

Elements of a Good Brand

By William Hastings, B.A.

Your brand, and how you communicate it, is paramount to your business success. Your brand accounts for 50% or more of a company's market value, according to marketing Guru and author Peter Fisk. Your brand is who you are as a unique business—as a culture. It is what makes you different and worth a second look.

In simplest terms, however, a brand is not what YOU say your company is, it's what your audiences THINK and FEEL you to be. A brand is embodied in an amalgam of perceptions, feelings, impressions—a gut reaction that people have formulated about a particular product, service, or organization. Your internal brand may be quality service, but a Microsoft clip art “logo” will not engender this feeling or perception.

What comes to mind when you see an image of the Nazi swastika, or Coca-Cola bottle? Chances are, those symbols elicit fairly strong associations in both your heart and mind. What you've just experienced is a “brand.” So, why do we have these reactions? Because we're human. We all think, we're all hardwired to reason, discern, and make choices, but more importantly, we all FEEL. And, when bombarded daily with a litany of messages and choices all screaming for our attention, our minds side-step the melee, and our hearts respond to the messages which resonate most with our ideas about ourselves.

There is, however, a difference between branding and a brand. Quite simply, a brand, as illustrated above, is reactive—your audience's perception of you. Branding is proactive—encompassing all of the actions your organization

undertakes to influence those audience perceptions. Branding efforts seek to create an appropriate, overarching voice, a personality; that voice is communicated through symbols such as logo, tagline and company name, extending to advertising and marketing strategies, customer service and personal contact—collectively known as “touchpoints.”

To be effective, branding symbols and touchpoints must correspond to and resonate with target audience(s). Your branding messages must accentuate what makes you and your offerings different and unique in comparison your competitors' messaging (the power of “different”). With so little time to make a first impression, it is essential to communicate your message in a concise, clearly-articulated manner that helps your audience “see” themselves in the brand. This is done most effectively by expressing benefits as opposed to features, descriptions of services, or some wonderful quality we or our businesses possess. (Your mugshot means little to people; what you can do for them—how you can solve their problem, or satisfy their needs—means everything.)

In other articles from the Sublime Limbrary®, we will cover the elements of branding in more detail and discuss how small business and non-profits can effectively brand themselves. The fine balance of branding is making an emotional impact upon your audiences, through benefits important to them, while communicating your essence with skill and subtlety (showing, not telling). To do all of this with a symbol, a few words and brief messages is challenging, but when it's done right, you will get noticed! 🍏

Examples of Branding Touchpoints

- Visual identity (a company's logo, print collateral, website, employee uniforms, vehicle graphics, internal and external signage)
- Descriptors such as company name and tagline (short, memorable, impacting)
- Product design and functionality
- Packaging
- Service: The nature of the service (smart, friendly, reliable) is a valuable element in building good brand associations
- Advertising
- Retail environment
- Branded sound (e.g.: the “Intel Inside” quad-tone, the NBC tri-tone)
- Employees (demeanor, attitude, level of customer service, determination)
- Advertising spokespersons (Catherine Zeta-Jones for T-Mobile, the friendly Geico Gecko)