).
4. Signature file – Implement your USP into your signature file, so with every email you send visitors will be further exposed to your brand. Check out the help file of your email software for more on setting up sig files.
5. Thank you pages – If you have online forms (for visitors to contact you, request more information, subscribe to your newsletter etc.), you most likely have a "thank you" page

where you thank visitors for using your form. This is an excellent place to position your logo and slogan. Don't clutter with lots of banners and marketing material. Keep it plain and simple.

6. Ebooks – Create free books on subjects of interest to your visitors and allow them to re-distribute to their own visitors. Brand your ebook with your logo, domain name and slogan on every page of the ebook (also consider including your own name).
7. Publish free articles – With thousands of new Web sites and ezines popping up in Web land every month, the demand for high quality content is immense. You can provide articles for other webmasters/editors to publish on their Web sites/ezines. At the end of your article put your name and a link to your Web site, with short teaser copy to get people to click on your link (offer a free book, subscription to your ezine or some other enticing offer – see my resource box at the end for an example). This is free publicity at its best – not only will you get traffic back to your Web site; you'll also add status and credibility to your name (provided your article is of high quality). Visit the following sites to submit your articles:

– <http://www.e-zinez.com/articles/index.html>

- <http://www.ideamarketers.com/>
- <http://www.ezinearticles.com/>

8. Autoresponders – These are emails that are sent automatically to anyone who requests them (triggered by sending them an email). Autoresponders are great as they work 24 hours a day without any intervention on your part. Use them to send visitors free reports, articles, list of links, etc. And add your branding copy (logo, name, slogan, USP etc.) at the top and bottom of the autoresponder message, with a link back to your Web site. Nowadays all good Web hosts provide their customers with free autoresponders.

If you don't brand, you'll have a hard time surviving on the Web. If you do brand – properly – you'll have a hard time not laughing all the way to the bank. And as shown by the above tips, online branding is not hard to do. Just implement the tips and you'll be well on your way.

Branding

By Bob Osgoodby

Branding by Bob Osgoodby

No, we're not talking about burning your brand into the hide of a steer, but rather into the mind of your potential customers. We're going to discuss effective techniques for telling your customers who you are, and what you do.

One of the maxims of any advertising campaign is to try to make your company a household word. Many of the major corporations such as Budweiser and Wendy's have discovered how to do this, and we could take a few lessons from them.

The Internet today, gives the smaller players a "level playing field" with some of big guys. If we are to succeed, it is vitally important to recognize what they are doing in their branding programs.

First, and foremost, if you are serious about doing business on the Internet, you must have a web site. When visitors arrive there, it should be immediately obvious as to what you actually do. Too many web site developers forget this, and try to impress

their visitors with graphics that take too long to load.

Don't forget – people visiting your site have come there for a reason. If you don't make it immediately clear what you do, they may just "click away". Any good ad will feature what benefit the person will receive by doing business with you. You want your "brand" to be loud and clear, and not hidden behind a lot of "glitz".

You must have contact information. A picture of you can go a long way to humanizing your web site. People prefer doing business with other people, not a nameless company, without anyway of contacting them, other than a form to fill out. You must have a physical address, and preferably a phone number where someone can contact you. The more you can make your potential clients comfortable with you, the better your odds of getting their business.

Verbal content is king. If your copy is not good, you will not succeed. Many web sites simply throw up a few graphics and a few "buzzwords", and wonder why they don't get a good response. People have taken the time to come to your site and are looking

for answers. A visitor to your web site, should leave with few, if any unanswered questions.

So basically, what is a brand? Your business name can be your brand, but it must tell the public exactly what you do. If it doesn't, you must create a brand, and feature that in all your advertising. It should be the first thing people see when they visit your web site.

The web site – <http://ListsAreUs.com> – gives a good example of branding. On the first page, without having to scroll down, you immediately know what the web site is all about. All of their advertising, which is specific to the market they wish to reach, carries this brand.

If you are to succeed in your online business, you must have a brand that will not only be remembered, but reinforces what you are trying to promote. But that is not all that must be done.

Newsletters and Ezines, specific to the market you wish to target are an excellent way to reach potential clients. While your ads should be brief, as people scanning a publication may skip by

your ad, it must be compelling. This is where your brand is so important.

A web site with a minimum of information however, will normally not obtain your goals. Face it, you got them to visit your site with your ad, and now they are looking for answers. If they don't find what they are looking for, the odds are they won't come back. While your ad must be brief, here you can (and must) tell the entire story.

Branding is critical to your business. Once you get "your" brand to be a household name for your target market, you are well on your way down the road of ecommerce.



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