

Land a better BRAND.

In the weekly newsletter, I talk a lot about the importance of marketing. I talk even more about the importance of getting your message out to the consuming public via traditional advertising avenues. However, to make your marketing and advertising more effective, you need a solid branding plan. Too often, all of our advertising dollars go into simply promoting events or sales (*we are guilty of this too*), when we need to communicate what and who we are. Businesses need to tell people how they are different and why their approach is better. The same concept applies to organizations, communities and other entities. Without reinforcing your approach through branding, consumers sometimes incorrectly think they are comparing apples to apples when comparing one organization to another. **Effective branding allows you to become an orange in a field of apples.** Below is a brief synopsis of branding methodology to help you land a better BRAND.



First- What is Branding? - Branding is the attempt to develop a strong reputation to increase recognition and create a significant volume of impressions. In other words, you want to create a positive familiarity, or understanding of what you are, why you exist and what makes you different/better. As a result of branding, businesses or organizations typically want increased traffic, sales, donations, memberships, volunteers or other interaction.

There are rules for the Branding process- During the January Quarterly Training, Kathy La Plante shared some of the basic rules for the branding process that she learned from Al and Laura Ries (*authors of: The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding*). Here are some highlights:

1. Expansion: The power of branding is inversely proportional to its scope. (i.e. you can't be all things to all people, choose a simple narrative that people understand and appeals to your target audience, then stick with it). Often times you will hear a ethereal tag line for an entity and ask yourself "what does that mean?" or "what are they trying to achieve?". That's a bad thing... And, you need a realistic vision of what you currently are, what you want to be and benchmarks to get you from "point A" to "point B" to create a brand. A brand becomes stronger when you narrow its focus.

2. The BIRTH of branding is achieved through publicity, but once born a brand needs ADVERTISING to stay healthy. Our local media does a good job in introducing businesses to the public, and creative businesses can create positive publicity in a variety of ways, but you must advertise to reinforce and shape your brand in the mind of the consuming public.

3. Brands should strive to own a word (owning an icon is also important). Ford says "quality is job one". The word they are trying to own is "quality". Some companies try and own "style" or "low-prices". Cities often try and own words like "excitement". What is your word? How will you "own" it? Which leads us into our next rule:

4. Credentials: The crucial ingredient in the success of any brand is its claim to authenticity. Uniqueness. Honesty. Steadfast belief in what you are, and pride that you can share with others. Brands must differentiate themselves in a meaningful way. If you take a city and say "we are just like _____" and that city is within driving distance, you are in trouble. If you are a business and say "we are just like ____" when there are substantial differences in the consumers mind (trust me, there will be), the consumer will doubt your honesty and may not trust the rest of your message. Be honest with yourself about what you are, who your target customer is and make sure a brand is meaningful to them. In the 1950's, advertising agencies would include a bunch of wealthy white guys sitting around a table talking about how to penetrate a shopping market that generally consisted of middle class females. It didn't always work well. Make sure you can empathize with your target while branding.

5. Quality and consistency- A brand is not built overnight. Success is measured in decades not years. Quality within your branding campaign is important, but creativity, frequency, understanding and adherence to your brand principles are also important factors. Plan your branding process thoroughly, then stick with it. I can still hear the "Bluestem Farm and Ranch Supply has got it" song in my head from my childhood. They have a strong brand built through consistency over time. Other entities have produced ill conceived brands that didn't resonate with the public, and those brands tend to drop into and out of existence with little effect (except for wasted resources).

So, now that you have questions and rules in mind, how about some answers? Each business is unique, each city is unique and each organization is unique so there aren't any universal answers that will be specific enough for you to achieve rebranding. BUT, we do have tools that can help you reach out to your customers (like electronic surveys) and can provide FREE consulting to businesses or organizations that want to get started on a branding exercise. We can help you create a customer survey that you can e-mail out (or print) to gain some feedback. We can also ask some of the tough questions above to help you define your brand and market position.

Talk to your advertising representatives about branding projects they have been a part of. I'm sure they would be thrilled to help you get a branding campaign off the ground. Talk to the Small Business Development Center and their associate, Dr. Jim Stephens. Stop by your local book store, library or the Main Street office and ask for information on branding. Taking a small step to get started could lead to a BIG impact for your business or organization. Are you ready to get started? Contact the Emporia Main Street office, and we can help you land a better brand.

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