

How to Make Your Brand Great Again

Corporate branding may not be rocket science, but many companies still find successful efforts elusive. Marketing expert Susan Carol offers seven key questions executives much ask themselves about their brand presence, and tips for achieving the right answers.

By Susan Carol

Your brand, whether personal or business, should represent core values and a clear mission. It should be easily recognized, understood and remembered. It is your promise to your customers or constituents. A promise to keep! Maybe you already know this. In that case, consider this short article a refresher.

Corporate discussions about brand are often about identity artwork, advertising concepts, or taglines. Those are all important elements; but branding has a larger scope. It is everything you or your company does at every touch point of discovery or experience. For a business, that includes employee behavior and communications.

These seven questions should be part of developing any brand-building effort:

- What is our mission in clear, simple, memorable terms?
- What can we promise and deliver every time?
- How do our customers define quality?
- What symbols, messages or images support our mission and promise?
- What is our unique position in the market and how do we differ from competitors?
- Are the core messages and images we present memorable?
- How will we empower our employees or other influencers to carry our message?

How to Sustain or Strengthen a Brand

Organizations of any size can build a powerful brand. The key is committing to the effort and

developing a strategy that can be maintained over time. This doesn't mean a brand can't evolve; and it doesn't rule out creativity in advertising and marketing. But core elements — such as company logo, tagline, and defining introductory messages — must be consistent and established to endure.

Repetition and consistency are critical to forging a recognized brand that builds trust with customers. I recommend creating branding guidelines and establishing brand leaders to ensure adherence.

Risks in Today's Fractured Media

Successful branding establishes trust and paves the way for other marketing activity. However, today there are new threats to brands, namely in social media. While many of us enjoy the free spirit of communications and networking through such channels as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube, we also witness how quickly exposure can go "viral" in a negative way and erode trust.

That does not mean that social media should be avoided. Quite the contrary. As in traditional public relations strategy, it is important to maintain the lead in telling your own story. Gaps allow someone else to fill in the blanks. Don't let that happen!

Social media and web communications should be part of your branding guidelines. All employees should clearly understand the parameters for communicating about the company on any medium, and there should be a clear chain of command for reviewing company communications before release.



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Dispelling Two Myths on Social Media

While we're on the topic of social media, let's clear up two common myths that can hamper any branding effort:

- The myth that social media is free.
- The myth that social media is just for young people, and it's not for businesses.

While you don't have to pay to access social media channels, as with anything, you get out of them what you put into them. Social media channels are crowded with more messages than the marketplace can consume. But they also offer unprecedented tools for targeting the exact audience you need to reach. To unlock this potential, successful organizations invest in professional content development teams to ensure their messages stand out with quality video, images, storytelling, and strong calls to action. Paying to promote posts to the right audience and using tools to automate some of this activity will further ensure your message doesn't fall on deaf ears.

Unfortunately, too many senior executives view social media as a younger-generation channel and delegate the work of posting on Facebook to the intern, new hire, or a "hip" agency with no knowledge of their business. Don't make this mistake.

How Do You Present on the Web?

Google yourself, your employees, your company, your competitors. Where do you come up compared to competitors? Is the look and feel consistent? Is the content accurate, positive, and on-message? A website is critical too, but often neglected. Even if you don't believe new business emanates from the site, it reflects upon you. Often it is used for verification.

There are self-help tools, inexpensive labor pools and resources online to create your own web or social media presence; but the creativity and expertise needed to create a sustainable, polished image requires professional, experienced talent, ideally familiar with your market position.

Unfortunately, many small companies find a single web developer or friend who does this on the side and fail to realize it takes a team of professionals to create a well-branded website.

What You Do Matters


What if one of your key messages is that you provide personal service, but the only feature on your website for reaching you is an info@XYZ email address that frequently elicits no response? That creates incongruence in branding, because action is inconsistent with message.

There are many instances of this within your industry and elsewhere. Often it is a matter of one leader conveying one message and another saying something else. Or else it is different departments getting creative and using various templates or choosing their own communications just because they can.

It's easy to forget about the impact every action has on a brand. Consider a branding or social media workshop for your company and make the brand great again by reinforcing what's conveyed at every touch point.

A Creative Spin

Try this simple branding exercise: Gather your team and give each member a fidget spinner. Ask them to spin it. Invite team members to clearly state what your company stands for before their spinners stop. Don't forget to include a call to action!

Here's mine: Susan Carol Creative provides public relations strategy and marketing communications talent you can't just Google. Our full-service agency has specialized in the equipment-leasing and finance, healthcare, and technology industries since 1989. Learn more at SCAPR.com and on Twitter @SCAPR. You can also find Susan Carol on LinkedIn. She is a former ELFA board member and current producer of an industry thought-leader video series that broadcasts on *Equipment Finance Advisor*. 

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