NAMS

Novice to Advanced Marketing System

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Introduction: What Is a Brand?

A brand is a perceived image that provokes an emotional response. It's hard to define because it's intangible. The brand is the image attached to a name, design, symbol, or some other feature of a company's product.

Here's a better definition offered by Seth Godin:

> *A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories, and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to choose one product or service over another. If the consumer (whether it's a business, a buyer, a voter, or a donor) doesn't pay a premium, make a selection, or spread the word, then no brand value exists for that consumer.*

What's important to understand about a brand is that it has nothing to do with the actual product. It exists in the minds of customers only. As mentioned in the definition, a brand is a perceived image.

Brands are often confused with logos and identities. A brand identity consists of the image or design motifs. The logo is just one design that communicates the brand. Both are involved in communicating the brand's message, but a brand is much bigger and more encompassing than that. It also includes the images or feelings that the design or logo invokes.

In his definition, Godin mentions 'value.' The importance of a brand is that it offers a unique perceived value that a customer doesn't get from your competitors. In other words, the brand is the reason your customers choose you. A good brand tells customer that this is not only the best choice for them, but the only choice that offers the unique solution they're looking for.

From the point of view of your business, your brand is the promise you make to your customers. It precedes and underlies all of your marketing and, if done well, every contact the customer has with your company.

Because of this, branding is one of the most important considerations for businesses. It all too often gets forgotten among the many other things that go into launching a business. But brands are powerful. They outlive the products they sell. It takes a great deal of thought and consideration to create a winning brand.

Elements of an Effective Brand

Brands come in all shapes and sizes, but there are a few common elements you'll find in all of them.

Clarity. A good brand communicates the intended message clearly. Communication is very important. It's also important that you communicate the intended image you want customers to perceive, rather than giving them the wrong message.

Memorability. In order for a brand to work effectively, it needs to be memorable. It needs to stay in the customer's mind.

Uniqueness. Your brand tells people what makes your offering unique among your competitors and the most ideally suited for them. As I said above, it's not that you're the *best* but that you're the *only* option that fully and adequately meets the customer's needs. This aspect of uniqueness also means you don't have to appeal to everyone.

Emotional Connection. All good brands make an emotional connection with their target audience. People identify themselves through the brands they like. It's just as much a part of a person's identity as their political or religious affiliation. If your brand gets inside your customers' heads and elicits an emotional response, they'll identify with it and remain loyal. This is what motivates the buyer to buy.

Credibility. A good brand is consistent. It never strays from the customer's expectation. Like an old friend, it's always there giving them the same message. In this way, your brand establishes your company's credibility in the customer's mind.

Timeless. The best brands are timeless. They endure and stay relevant for years or even decades to come.

Steps for Designing Your Brand

Step One – Market Research

In order to speak well to your audience, you need to know them and understand them well. Branding happens inside their heads, so you need to know (to the best of your ability) what's going on in there.

The best way to get to know your target market is to create a profile that describes them. This profile describes an individual who is your ideal customer. This isn't guesswork. You arrive at your information for this profile by conducting market research.

The information you're looking for includes:

- ✓ Demographic information about your customers such as age, gender, income level, family situation, location, etc.
- ✓ Psychographic data such as their worries, fears, self-image, attitudes, problems, etc.
- ✓ Shopping habits. What other brands do they buy from? Do they save or shop impulsively? Are they big spenders or cautious?
- ✓ What products and services they'd like to see in the world, or how the companies they currently buy from don't meet their needs.

A good place to start with market research is with your existing customers, assuming you have some. If you do, try to find identifying features that most of them share. You may notice that most of them are female or that most are at a high socioeconomic level. If you already have customers, use them to create your profile. For any information you don't know, ask them. Conduct surveys and give customers an incentive if necessary.

If you don't currently have customers, or if you want more data than they offer, you can conduct market research on potential customers. Whether or not you have customers, this is a good idea since you want to increase your customer base.

There are two ways to conduct market research: directly and indirectly. First, let's discuss indirect methods since they're generally easier to carry out and put less strain on resources.

Indirect market research means basically being a fly on the wall. Find out where your potential buyers are and listen to them. This is incredibly easy and cost-effective today because of the Internet, which encourages people to talk and share their opinions.

Here are a few ways to gather this information:

Online Forums. Join online forums where your customers and potential customers spend time asking questions and having discussions.

Blogs. Blogs are good for gathering data because they're updated more often than regular websites. Try to find blogs about your industry or by potential customers and read what they have to say.

Social Media. Connect with your target market on social media and monitor their conversations. This is a great tool because you can also communicate directly with potential customers through these channels.

Keywords Tools. Use a keyword tool to see how many people are searching for products such as yours. Choose keywords that are relevant to your products. In other words, if you were going to search for this product, what would you type into the search bar? The volume of searches gives you an idea of how popular products such as yours are.

The Competition. A great source of data is your competitors. Find

competitors who offer something similar to what you offer. If possible, look at sales data to see how your target market shops. Stay abreast with your competitors' websites, blogs, newsletters, and so on.

Business Trends. Read industry journals and websites to find out the latest trends related to your business.

Direct market research methods include:

Interviews. Conduct interviews with people during which you ask them directly for the specific information you need to create your profile.

Questionnaires. Questionnaires can be done online or offline. Create short questionnaires that ask very specific questions to help you gather the information you need.

Focus Groups. The most labor-intensive, but often most lucrative, market research method is the traditional focus group. This is where you gather a group of people to discuss their opinions, perspectives, and beliefs on a certain product or an aspect of a product.

Both direct and indirect market research have their merits. With direct research, you get straight answers to your specific questions. But sometimes when asked directly, people say what they think you want to hear instead of what they actually feel. With indirect research, you're listening in and the data may be more truthful.

It's good to do a bit of both. The more samples you gather data from, the clearer and more accurate a picture you'll have of your target market.

Once you create your profile, you'll shape your brand so that it will appeal to your ideal customers and communicate why they need you.

Activity

1. Using some of the market research methods listed, think about the specifics of the demographic you are trying to reach.
2. Use the worksheet provided to define your target market.

Step Two – Define Your Brand

Armed with a profile that describes your ideal customer, it's time to define your brand.

Defining your brand means clarifying exactly what it stands for. This is what you want the customer to think when they encounter your brand. It could be a unique service, a better speed or price, higher quality, a product made just for their lifestyle, innovation, reliability, or anything else you want to be synonymous with your brand.

Remember that your brand can't be all things to all people and in fact it shouldn't be. It should deliver a clear message that resonates with your target market.

To define your brand, you need to come up with a unique value proposition. Your UVP is the promise you make to your customers. It's a statement that's as short as possible but includes exactly what makes you unique and tells people why they should buy from you.

If you've conducted research well and heard from a large sample the reasons why they buy from you, this may not be hard to do. There may be one particular benefit that you hear over and over from satisfied customers.

If not, it takes some brainstorming. Start by brainstorming with your team, considering the natural strengths of your products or services. You're looking for one particular, natural strength that's highly valuable to your customers and sets you apart from other similar companies.

Here are some questions to help you in your brainstorming:

- ✓ What do you do?
- ✓ What do you *really* do (in other words, what is the benefit to your customers)?
- ✓ What makes you different?
- ✓ What do you do better than the competition?
- ✓ Are there parts of the market you speak to but that your competitors don't? Or are there parts of the market you'd *like* to speak to that they don't?

- ✓ What do your customers or clients think about you?
- ✓ What are the goals of your business?

The second question above may be a bit confusing, so let me illustrate with an example. Let's say you're a car company that produces luxury sports cars. What you *do* is build high quality cars that are stylish and appeal to moderately wealthy customers. But what you *really* do might be something like offer freedom or make customers feel younger. Maybe you unlock the wild side within every suit-and-tie executive.

A restaurant may brand itself as a fun place that brings the family together. A gadget maker's gadgets might put their users in touch with the entire world. Brands communicate benefits to customers, not so much what the product actually does.

Again, it may help to look at the competition in order to discover what your best qualities for your customers are.

Once you've identified the natural strengths that make your company unique and offer the benefits your customers are looking for, write it out in a simple statement. This is the basis of every decision you'll make about your brand from here on.

Activity

1. Using your worksheet, answer the questions asked regarding your Unique Value Proposition.
2. Use your answers to write out your UVP statement.

Step Three – Design Your Logo

There are many ways you'll communicate your brand to your customers, but one of the most powerful and important is your logo. Your logo is your calling card. It's instantly recognizable and as soon as someone sees it, they make the connection to your brand.

A good place to start in creating your own logo is to consider some of the logos you're most familiar with. Brainstorm recognizable logos, as well as the logos of brands you regularly use. Consider which you like and don't like, and which are most effective at communicating to you.

Logos come in all shapes and sizes and there are no strict guidelines per se, but here are a few considerations.

Three Types of Logos

There are three kinds of logos: text logos, image logos, and abstract image logos. Some logos mix all three of these types.

1. **A text logo** is simple and just presents the name of the company or a letter associated with it. Think of Google's simple lettering. Most companies use their name as a logo. Very recognizable brands like Apple or Starbucks can get away with using no text.

2. **Image logos** show an image related to the company. Examples are McDonalds' golden arches and the apple that is Apple's logo. Starbucks' logo is a stretch but still related: Seattle, the hometown of the company, is a seaport and the logo is a siren beckoning sailors.

3. **An abstract symbol** is something like Nike's swoosh. It doesn't say the company's name or show an image related to the company, but somehow the movement of the swoosh communicates the brand's message.

Logo Colors

The first thing to consider with colors is that most good, recognizable logos use only one or two colors. Simplicity is best.

The most used colors in brand logos are red, blue, and black or greyscale. However, many companies use other colors as well.

Colors need to be considered carefully because each color sparks certain associations in the mind. You want your logo's colors to spark the associations you want to make and not something else.

Here's a rundown on what, generally speaking, common colors mean to people:

Blue: Dependability, strength, calm.

Red: Attention-grabbing, energetic.

Green: Security, reliability, honesty, nature.

Pink, Yellow, and Orange: Excitement, youth, energy.

Brown: Dependable, simple, honest.

Black: Cool, sleek, high-tech.

White: Simple, pure.

These are very general color associations, but look at the colors used in the logos you brainstormed earlier. You'll start to see patterns. Certain colors are used for certain types of brands.

Clean and Functional

Simple logos are best. Your logo should present a single image or word without any needless special effects that can distract from your message.

In addition to being clean, your logo also needs to be functional. What this means is that it's easy to reproduce. Even if you use colors, it should look good in black and white because it won't always be reproduced in color. Also make sure that your logo looks good whether big or small.

Invest the time, energy, money, and other resources in making the best logo possible. Your logo is extremely important for your branding and too many companies fail to put in the required effort.

Activity

1. Using your worksheet, think about logos you've seen and liked. List what it is that attracted you to them – be specific.
2. Think about the elements you want to incorporate into your logo. Why? Use the worksheet to keep a record of what you brainstorm.

Step Four – Your Identity System

The 'identity system' for your brand is the image you're conveying to your customers. Mostly, it entails the visual design elements that you use consistently in all of your marketing to convey your brand message. The logo is one of them and arguably the most important, but there are others to consider as well.

These visual elements are used in:

- ✓ Marketing materials including books, pamphlets, flyers, websites, etc.
- ✓ Products and packaging
- ✓ Signs
- ✓ Communications such as email newsletters
- ✓ Clothing worn by employees, if applicable
- ✓ Stationery or any other office supplies you use

In other words, these visual elements should be included in everything your company does wherever possible. You may also include audio, such as a jingle or a tone like the Windows startup sound, a smell, touch or anything else that can communicate your brand.

Test each of these visual elements against your unique proposition and the promise your brand makes to your customers. Ask yourself whether they convey the message you want people to get when they encounter them. Your intuition can tell you if something is off, but it's also good to ask colleagues and test your market. Again, you can get ideas from your competitors or brands you know and use.

The same basic guidelines apply to all of your branding design elements. Keep them simple and relevant. Make sure they communicate immediately with your market.

Activity

1. With the worksheet, list the different elements that make up your marketing to convey your brand message.
2. Compare them to the specifics outlined in your UVP. Check whether or not your marketing really adheres to your identity system.

Conclusion

You now understand the basics of branding and have a step-by-step guide to defining your brand and the design elements that will get it recognized.

Remember that branding is not simple. A good brand, logo, and identity take a great deal of time experimenting and refining your ideas until they're perfect.

But this is no small consideration. Brand is everything. Devote the time and resources you need to create a brand that's powerful and effective.

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