

BRANDING FOR SMALL BUSINESSES AND BLOGGERS



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HOW TO STAND OUT
FROM THE CROWD &
CONNECT WITH CUSTOMERS

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Introduction

The reason why spoken communication evolved from grunting to specific words is because this improved the odds that your cave-inhabiting ancestors were getting their message across. Whether language is spoken or written, it's generally used to shed more light on the message you are trying to communicate. As long as you're speaking the same language as another person, and you both understand the meaning of the words and phrases you're each using, you can have an enlightening and well-understood discourse.

But this isn't always the case.

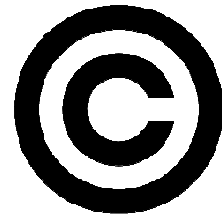
In the situation of the words "brand" and "branding", a lot of people seem to have very different ideas as to their meaning. Some equate branding with marketing, and while these two business tools are interconnected, they aren't the same thing. Others believe that a brand is nothing more than a logo.

Logos can do a very good job delivering a brand message (or not), but in many cases, if someone was to look at a logo without knowing what the corresponding company was about, that logo would give them no knowledge as to what the company does or what it offers.

The Definition of Branding

In business circles, people "in the know" will tell you that the word brand simply means "a product or service from a specific source". This may get you thinking about how cattle ranchers used a physical brand to mark their property. That practice is thought to be one of the reasons that logos exist today. Each cattle rancher would create a branding iron with a specific, one-of-a-kind symbol that was physically burned into each head of cattle.

When someone saw this "trademark", they understood immediately that the calf, bull or cow in question (the product referred to in the above brand definition) came from a particular ranch (a specific source). The fact that the tool used to mark cattle was called a branding iron may be why we use the term branding today to illustrate how we signify that our products and services are offered by us rather than someone else, and are unique in some way.



Branding in business moved from the cattle fields to physical products of all types in the 19th century, as the manufacturing and packaging of goods joined assembly line efficiency. Burgeoning technology meant that just about anyone could go into business, selling a product or service that was offered by others. Unlike cattle, which simply had a brand symbol to indicate who owned the animal in question, similar products need to differentiate themselves from the competition by being unique.

This means the modern definition of branding is probably closer to what marketing guru David Ogilvy describes, rather than simply telling you where a product comes from. Ogilvy and other smart marketers came to understand that to make your offerings stand out in the minds of your target audience, you needed to convey "the intangible sum of a product's attributes", or your product was perceived as pretty much like other similar products offered by other companies.

When you can brand your company, services and products in such a way that they leave something positively memorable and specific in the minds of your audience, and that unconscious relation to your company is unique, your brand and company can grow incredibly quickly with little more than word-of-mouth advertising.

In this special ebook on branding for bloggers, kitchen table entrepreneurs, infopreneurs and internet business owners, we'll take a look at the true meaning of branding, and why it's so important for even the smallest of companies.

You'll learn the benefits of having a clearly defined brand message, why a logo may or may not be important for delivering that message, and how marketing and branding are closely related, but not the same animal.

You'll discover that the most important aspect of branding is getting people to attach your company name, logo and products to your unique story. This means being uniquely different from your competitors, and the rest of the marketplace as it currently exists.

You'll learn why you should understand what your clearly defined target is as far as an audience or niche, and how to choose a business name that helps broadcast your brand.



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Companies that use branding correctly understand their website often provides one of the first interactions with their business. This means setting your website up in such a way that it relays the values and overall feel of your brand and business.

Finally, you should seriously consider injecting your specific and unique, one-of-a-kind personality into your brand. This helps reach your audience on a deeper level than businesses which are stodgy, dry, formal and have little personality.

Let's get started with your branding education by exploring the difference between branding and marketing.

The Difference Between Marketing and Branding

Marketing can take many forms. You may decide to spend money on a Facebook ad campaign. This is an example of you marketing your business. Traditional, "old school" marketing tactics include classified advertisements in magazines and newspapers, radio advertising, marketing with television ads and handing out your business cards.

As such, marketing (trying to make people aware of what you have to offer, in the hopes of building a prospect list and eventually making sales and profits) can only happen after branding has occurred.

Once you have created a memorable brand, which may be recognized because of some physical trait (the size, shape and color of a container or package) or emotional attribute (when people think of your business they think of romance, upper-class ownership, excitement, extreme value, durability, etc.) - It's only then that marketing should take place.



If you begin marketing your business without a clearly defined brand or identity, what is there to make your audience choose you over a similar product from a competitor? The answer is ... nothing.

The difference between branding and marketing is simply this...

- Branding is what you do to create a specific and immediate idea about your business and products in the eyes of your audience.
- Marketing can be any number of practices that lets people know your brand exists.

If you build your brand properly, you can create raving, loyal, lifetime fans and customers who can't wait to tell others about your business. This makes any and all marketing efforts pay off much better than if your brand is not well-regarded, or instantly recognized.

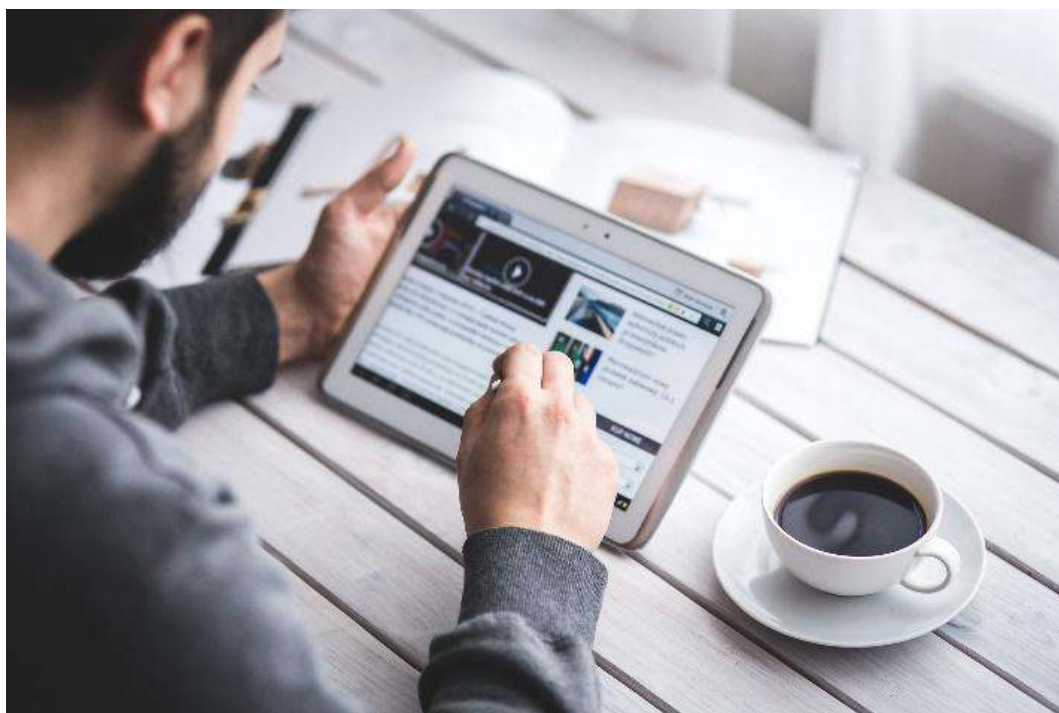
Marketing is simply a tool which works to identify possible buyers, clients and customers so you can present your brand and those products and services you have to offer.

I Just Run a Small Blog or Online Business. Why Is Branding Important to Me?

Instead of thinking of yourself as a small-time blogger, online entrepreneur or someone who is just getting started running an online business, try a different approach. Think of how many other individuals and businesses offer pretty much the same things you do. No matter what you're selling, unless you are the first to market, you're probably up against a lot of competition, in the form of small, medium and large businesses.

When you think of the sheer amount of competition you face online and off, branding begins to make a lot of sense. The smaller your entrepreneurial business or blog, the more importance you should place on branding.

In 2008, a gentleman by the name of Pat Flynn started a blog about running online businesses. He was up against major competition. He has confessed over the years that nothing really happened to his blog to create a full-time income until he began to brand himself as the "passive income guy", broadcasting his unique and personal story.



Now Pat Flynn is one of the most recognizable bloggers and online entrepreneurs in the world. He was at one time where you might be right now ... a small-time entrepreneur and blogger. Once he began teaching others how to make a reliable and passive income and his audience began to make money doing things Flynn taught them, his brand as a passive income expert exploded, and so did his business.

Branding is important for small businesses as well as large companies. If you have a limited budget, smart branding is perhaps the most inexpensive business tool to create a global reach, diehard, lifetime fans, and a positively memorable experience related to what you have to offer.

Your Brand Story - What Makes Your Brand Unique & Stand Out from the Crowd?

Probably the most crucial start to branding so that you are heading in the right direction is the development of your USP. Your USP is your "Unique Selling Proposition", also referred to as a "Unique Selling Point". According to the Online Business Dictionary, your USP can be defined as ...

"A real or perceived benefit of a good or service that effectively differentiates it from the competing brands and gives its buyer a logical reason to prefer it over other brands."

This part of branding doesn't necessarily concern itself with your logo. We will discuss logos later, because they can be important as far as your brand is concerned, in many cases. What you're looking for here is what makes your company and products the "no-brainer" choice as opposed to what other companies are offering.

When Domino's Pizza first began, there were plenty of rivals. There were national chains and local, "mom-and-pop" pizza stores to compete against. Because of this, and the fact that Domino's Pizza definitely did not set itself apart from the competition by offering the best tasting product (they certainly didn't), the company was only mildly successful.

However, with smart branding, the single-store Domino's company that started in sleepy Ypsilanti, Michigan grew rapidly to become the second biggest pizza chain in the US because of a simple branding message...

"30 Minutes or It's Free"

Domino's founder Tom Monaghan realized people were upset about having to wait 45 minutes to an hour or more to get their pizzas delivered. He focused on delivery only, figured out what area he could deliver pizzas to where he could guarantee a 30 minute delivery time after order, and the rest is history.

Monaghan didn't promise the least expensive pizza or the best tasting pizza. He didn't promise the freshest ingredients either. He simply promised that if you didn't get your pizza delivered in 30 minutes or less, it was free. That simple branding maneuver did what no other pizza company could do, and because of it, Domino's Pizza is now a multibillion-dollar operation around the world.

Find out what you can do that's unique to your industry or marketplace and currently not provided by your competitors. Make that characteristic or promise a part of your brand, then do everything you can to stand behind that message.

Tell your story, one that's different from others. If you can do this, and your unique branding efforts provide a benefit for your customers, there is no reason why you can't become the next Domino's, going from smalltime operation to global business.



Market Research & Defining Your Target Audience

Ask yourself the question, "*Who is my target audience?*"

Your first answer is probably going to be very vague, such as "people who are overweight" or "people that want to run an online business". If you attempt to target those massively large audiences, two things are going to happen.

First, you'll be battling huge businesses with massive marketing budgets. Secondly, your target is so undefined that you'll have a tough time hitting the mark.

What you have to do here is to ***dig down deep.***



Think about the unique benefits your products offer. Then work backwards. What individual can benefit from what you have to offer? Don't think about your audience as a whole; consider the perfect individual your product or service is best suited for.

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In other words, if you're marketing to "single stay-at-home moms starting a blog about money-saving shopping tips" rather than "stay-at-home moms", you have a much better chance of connecting with your audience.

Clearly define your audience. What are the characteristics and traits that embody your "perfect prospect". If your service is best suited to a single mom with 2 kids that is stuck at home, has some college education but not a college degree, is struggling to make ends meet and is thinking about blogging to develop a passive income stream, create a mental image of that woman in your mind.

- What does she look like?
- What does she dream of?
- What is her income level?
- What are her values, likes and dislikes?
- What are the problems she needs solved?
- What does she want from you?

Keep this very specific target in your mind at all times, especially when creating your brand and marketing your branding message.

Understanding that specific individual's needs and desires and having a clear idea of who the people in your target audience are is extremely important when creating your brand.

Choosing A Domain Name/Business Name

Yahoo is a globally recognized Internet company. Starting out as an Internet search engine, they had a lot of competition. They wanted to become memorable.

With a silly name like "Yahoo", they are recognizable ... and that name is definitely memorable. Whether you go silly or serious, you want to be unique and recognizable when you choose your business name and the name of your website/domain.

One thing you must absolutely understand here is that the name of your business is not nearly as important as how effective you are at communicating what value your business adds to the marketplace.

It's also important to look at the competition.

You don't want to use words in your business name that could accidentally lead people to your competitor. Also, while it's good to differentiate yourself in many aspects, depending on your business, you may want to think like other businesses in your market. For instance, financial consultation firms are often named after the last names of their founders.



You should additionally think about what exactly it is you're trying to get your business name to accomplish. This has a lot to do with your branding message, the idea you are trying to create in the mind of your perfect prospect.

The Publix supermarket chain in the United States uses a misspelling of the word "publics" to be catchy and memorable, while also conveying the sense that they are a part of your public neighborhood.

If you have a single product or service you are offering, integrate that idea into your business name. A website named "ReallyCheapCarInsurance.com" effectively translates your main business focus, and isn't where someone would probably turn to if they were insuring a \$200,000 sports car.

Consider these points:

- Positioning - *how is your company different?*
- Savings - *how does your company provide great value?*
- Experience - *how does your company reward your customers emotionally?*
- Recognition - *can you make your company name positively memorable?*

Once you have an idea for a business name in mind, test it against your marketplace.

There are plenty of forums, chat rooms and Facebook groups where your perfect prospects hang out. Getting input from these individuals before deciding on a business and website name that will represent your company can keep you from making a serious mistake.

The Chevrolet car company once created a model called the Nova, hoping to cash in on the meaning of nova as a bright, shining star. However, they didn't do enough market research. The phrase "no va" is loosely translated in Spanish as "doesn't go" - hardly an attribute you would want to attach to an automobile!

Branding Logo & Design Basics

Google is the world's largest search engine and the largest (and some say most powerful) Internet company. Even so, their logo does not tell you what they do as a business. The Google logo is simply the word Google, spelled out using 4 different primary colors. This isn't usually what you want to do when you attach a logo to your branding message.

The creators of Google started off with a silly name and no clear logo. They quickly grew to become the largest Internet search engine, and once they reached that point, they were already known for what they did rather than a particular logo.

As a budding blogger or entrepreneur, you'll probably have to do things a little differently.

The following 7 tips and best practices are proven to create a logo which is relatable to your brand, as well as instantly identifiable and memorable.

1 – Come up with Several Ideas First

Sketch out 10, 20 or even 30 logo ideas. Then turn these over to a talented graphic designer. If you simply come up with one idea and then go with that logo, you may be forcing your thoughts on your prospects, and could miss out on the perfect logo and design.

2 – Keep It Simple, and Identifiable When Small in Size

Your brand needs to be recognizable on computer displays, the television and on print media. Since more people access the Internet from their cell phone than from a traditional computer, this means your logo is going to be physically small in many cases. If it's way too busy, with too much going on, it will be unrecognizable or visually frustrating on mobile handset displays.

3 – Make Your Style "Fit" Your Company

If you have a very formal company and market, the font, design and colors used in your logo should reflect that. The opposite is also true. Bubbly, cartoonish, humorous characteristics should only be used if your company has the same traits.

4 – Attach Your Unique Message If Possible

A few years ago, the Wendy's hamburger chain changed their logo, only slightly. The same smiling, redhaired, freckle-faced young girl is used, but now the fringe around her collar spells the word "MOM". The idea is to unconsciously have you associate Wendy's food with a home-cooked feeling.



5 – Look at What Your Competitors Are Doing ... and Then Do Something Else Entirely

Remember, you want to be unique. If all your competitors' logos are similarly unappealing or "normal", that's a good thing. Make your logo, as well as your brand and products, different than what the competition offers.

6 – K. I. S. S.

The KISS business tactic is to "Keep It Simple, Silly". In business circles, the word silly is replaced with another "S" word that insults your intelligence, but the message is the same. Sometimes a simple, uncluttered, straightforward design is the best. Take for example the globally recognized and very simplistic logo of the Apple computer company.

7 – Outsource the Job

Graphic designers are good at what they do. Unfortunately, as a small business owner, you may be a micromanager. You're used to doing everything, all the time. While you can probably figure out how to use Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop or some other design tool, once you get the idea for your logo in mind, it's smarter to outsource to an experienced freelancer to handle the job for you.

Infusing Your Brand with Personality/Connecting With Your Audience

Have you heard of Matthew Lesko? If you've ever looked for information regarding government grants, loans and other sources of free money, you no doubt know exactly who Lesko is. However, before he decided on a very specific brand message, he was simply one other resource available for people in the United States searching for government-backed loans and grants.

Struggling to become known in a very competitive market, Lesko decided to make himself visually memorable. He began wearing colorful but eye-jarring jackets and suits, many of them covered with question marks. He understood that people had a lot of questions regarding how to obtain grants, loans and free sources of money, so he wore multicolored clothes that were brash and sensational, adorned with question marks.

He began making TV commercials and infomercials where his voice, enthusiasm and personality was as frantic, loud and "in-your-face" as his clothing. He instantly became known as "the question mark guy", as well as the #1 government grant and loan resource.

He has since published more than 100 books, 2 of which are New York Times bestsellers and 2 which are national bestsellers, all showing people how to get free products, money, grants, loans and services from their government.

This is just one example of many why you definitely need to infuse your brand and your company with your personality. Before Lesko made himself different than every other of the hundreds of companies offering literally the identical information he offered, Lesko struggled.

Now he and his company, Information USA Inc., have been featured on Good Morning America, Late Night with Jay Leno, the David Letterman Show, The Today Show, Larry King Live and the Oprah Winfrey Show.

If you're not sure how you can set yourself apart from the competition, talk to your friends and family members. Ask them what is your most identifiable (and positive) attribute, characteristic or trait.

Think about what your products offer that makes them better and more valuable than what your competitors are doing. Then use both of those pieces of information to marry your personality (sassy, intelligent, friendly, helpful, etc.) and physical appearance (exceptionally tall, very short, fat, skinny, crazy hair, celebrity look-alike, etc.) to your business.

Knowing When It Is Time to Change Your Brand Message

Are your sales and profits where you want them? Are you getting the things from your business you had hoped for? Perhaps business is booming, your blog is blowing up, you're the entrepreneurial toast of the town, and you have a positively memorable brand that does its own advertising without you spending a penny. If that's the case, congratulations. You don't need any more help in brand creation.

Odds are though, this is not the case for you. Otherwise, you probably wouldn't be reading this ebook. That means that you may not have developed the brand message that can do the most for your company. In either of those cases, where your brand is super successful or your branding message needs some help, you may be asking yourself the following question ...

"When, if ever, should I think about changing my brand?"



If you have ever considered modifying or totally changing your brand message, congratulations are in order. Most people develop an identity for their business and they never tweak it or try to make it better than it is.

They look at branding as a "once and done" endeavor. This is a shame, because even successful businesses can benefit from changing the perception of their company, whether large or small, when that change is needed.

Take the Harley-Davidson motorcycle company for example. The powerful motorcycles developed by the original Harley-Davidson company were generally associated with "bikers", motorcycle gangs, and didn't have the most positive associations.

Faced with global competition from high-profit motorcycle makers like Kawasaki, Suzuki, Honda and Yamaha in the early 1980's, as well as bankruptcy, the company made a smart decision.

Instead of associating themselves with macho men, life on the road, motorcycle gangs and other "tough guy" imagery, Harley-Davidson went to work on their product and image. In a branding strategy session that lasted just 4 days, the company created a whole new brand identity. They began to approach things differently from the above-mentioned cycle makers, by not releasing significantly different products each year.

They got their employees involved in their operation. They re-created their retail store environments to be friendly, happy, enjoyable and informative places that were not only frequented by men that looked like extras from a Hollywood biker gang movie.

They began to develop motorcycles specifically for women and marketing their products as "his and hers" toys for middle income to higher income couples that were anything but their former tough guy, all male, living on the road demographic.

They came up with the idea of an owner's group so their customers could interact, show off their motorcycles, ride alongside each other in events and the idea paid off. By totally changing their branding image 180 degrees, they averted bankruptcy, and not only survived massive competition on a global level, but are thriving better than ever before, with an established presence as a status symbol motorcycle developer in multiple countries on 6 continents.

If you're struggling, or your business is doing well, it pays to take a look at your brand. Be honest with yourself. Think about ways you can make your brand more attractive to your prospects, and don't be afraid to retool your branding message when necessary.