

Branding Your Business

09/17/07

We've been told we should focus on branding our business more. We don't know a lot about what that means. Ours is mid-sized service business in Rockland County. We offer several different services, which have a few different names. What advice can you give us?

Branding is all about creating an identity and a representation of that identity, and then linking the two together. First you have to define what your business or services stand for, and what makes them unique. Next you have to come up with a representation of for that definition. And then it's all about promotion of the brand.

Look to your customers for advice. It's my experience that if you focus on how your best customers see your services, you are likely to attract more of the same. One caution as you start out on this project. The final decision about logo, brand and tagline all stop on the owner's desk. However, owners should not dominate the information gathering stage, as they may overlook customer feedback that could influence the design.

You may want to ask an outside firm to gather data for you. This can help to reduce any bias about the information you need to gather. There are many firms that will put together and implement an information questionnaire for you. Look for firms that provide

copywriting or brand identification services.

You want to put together a questionnaire, to ask your customers for their feedback. Consider the following questions

- What do you value most about the services our company provides?
- What words come to mind immediately when you think about our company?
- If you had to think of a symbol that comes to mind when you think of our company, what kind of symbol do you think of?

You also want to find out what your customers think makes you unique. This comes down to why they chose to use your company or service, instead of any of the competitive alternatives. Again, you may want an outside firm to gather this data, in order to be totally objective. Here are some questions to consider, regarding uniqueness:

- What do you think sets our company apart from other providers of similar services?
- What are the values you associate with our company? How does that compare to how you think of our competitors?
- When making a buying decision, what are 2 reasons you chose to work with our company / our service?

You also want to gather your best clients' overall impressions of what it's like to work together. This, too, needs to be included in the definition of what your company stands for. Try these questions:

- When thinking about the work you've done with our company, what outcomes do we produce for you?
- What are two reasons to buy from us?
- How would you describe the relationship between our two firms?
- What caused you to make a decision to buy the type of service we provide? Why from our firm?

Next you have to come up with a representation of those answers. Here's the challenge. You have probably gathered lots of words, from lots of clients. You now need to distill that down into a few words that stand out, and define your business.

Once you have selected the defining word(s), you also have to come up with a symbol. For the symbol part, you definitely need a good designer or design firm. You want to hire someone who has an educated understanding of colors, design, and symbols, which they can put to use for your company. That firm has to be able to work with the information gathered from customers, and turn that into a vibrant, distinctive representation of your business.



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Based on all of the descriptions gathered from clients, you want to look at ½ dozen clear, distinctive pictures or symbols, which represent what your clients believe you stand for. I strongly recommend that you plan to use color, as it is eye-catching and helps to speed up the identification process. Even though color is more expensive to print, it is well worth the investment.

Once you have options to look at, show them to your customers. Ask your customers to choose. Remember, it's not about what you like, it's about what your customers like, so long as you can live with the choice.

And then it's all about promotion of the brand. Put it on your letterhead, your business cards, promotion literature, website, emails. Every way you communicate, have the same name-brand, logo and tagline. Be distinctive by keeping it simple, clear and focused.

Looking for a good book? Try BrandSimple, How the Best Brands Keep It Simple And Succeed, by Allen P. Adamson and Martin Sorrell.

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