

The bottom line?
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Marketing Partners, Inc.

A Brand Never Sleeps

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Your organization already has a branding program, whether you know it or not, and your brand lives 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The products and services your company or organization provide (and how they are provided) are at this very moment creating a “brand” in the minds of your customers.

Whether you are currently engaged in a formal “branding program” or haven’t even begun to define what you want your brand promise to be, your brand is out there —living, breathing, being shaped, reshaped and ultimately judged by everyone who comes into contact with it...especially by customers and potential customers.

The challenge is to take control of that branding effort and make it work for you.

Brand Speak

What is a brand?

To branding theorists, a brand is often defined as “mindspace,” or “a place in the mind of the consumer.” In that space is the collection of all the experiences an individual has had with your organization and its products and services. Past and present. Good and bad.

A successful brand is one that can turn those experiences into a set of promises that imply trust, consistency and define a set of positive expectations in the minds of customers.

Specifically, a strong brand...

- Makes and keeps promises to your customers;
- Represents all that you are and aspire to be;
- Makes you different from the competition;
- Creates an emotional connection with your customers; and
- Guides your organization and its people.

What is a brand?

The intangible and emotional connection between an organization and its customers...

“The exchange consumers make with a good brand...makes perfect sense: The brand offers **comfort, trust, convenience and identity** in an excessively complicated world. In return, consumers give the brand their **predisposition to buy...**”

David F. D'Allesandro, *Brand Warfare: 10 Rules for Building the Killer Brand*, 2001

Questions, Questions, Questions

So what should **your** brand promise? What does it currently promise? What do customers expect? What about non-customers' expectations? More important, when should you ask these questions and how can you obtain the answers?

“A brand embodies the organization's **promise to consistently deliver** a specific set of features, benefits and services to the buyer. If the brand cannot **influence choice**, it is not a brand; it is just a corporate identity.”

Marketing Partners,
“*What's all the Buzz about Branding*,” 2001

For all of these questions, what it comes down to is “know thy customer.”

Self-examination, market research and strategic prioritization are the initial steps your organization can take to answer these questions, identify what you stand for and create an effective brand promise. However, just because you’ve collected the information once doesn’t mean you’re done.

The practice of continuous data collection forces you to evaluate and re-evaluate your brand to confirm that the products and services you offer continue to live up to your brand promise.

Branding: Old-School Talk vs. New-School Walk

Old-school branding encouraged organizations to pour large sums of money into mass media to create space in the mind of the consumer.

Rather than focus on enhancing or improving the customer experience, companies bought and deployed promotion and advertising to persuade consumers that the organization was doing something for them. Today, new-school branding encourages organizations to spend money on brand segmentation, brand maintenance and if need be, brand reinvention. That is, you should spend money to create, provide and ensure that products and services consistently meet or exceed expectations, not just to convince consumers you’re doing it.

The bottom line?

Marketers are finding it more cost effective to maintain that “space in the mind of the consumer” through managing the purchase experience rather than through marketing communications.

That’s not to say that marketing communications such as advertising aren’t important; however, today’s “what’s in it for me economy” demands that marketers create a positive experience for customers so they make a repeat purchase decision based on that experience, not on their “last heard” message.

What else would explain why consumers clip coupons to make sure they purchase ground coffee at a grocery store for the least amount of money, yet spend as much as \$4.50 on a Venti Mocha Frappuccino® at their neighborhood Starbucks? Again, it’s all in the experience and meeting the expectations of that experience.

What is branding?

Branding is **cross-functional**, with one single message running through all customer-focused activities; it is not just the responsibility of membership, marketing or any other single department.

Branding Never Stops

Because a brand never sleeps, branding never stops.

What is branding?

Branding is a conscious, ongoing effort that promises a consistent experience to your customers and delivers on that promise every day.

While a brand is the promise you make to customers, effective branding aligns everything you do, say and sell in your daily activities to create an organization that single-mindedly lives up to that promise each and every day.

Branding is where the rubber meets the road. It involves everyone at all levels within the organization continually creating, offering and monitoring programs within your organization to live up to your brand promise. This necessitates training and, if necessary, hiring staff that can make this service component a reality.

Driving the Brand Strategy

By now it must be apparent: the act of branding is strategic, not tactical. More than just a marketing tool, effective branding is a significant financial and management strategy. Senior management must drive the branding effort because a successful effort will be all-pervasive.

But, while the impetus and direction for the branding effort must come from senior leadership, every department and every function must be single-mindedly focused on the brand, creating and maintaining a relationship with every one of your customers.

Every department, not just the marketing department, is responsible for living up to your organization's brand promise.

Where do you begin?

- By creating and/or reshaping (if necessary) your brand promise;
- By developing a brand strategy that aligns your organization around prioritized, daily brand-building activities; and
- By every employee living your brand through daily activities that “walk the talk.”

About the Authors

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Marketing Partners, Inc. is a strategy and business services organization serving , consumer packaged goods, consumer durable and health care clients, as well as individual membership societies and associations across the United States. The firm's focus is on organizational and business improvement — principally in three areas:

- *Customer Focus*, which includes using market research to create market-driven products and processes designed to gain and retain customer loyalty;
- *Organizational Advancement*, which views the organization itself as the product and focuses on developing both strategy and organizational capabilities including custom-designed strategic and breakthrough planning processes; and
- *Revenue Enhancement*, which employs both fund raising and marketing tools to identify and tap new sources of revenue.



If you would like more information about how a focused branding effort might benefit your organization — or more information about any of the services Marketing Partners offers — please contact us.

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