



## **Why You DO Have To Think About Branding As A Small/Startup Company**

Let's talk branding. It's a word that gets thrown around a lot, but what does it really mean? More than that, what does it mean to your business? Is branding something you can afford to focus resources on as a small business? Can you afford not to?

What if we substitute the word brand for reputation? That's a little more familiar, but only a part of what branding means. It is your reputation and more.

### **What is Branding, Really?**

Branding is a word that encompasses all the facets of who you are as a business. It is how you want your customers, prospects and the public to see you. Your brand is what customers think and feel about your company. It is what, ultimately, will move them to become clients.

A customer is not just buying your product, they are embracing your identity.

When you think about a big brand like Nike you may picture a pair of their shoes, the signature swoop of their logo, a person running, or their "Just do it" slogan. What do you feel? Optimistic? Energized or inspired? If you were to think about buying running shoes would you trust that Nike shoes are well made?

Your perception of a Nike, or any other company, is the result of branding. Everything from the logo, color choices, the vocabulary and tone of voice they use, packaging, and the music choice in their ads are part of deliberate branding. A strong brand will permeate every aspect of a company's marketing plan.

### **Why is Branding Important?**

In the age of Google, the amount of information available on a moment's notice is overwhelming. There are almost infinite numbers of choices competing for your attention.

Paid ads dominate search results, sites with good SEO float to the top, but what is it that actually captures a prospect's attention and keeps it? What sets you apart from your competition? Branding. Branding creates awareness and breeds loyalty.

Pricing may be a factor when Dennis decides which drill to buy, but he is willing to pay more for quality. Dennis imagines building things in his garage with his son, so he wants a drill that will last a lifetime – one he can pass on to his children.

The way you present your company will determine whether he buys your product or someone else's. If your company values quality, family, and good craftsmanship that will be evident in your branding. Dennis will feel that. And trusting that you will deliver on that promise (a tool that will last), you will have not just sold one drill but created a loyal customer. And loyalty breeds sales, through word of mouth, positive reviews and repeat customers.

### **But Can I Afford It?**

Branding does not have to mean million dollar national ad campaigns. Taking your branding to the next level, incorporating it into your marketing plan, can benefit from the guidance and expertise of a professional agency; however, there are a few things you can start doing today to actively manage your brand:

- 1) Identify your values – what is it that you care about? Speed, quality, keeping your price low?
- 2) Think about your mission – what problem are you solving for your customers? What is your value proposition?
- 3) Pinpoint what differentiates you. It is not possible to be all things to all people. What are the one or two things your company does differently/better than everyone else?

Once you have answered these key questions, take some time to review your current marketing. Are your answers reflected in your outreach? Is it clear by looking at your website, brochures or ads what you stand for and how you stand out?

Read customer feedback and reviews. Learn what your customers value and how they see you. If your values and theirs are not in alignment, what needs to change?

Take a look at your logo. What does it say about you? How about your color choices? Are they bright and cheerful? Energetic? Calming and reassuring? What other visual elements are you using and what do they say? Think about how these choices relate to your answers.

What stories are you telling and how are you telling them? When was the last time you really read your website, ad copy, and scripts (if you have any)? Is the language consistent? Are you formal in one place and informal in another? Consistency is key.

Stories are what connect us, compel us and convert us to loyal customers. How did you get into this business? What are you passionate about that led you here?

The best stories demonstrate your values. Instead of saying, "we make quality tools," demonstrate it with a testimonial from Dennis. Tell us the story of how your dad broke a drill bit and almost took off a finger, but after investing in BrandX, he was able to use his

drill for years, passing it along to you. This story will resonate with customers like Dennis and will be what synch the sale.

Branding is important, and not just for big companies with massive budgets. If anything, branding is more crucial to a small business. The competition is fierce; it's loud out there - let good branding cut through the noise with a message that speaks to the heart.

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