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Brand Equity Biz-Speak for Trust

by Tom Marx and Tom Herndon

Building Your Brand

Branding is the art of developing an ongoing, trusting relationship between your customer and your company. When the activities of your customers enable your company's brand to achieve greater margins, you have positive brand equity.

Here are three essential components to building sustainable brand equity:

Awareness

Repeatedly telling the market that you have a product and what the product does.

Credibility

Designing your message based on WIIFM – What's In It For Me – from your customers' point of view.

Authority and Leadership

Potential customers will trust stories about your company when told by friends, partners, and colleagues.

Awareness

Awareness is basically telling your prospects and customers that you have a product and what the product does. The most effective way to build awareness is with an integrated approach to marketing.

However, when we say "an integrated approach to marketing," we are not just referring to a combination of tactics such as direct mail, advertisement, and web-based marketing. We're also talking about what's at the heart of your messaging - how you are communicating your value proposition and to whom.

Your message could be more emotional – such as the iPod's message of being hip, cool and up-to-date with the latest toys. Or, you can take a more rational approach and tell your customers how you will solve their challenge, make their lives better, or fulfill their need. Knowing your audience (what influences their emotions and beliefs) and speaking in their language is key.

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Pay attention to what your customer says is in it for them rather than telling them why your company or your product is so wonderful.

Don't assume you know what they need and what they'd be most interested in. How do you find out what your customer wants? Ask! Do the research: surveys, focus groups, customer events, etc.

A truly integrated marketing communication campaign will always have a higher impact than any stand-alone activity, yet what gives marketing its strength is repetition. Combine integration with repetition and your marketing investment will be returned exponentially.

Credibility

Integral to building awareness is establishing credibility by removing the barriers between your audience and the perceived value of your brand.

A lot of companies are still utilizing the traditional (read: institutional) style of marketing. This kind of objective marketing is often formal and distant. The approach we suggest as part of a truly integrated process is subjective marketing – marketing that is directed more inward: more personal and intimate – with your customers in mind. Remember WIIFM.

Become closer to your customers. Position your product in a situation where the customers can place themselves. Create a closer connection with their everyday life. Tap into your customers' basic human needs. The perceived value of your product will increase if your customer recognizes their opportunities within the solution you offer. Then prove that you know what you're talking about. Show that you have done it before. Offer examples. Show success, show progress, and show results. Make your customer's life simpler, and more enjoyable.

Include your customers in the design of your credibility. Examples from actual customers (testimonials/endorsements) are perhaps the best way of securing the credibility you want. Simple endorsements, such as: "It's nice to do business with you" or "We appreciate the effective, efficient way you have organized your technical support organization" or "I improved my lap times by more than two seconds," add credibility and can make all the difference between you and your competition. The more product- or service-specific the testimonial, the better.

Don't forget the total ownership experience your customers have with all aspects of your organization. Have your customers stress how fantastic your product is, but encourage them to be specific:

- Why they bought your product
- How they used it
- What the results have been
- How well they were taken care of by customer service, technical support, and accounting
- How it met their original objectives for buying the product/service

Having your customers communicate ROI and total cost of ownership are some of the most effective ways to demonstrate customer success.

Authority and Leadership

To further cement your value into the market community, once awareness and credibility have been established, begin to work on the authority and leadership components of your campaign. To establish authority and leadership, pay attention to how your brand is being communicated to your customers via other people and/or channels.

Customers are more likely to trust the stories of your product results when they come from third party influencers (friends, partners, and colleagues). Even the opinions of your competitors are sometimes trusted more than what you are saying.

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Word of mouth marketing - whether positive or negative - generally carries the most authority. By integrating the WIIFM principle into the messaging of your marketing campaign and giving special focus to communicating to the third party influencers surrounding your customers, you will substantially boost the market's awareness of your brand.

Be visible – participate in industry events, committees, associations and other activities. Donate to an industry-centric scholarship fund. Get articles placed in print and on-line media. Keep your website current and include testimonials, press releases and product reviews. Do webinars, technical training, and sales training. Have a great customer service and technical support team.

Bottom Line

Branding happens – for better or worse. It's what companies choose to do about it that makes the difference. Build brand equity by focusing on awareness, using credible claims and giving your messages extra authority by reaching third party influencers.

Use the principles above to manage your brand. Brand management protects your profit margins, builds higher stock prices, and is the cornerstone upon which brand equity is built. In a world of greater and greater choice, branding becomes an incredibly important piece of a company's competitive edge.

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