

Build Your BRAND

What it takes to make your stamp on the marketplace

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Build a Brand

That Works For You

By Myra A. Thomas

No matter where it appears—on a cap, a shirt, or a sneaker—when people see a particular “swoosh” design, they immediately think “Nike.” In fact, the swoosh “brand” is so powerful, thinking doesn’t even have to happen. It’s simply second nature to see it and just know what it means. If, like the apparel giant, your business, product or service is that instantaneously recognizable, then you’ve got a good brand. If it’s not, and you’re a small to mid-sized company in a large market, how do you get it there?

First, know this: branding with that kind of power is not just for corporate giants and well-known, well-established products, according to Simon Hooks, chief executive officer of Corporate Communications Group, a marketing solutions company based in West Caldwell. And he’s not alone in that thought.

Bob Mickens, creative partner at Artfactuality, a creative services design firm in Montclair, notes, “People talk about branding today like it has just become such a catch phrase,” he suggests. “But creating a brand is a very sophisticated process.”

It’s an important process, too, in a market flooded with products, because, in the end, Mickens suggests, it comes down to whether or not companies achieve a simple marketing goal: to leave shoppers with a strong idea about a product or service and thereby have the ability to influence buying decisions.

Create a Strong Visual...

So, what is branding, exactly? Mickens says a brand is an image that expresses an idea. “Images can be visual shorthand, if they’re done well,” he suggests. For instance, like Nike’s swoosh, people see an apple with a bite taken out of it, and immediately think of iPods and Macintosh computers, products of Apple Computer.



Simon Hooks

To do it well, Mickens advises, “You have to figure out how to

stand out from the competition in a strong visual way.” Why? It helps you to connect with the consumer. He suggests, “There’s nothing better than a powerful visual to do that for you.”

But that doesn’t mean a brand is simply a logo. “Branding is really the public perception of everything that your product is,” explains Hooks. Once created, a brand must be incorporated into every aspect of the business’ strategic planning.

Often, small business owners come up with brands, but may not know how to use them effectively, according to Hooks. A mistake he commonly sees: “There’s a disconnect between the brand and the tactical marketing perspective.” If businesses bridge the disconnect, they can be more successful in distinguishing their products.

...And Shape a Consistent Persona

But where’s that bridge? It lies in consistency. If a business spends money creating a logo and other aspects of a brand, Hook explains, then everything that business does needs to reflect the image they want to present. Again, Apple demonstrates this process very effectively.

Take a look at its logo, the sleek design and the shape of its products, the clean layout of its Web site, even the type face of its packaging—all are reflective of the image the company wants to convey and therefore work to reinforce its brand. The iPhones, iPods and iMacs presented through advertising, marketing materials, television commercials



Bob Mickens and partner, Christine Moh.

Photo by Dan Epstein

and Web pages all share that consistency in look, feel and style. It’s even carried over to the product names: iPhone, iPod, iMac.

And never forget that business Web sites, according to Hook, “definitely” need a brand. “It’s easy to throw a Web site up, but it takes more time and effort to convey a message that stands out,” he notes. If a company is investing the time and money to put its products and services on the Internet, then building a site that effectively represents its brand is critical—it can’t be overlooked.

One thing is sure: small and medium-sized businesses can, and do, create successful brands. When it works it’s because they understand the value of creating a strong and trusted public persona. ■