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The Brand Called You

By Steven Van Yoder

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Every company has a reputation. Everyone you meet will form an opinion about your company, even if they have not done business with you yet. The challenge is to manage your reputation so that the opinion that people have of you is positive. This is what creates a brand.

Brands have a number of strategic functions, enabling you to: Differentiate yourself from your competition Position your focused message in the hearts and minds of your target customers Persist and be consistent in your marketing efforts Customize your services to reflect your personal brand Deliver your message clearly and quickly Project credibility Strike an emotional chord Create strong user loyalty

For small businesses, branding is not about slick advertisements. Small-business branding is about getting your target market to see you as the preferred choice. Building a slightly famous brand is not just about what you do; it's about what you do differently from everyone else.

Building Your Brand

A brand is a promise of the value your clients will receive. In an amazingly complex and competing world—where it's increasingly hard to know what's real and what's not—having your customers not only acknowledge but support the promise of your brand is the key to building a thriving business.

To become a brand, you've got to become relentlessly focused on what you do that adds value. Do you deliver your work on time, every time? Do you anticipate and solve problems before they become crises? Do your clients save money and headaches just by having you on the team? Do you complete projects within the allotted budget?

Branding integrates customer service, sales promotion, public relations, direct mail, newsletters, discounts, event sponsorship, word of mouth and other communications tactics to present a unified

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message about the company, its products or services.

Your brand will integrate all your marketing around a core idea and vision. As a result, you will find it easier to sell yourself, because your message will be uniform and powerful. Every business needs to evaluate its brand identity against the following criteria:

Relevance to the Market

A brand must stand for something that is meaningful to members of a target market. Your brand encompasses the total experience of doing business with you.

Consistency of Behavior

Customers must be able to depend on the brand to deliver the same experience every time. Because

your market experiences your values through your brand, the only way they will truly become loyal to your brand is through your dedication and consistency.

Relationship–Building

A brand is not a logo or an advertising strategy. "The strength of any brand is in the relationship it has between a company and its customers. The stronger the relationship, the more business they will do, and the more likely it is that customers will refer them to their friends and business associates.

Loyalty to the Customer Is Returned

The test of a brand is, in fact, the strength of loyalty it generates. If you have a strong relationship with your target audience, then you have a strong brand and a strong business.

Reputation Is Priceless

The only way to be successful in business is by establishing a good reputation, and a brand can help you do that. Your reputation works as your strongest marketer by communicating the relationship you have with people who've done business with you, and your target market in general.

Good brands stand the test of time. To develop a brand that will last a lifetime, go beyond what you do right now. Think long term. Look at Coke, Ford and General Electric. No matter what they sell or how they change over time, they can rely on their brand equity build on a foundation of customer trust to take them deep into their customer's trust quotient and keep them there.

If you establish a place of trust and relevance in prospects' minds, you're already in the door. The more people believe in your brand, the more it will spread throughout your niche market without your pushing. If your brand is clear, distinctive, and easily understood, and expresses a unique, compelling benefit that people believe in, it will bring you all the business you can handle.

Steven Van Yoder is author of *Get Slightly Famous: Become a Celebrity in Your Field and Attract More Business with Less Effort*. Visit

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Creating An Unconscious Brand

By Rachelle Disbennett–Lee, MCC, MS

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Creating An Unconscious Brand

Branding is a big topic in today's business world. Everywhere we look we can see examples of branding. Just think of companies like McDonald's, Coca Cola, and Toyota. These companies work hard to create and maintain their brand images. Branding is actually somewhat of a recent phenomena in business. It was started back with Proctor and Gamble when they decided to name one of their soaps Ivory. Naming the soap proved to be an excellent idea to the detriment of their other soap products. People stopped buying the generic soaps and began buying Ivory. Because of the success of Ivory, P&G realized the importance of branding and began a branding revolution. Moreover, branding is not just for companies; individuals have their own brands too.

You may not think of yourself as a brand, but you are. Most of us do not work at creating a specific brand like the big name products that we have all come to know and love. But, it doesn't matter. We are creating a brand everyday, consciously or unconsciously. Unfortunately, most of us are creating our brands unconsciously.

Everything we do, say, wear, every expression and even things we don't say and do create a brand. We cannot not communicate our brand because it is part of who we are. We might have a brand as a trustworthy person, or a good friend, or perhaps something not as positive such as someone who is always late. Our brand is communicated everyday by every action we take.

Stop creating an unconscious brand. Your brand is important because it says who you are and what you stand for. It communicates a great deal of information about you and can help or hurt you. Instead of being oblivious to the brand you are creating, begin taking charge of your brand. Your brand lets others know what you stand for, what they can expect from you and what kind of person you are. Make sure it communicates accurately.

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