

A Great Brand Means Nothing if No One Knows about It

By Karen Post

All right, you've spent time, money and resources on developing your brand. You clearly know who you are, you've decided on your brand difference, you've found folks who want what you have, you've mapped out the great experience you will deliver and now you must employ the big brand bang—and resonate your message through every point of market contact.

This is where so many organizations “bust the brand, big time.” They lose focus, spend mega bucks on meaningless mayhem and forget the basics of clear, compelling and consistent communications.

I recommend all organizations have a brand plan and a Brand Bible™. The brand plan should include your brand goals, strategies and tactics for getting the word out. The Brand Bible™ is the internal book you train and empower your employees with so they become brand warriors. The Brand Bible™ should address the brand history, its purpose and how to protect the brand equity that it earned through graphic usage and language protocol.

Exaggerate, accentuate and eliminate.

When you are designing a communication program for your brand, you must remember that your audience is assaulted with thousands of brand messages daily and many of these messages are fragmented, convoluted and darn right confusing. So to make sure they “get it,” my simple rule of thumb is “Exaggerate; don't be shy.” Accentuate, put the spotlight on the important stuff and finally eliminate all the wasteful, meaningless junk that does not significantly speak to your brand.

Run all your communication activities through the brand filter. If it connects with your brand's purpose, personality and promise and screams the big brand, then it's a keeper. If it doesn't and it's still a totally awesome promotional or communication tactic, then look at what you can change so it can work for your brand. If that becomes too much of a stretch, then just forget about it. There are always many other killer ways you can spread the good word on your brand.

Many folks think brands are built by advertising. Some are certainly fueled by it. Should you decide advertising is part of your branding mix, then make sure you adhere to these guidelines.

Risk.

There's a road named Risk and it's the most direct path to brand success. That's right. Incredible advertising usually takes an untraveled path. It goes where its competitors are afraid to. It stands out from the crowd. It creates a memorable, distinct mark on the minds of its market. Does your advertising look and sound like ten of your closest competitors? How will the buyer know it's you?

Reach.

Are you buying your ad space or time in the right target zone? How long will that impression last? What is every eyeball or ear costing you vs. another way to touch them? Does the math work when you add production and insertion costs?

Relevance.

A great advertisement should look, sound and feel like your brand persona and be a relevant value to the buying market. Tap into the whole brain of your buyer. Don't just shove your product features down her throat. Most consumers don't like the way that tastes anyway. Hit them where they live. Upset people. Make them think. Challenge them. And remember brands are 70% emotional and 30% logical.

Repetition.

And whatever you do, without frequency you are hosed. Let me repeat. Without frequency you are hosed. In most cases, the average human needs to be exposed to a message at least seven times before it makes a tiny dent in the brain. So if you are buying a sixteenth of a page, black and white ad in a daily journal and running it one time, the sales or awareness generated from that single insertion may be your home run for that quarter. You must repeat your message over a period of time for it really to sink in.

Advertising is important, but not always the single answer to getting the word out on a brand. Many successful brands grow and prosper without traditional media spending. These super brands become super stars because they take advantage of all points of contact, both internal and external communication avenues.

Consider your employee training programs, the manuals, videos and events. These are all strong routes for your brand message. Signage, uniforms, delivery trucks, visual merchandising, point of purchase materials, your Web presence and your operation's environment should not be dismissed as they are also vital communication channels.

Understand the intense power of style, graphics, type and language in all your communications. They all aid in telling your brand story and contribute to the solid brand imprint you place in the minds of your market.

About the author

Karen Post, The Branding Diva™, is an author, national speaker and consultant on branding, marketing and communication issues. For nearly 20 years she has provided branding counsel and communication programs for individuals; start-ups; local, regional and national companies; politicians; and nonprofit organizations. For more information contact Karen Post at kp@brandingdiva.com or visit her at www.brandingdiva.com.
