
BUILDING BRAND IDENTITIES

You're having the gang over on Sunday to watch the cricket match on TV. Which pizza parlour do you call?

Your child needs braces. Which orthodontist does everyone in town go to?

You want to sell your house. Which Realtor do you call?

The answer is the same in each case: the one that has the best brand. Branding is important because it makes sales easier!

Realtors, dentists and restaurants all have brands. So does every small business in the world. Sure, we think that only Fortune 500 companies, like Coca-Cola and Procter and Gamble have brands. But that's not true. Every company has a brand image. Whether the brand image is good or bad, or if it is well known or invisible, is up to you.

If you're involved in marketing in any way, shape or form, you've heard the term "branding" but you probably couldn't define it. That's because if you asked 50 marketers to define "branding," you'd get 50 different answers. Very few people agree on what branding is, but they do agree that is important in building sales and profits.

So why is it important to have a *Brand Identity*?

Brands with a clear identity make selling easier - Plain and simple

To understand branding, we need to understand what branding isn't.

A brand is not a logo, slogan, catchy saying, mission statement or publicity campaign

A brand is about trust. You select a company because you trust them and the companies have credibility. These are two issues that are important to every company of every size

When you travel along the highway and need a quick meal, do you stop at the local restaurant for a meal featuring the local cuisine - or do you pull in to McDonald's because you know the fries are always going to be the same? People trust McDonalds. They will give up the chance for an innovative meal in favour of the trusted resource every time!

That's because people buy on emotion and justify with logic.

Is it any wonder why McDonald's is a multibillion-dollar enterprise?

Look at the best brands on the Internet: Yahoo, Bazzee.com and Amazon. What do they all have in common? People trust them!

Good companies create good brands by creating trust.

Does one need a lot of money to create trust? No.

Yet hundreds of companies have blown away more than a billion dollars on print and television advertising during major events trying to build a brand image.

Exercise: Ask some brand managers at major companies, to name 10 search engines, 10 consumer web sites, three pet supplies sites and 10 business-to-business web sites.

No one is likely to give a proper answer. And these are the very people who are in the industry, and are exposed to the millions of dollars of advertising to create brands!

Conclusion: Buying your way to brand awareness does not work!

How do you create a great Brand Identity?

Through **brand assets** - these assets are your slogans, advertising, publicity, promotions, characters, spokes people, as well as your customer service and sales people! ***These tools help create a meaningful identity that creates an emotional bond with your audience that compels them to take action - and provide the logic that justifies their choices.***

Branding with Customer Comments

If you don't have the best brand name recognition in the world, don't despair. There's hope. You can build your brand identity and awareness with the help of your satisfied customers! You can build your brand awareness by adding the credibility of third parties such as your customers' comments. A few favourable comments on the website, newsletters or e-mail communications might be just what you need to raise your credibility and help consumers select you! *You can use it to build a credible brand image for your company and products - and it doesn't cost a cent!*

Company Mascots

Mascots can help build brand identity and company culture, but sometimes using them can backfire. If you're going to have a mascot, it should tie in with your company's missions and values. In the long term, a mascot can help establish identity with a brand. You hope it becomes an icon in popular culture, it will, if it is specifically tied to your brand. Too many companies make the mistake of going for a mascot instead of building a strong branding strategy. Certainly a mascot can help build a brand image, but at times it can also distract from the real strategy behind a brand and take attention away from it.

CAN YOU LAUNCH A BRAND SOLELY WITH PR?

Infosys is only 21 years old, yet the Infosys brand has become the most valuable brand in India, worth almost Rs. 27,000 crore. Did advertising build the Infosys brand? No.

Even if Infosys had not run a single advertisement, is there any doubt about Infosys' dominant position?

Massive amounts of publicity helped build the Infosys brand

In building brands, advertising has become less relevant - what builds brands are media messages. The more favourable the message, the stronger the brand. Note, that publicity built Narayana Murthy into one of India's best-known corporate executives. It obviously wasn't advertising that elevated him into a powerful personal brand name.

The new gurus of public relations suggest that it's possible — provided you change your marketing outlook. Launching a brand with public relations (PR) and launching a brand with advertising are two entirely different things. If you think the shift from one to another requires little, you are wrong. You have to change the entire approach. A few pointers: -

- **Define the enemy**

Defining your enemy allows you to focus your strategy on being totally different from that of your enemy. So when Procter & Gamble launched a new mouthwash, they zeroed in on the enemy — Listerine, the bad-tasting mouthwash. P&G positioned their product Scope as the good-tasting mouthwash and it became a strong No 2 brand.

Advertising works quite to the contrary. Consumers hate it when you single out a competitor to attack in your ads.

- **Leak the story**

A PR programme usually starts with a leak off to key reporters and editors. Newsletters and Internet sites are the favourite targets. That's the way Segway (a high-tech scooter) was launched. About 11 months before its formal introduction, the product was leaked to Inside.com.

The formal launch saw Segway being introduced on ABC's *Good Morning America* where Diane Sawyer and Charles Gibson gave it a spin. Naturally, Segway made it to all the evening news shows as well as most of the nation's newspapers.

An advertising programme, on the other hand, is normally launched like a D-day attack. It is usually kept a top secret until the day the first ad runs.

- **Start at the bottom**

With PR, there's little choice to do it differently. Unless you have an earth-shattering invention on your hands, you start slowly and hope the media coverage will gradually expand.

In advertising, you start the programme with a "big bang", sometimes with a Super Bowl ad. And since consumers tend to ignore advertising messages, the new ad programme has to be big, bold and catchy enough to get above the "noise level" and get noticed.

- **Recruit allies**

Why do it alone when you can get others to help you? The slow build-up of a PR programme allows enough time to recruit allies to your cause.

An advertising programme has a difficult time recruiting allies - the problem being issues about time and money. With a big-bang launch, there is usually little time to line up supporters. Also, advertising alliances usually fall apart over the question of who pays for what.

- **Roll-out the programme**

You have to crawl before you learn to walk, and you have to walk before you can run. The media works on similar lines. You need to start small, perhaps with a mention in a newsletter, and then move on to the trade press. From the trade press, you then move up the ladder to one of the general business publications. And eventually, you might see your new product or service on NBC Nightly News. So your brand creates its own momentum as you move up the media ladder.

You can't do that with advertising. The idea here is to launch the campaign with a big bang and follow up with smaller "reminder" advertisements.

- **Modify the product**

Feedback is an important element in a PR launch. By launching the public-relations programme ahead of the actual product introduction, there is an advantage of having enough time to modify the product before it goes on sale.

Advertising works differently. Once an advertising programme is launched, a company is committed. There is little feedback and no time to change the product or service. For instance, Apple launched the Newton Message Pad with a traditional big bang advertising campaign including TV commercials. But because of its flawed handwriting-recognition software, the product received scathing reviews.

- **Modify the message**

Which one attribute should you focus on when you launch a new product? Volvo spent years advertising the durability of its cars. Yet the media fell in love with the safety aspect of Volvos. They carried stories about Volvo's invention of the three-point lap-and-shoulder seat belt, the collapsible steering column, front and rear crumple zones and so on. Volvo finally threw

in the durability towel and switched their advertising to the safety issue. Little surprise that sales took off! So forget focus groups. Why pay consumers for advice when the media will give it to you for free?

However, an advertising campaign is cast in stone. It's embarrassing to change messages in the middle of an advertising campaign.

- **Launch "soft"**

How long should the PR phase of a new product launch take? It all depends. That's why we recommend a "soft" launch. The new product or service should be launched only after the PR program has run its course. But neither too soon nor too late.

In advertising, a programme is usually linked directly with the product's availability and the first ad runs on the very first date the product is available for sale.

'BRAND IMAGE OFFERS KEY TO SURVIVAL'

A staggering 94 per cent of British boardroom movers and shakers believe a strong brand can offer protection from an economic downturn. They believe the worth of a familiar and trustworthy brand is more valuable than any other company asset such as products and services, management team, employees, access to capital, technology and physical assets.

In times of economic uncertainty, consumers tend to be more discerning in terms of the products and services they buy. They cling harder to the familiar - to brands they know and trust. In such a scenario it will be madness for any company to cut back on what is possibly its strongest asset. Instead, firms should be helping the consumer through the decision-making maze by strongly differentiating themselves from their competitors and delivering wholeheartedly on the brand promise.

*Excerpts from The Fall of Advertising & The Rise of PR
by Al Ries & Laura Ries*

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