

Five essential tools to build your brand

Ways to target key potential clients that actually work and don't cost a bundle

By **Ted Matthews**

PROFITguide.com, August 4, 2005



Whether your business is big or small, here are cost-effective, powerful tools that should form the foundation of every good branding effort. A brand is what people think of you, and, if done well and consistently, these five items will help your firm gain space in the crowded brains of your customers and prospects.

1. Differentiate or disappear

While business leaders dream of their company serving everyone, the first step in building a brand is selecting a unique value proposition (sometimes a very narrow one) that will stand out loud and clear from others in your field. The narrower your proposition, the tighter the target market for your message; therefore, the better your ability to reach it, stake it out and eventually own it. Communicating to a broad audience today is simply too expensive for any business. Further, being unique qualifies as new information for the targeted recipient, increasing the chance of being tucked away in their mind as something they didn't know. Creating this place in the mind is what building a brand is all about.

Differentiating includes having a unique image or graphic approach to reflect your value proposition. We are very visual beings. Given a chance encounter, we almost always remember a person's face before we remember their name, because our visual memory is far more powerful than our capacity for words.

A case in point: Warrillow & Co., a North American success story, differentiated its business by offering big business (banks, credit card companies, express shipping companies, software firms, etc.) insights that would help it market to the fastest-growing category in North America—small business. When president and CEO John Warrillow started the Toronto-based firm seven years ago, he created a shocking image of a power drill pressed against the side of someone's head, with the positioning line "We help big business get inside the heads of small business."

Warrillow (www.warrillow.com) has done just that. Today, it has grown to 30 smart people who work with only the biggest of the Fortune 500 firms. These companies rarely make a move in this narrow but growing market without consulting Warrillow & Co. first.

2. A busy street is the best medium

While it may be a global marketplace, business is often easier to establish at home—in fact, in your own neighbourhood. Something about seeing that a firm has hard assets helps comfort the soul and makes initial business transactions happen a little more quickly. Finding a location that has busy street exposure and using that exposure well can return the often-higher rent many times over.

Startup Steam Whistle Brewing (www.steamwhistle.ca) of Toronto busted into one of the world's toughest beer markets and is growing by leaps and bounds. A key to this is a historic, high-profile location steps from the CN Tower and within view of a busy expressway. The location supports Steam Whistle's "old time quality" positioning and flags its existence to hundreds of thousands of passers-by every day.

The phenomenal Vancouver-based success story 1-800-GOT-JUNK (www.1800gotjunk.com) uses its hard assets—a fleet of amazingly clean trucks with striking graphics—to blanket the cities where it operates and spread its unique "junk with a difference" message.

3. Gotta have a good Website

The need for a good Website didn't go away with the implosion of the tech bubble; in fact, it has become a critical business tool. Your Website is the first place people go now, even before they call you. Potential customers use it to confirm your offering and establish your credibility, but they're also looking for the intangible alignment that will give them the confidence to partner with you. So, remember that your brand is what people think of you and your Website is often the taste test. Get it right.

Slow or unnecessarily elaborate Flash pages will say you don't have respect for visitors' time, while overpopulated home pages say your firm isn't helpful and out-of-date information says you don't pay attention to details. In their busy lives, any one of these turnoffs could end a potential sales relationship. For an example of how to do it well, check out www.impactmachine.com, the site for a design practice that focuses on hockey equipment, display, apparel and promotional design.

4. Produce an e-newsletter

Building brands is a process, not an event. The critical role of branding is to stay in contact with people who are already interested, to continue to build on what they think of you until they need and want to do business with you. An e-newsletter sent on a regular (but not too frequent) basis, with small (i.e., very quick to read) but valuable pieces of easily-digestible learning from your firm will serve as the catalyst to relationship building. Personally, I think a newsletter sent once a month that takes less than 60 seconds to read is ideal. But whatever frequency and length you choose, the real art is the unfaltering discipline to get it done regularly and never, ever stop. As a bonus, if your e-newsletter is good, some of your recipients will forward it to like-minded associates whom you wouldn't otherwise have reached.

Touchdowns & Fumbles, the weekly newsletter of Veritas Communications, reviews leading newsmakers and their public relations/public affairs successes and misses of the past five days. Arriving from the Toronto-based PR agency (www.veritascanada.com) every Friday afternoon in time for your weekend reading, and written with clever insights and humour, it speaks volumes about what it's like to work with this talented group of professionals. (Look for "How to: Create E-Newsletters customers actually read" in next week's PROFIT-Xtra)

5. PR: do well by doing good

Get your good-news story out to the press and let them help build your credibility. Remember that every journalist gets out of bed every workday looking for a story to write, and you can help by offering them your story.

But it has to be news. Your latest left-handed widget probably isn't. Here's a good idea: pick a worthwhile cause that's on strategy with your brand, volunteer your services and then let people know that you've done so. There was a time when companies stayed humbly quiet about their involvement in charitable activities, but today the public, including your business prospects, expects firms to do good deeds. Do them and recruit the press to tell everybody, elaborating on the link to your company's values and leading to an emotional connection with your brand.

Take a look at Upper Canada Forest Products (www.ucfp.com), another North American success story. The unique proposition of this Mississauga, Ont.-based supplier of hardwoods to the building industry is "people who really do care about the people they work with and do business with." The company's natural, strategic fit was to work with Habitat for Humanity, that cool organization that helps people in need build their own homes. The Upper Canada people are right there helping swing the hammer, and both their local and industry press are telling everyone about it.

Ted Matthews (ted@wewanted.com) is a brand expert and principal of Instinct Brand Equity Coaches Inc. in Toronto. He was owner and president for 28 years of Promanad, a marketing communications company.

© 2005 Ted Matthews

RELATED LINKS

More columns by Ted Matthews:

- [The CEO as CBO](#): Why you need to be your own Chief Brand Officer, the ultimate guardian of your firm's brand
- [Three misconceptions that could hurt your brand](#): There are widely held ideas about branding that just aren't so. Go on believing them, and you could find yourself spending your marketing dollars in the wrong areas and

focusing on the wrong people

- [The battle for brain space](#): So you figure branding is just something for the big guys to worry about? Think again

PROFITguide.com
YOUR ONLINE GUIDE TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

Close