

Brand Management

Do you get an uneasy feeling when you hear the words “brand management”? Too big of a task for you to take on while you manage your every day business with financials, sales and customer service? Small businesses don’t need a “brand”, do they?! Only if you want your business to get lost in the shuffle. Let’s break brand management down into a more “manageable” (if you will) part of your every day business.

Brand management can be separated into three parts: 1) your company (the brand itself), 2) your competitors, and, 3) your consumers. Ideally, all three parts fit together and share the same brand which represents who your company is today and who you want it to become tomorrow.

Let’s start with your company – the brand itself – the core:

- why you started your business;
- how you train your employees;
- what your company collateral shows;
- what your product or service is to the consumer; and,
- your “company speak” (the language you speak amongst yourselves and to others when you talk about the company).

It’s how you make your money.

Have you played the game “Introduce yourself in 60 seconds”? Tell me everything I need to know in 60 seconds so I will purchase your product. Branding your company can be as simple as this game! What message do you want to give your employees, shareholders, competitors and customers in 60 seconds or less? By narrowing it down to one minute of someone’s time, you pinpoint exactly what differentiates you from all the others, why someone would want to work for you or invest their money in your company or buy your product. This is your “company speak”.

Your one minute message is not only portrayed in words but in an image, as well. Your logo is the most frequently used and translatable image of your company.

- Is it consistent on your business card, letterhead, brochures and email?
- Does your image represent your words?
- Can your image exist without the words?
- Does it grab someone’s attention like a powerful 60 second message?

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The second part of brand management: knowing your competition is vital to remain profitable and grow your business.

- Do consumers recognize your logo or trademark even without your words?
- Do your advertisements jump out above the rest?
- How do rate against your competition?
- Are you the high-price leader or known for your fast and friendly customer service?

Your brand needs to be differentiated from your competition – easily sought after and located – with a clear, consistent and evocative message in 60 seconds. Here’s a quick exercise for your next staff meeting: open the phone book and compare yourself to your competitors. Have each employee make a list of the first ads they see and their immediate reaction to the ads. Are you visually represented the way you want to be?

Now we come to part three of brand management: your consumers. Your consumers are the reason you exist -- you solve a problem for them. It’s up to your consumers how well you brand yourself. After all, your consumers judge your company’s representation: eye-catching logo with simple and concise wording; a quality product at a good price; reliable and pleasant customer service. Your consumers tell you how well you’ve done “branding” yourself.

So let’s think about those words, “brand management” again. Brand management is how you represent your company to yourself (selves), against your competitors and to your consumers. By writing your 60 second message, you can reinforce this message through your graphics and advertising, through your sales and to your employees and investors.