

Know Who You Are *By Karen Post* And Your Brand is on it's Way.

Having a brand is powerful. It adds value to your balance sheet, attracts superstar employees and allows for greater profit margins. Your brand is like DNA. It's your unique mental mark; the sum of all your characteristics; a brain tattoo you land on your buyer, prospect, stakeholder and/or employee that create a strong, loyal, emotional connection.

Is your brand landed or on life support with a bad HMO?

Successful branding is not just for those with trillion-dollar budgets nor is it a magic formula for the business elite. Branding is for anyone who has something other folks want and for those who can follow five straightforward steps and stick with them.

Have Clarity.

Sounds easy, yet many business leaders struggle with defining their operation in 10 simple words, which is the first step to landing a brand.

Do you know who you are? If you polled half your staff today, would they have the same answer? What is your driving purpose in business? What do you promise to deliver? What are your strengths and weakness? What are your passions? What makes you smile?

And where do you want to be in 5 years, 10 years? If you don't know where you are going, how will you know if you get there? Set accountable goals. Do you want to build a brand and sell it? Pass it on to a family member, donate it to a charitable cause or just have fun with it? Be goal driven and the process becomes easier.

Ask your staff, ask yourself and ask your executive team the same questions. Do you all sing the same song or does someone sing in a completely different language from yours?

Now that you've done the internal check, what do the world and your market think? Do their impressions jive with your internal poll?

While taking time to think through and write down these answers may be a painful burden, kind of like a root canal, this exercise is critical to building a brand strategy and mapping out a plan for market significance and success.

Branding is about lodging a collection of positive, relevant information in the minds of decision makers and influencers. Market share is good, but today mind share is where success resides. As consumers, we are assaulted every day with more than 3,000 screaming branding messages. It's overwhelming, confusing and often annoying. That's why it is so important for a company to speak in a singular, concise manner. Translate that to nonmarketing talk: Decide on the most important stuff and say it so a child could understand it and repeat it a bunch!

Be Decisive.

Now take all this data and feedback from the internal and external spheres, take a vote from your gut and make some hard decisions. Deciding on even a lame idea is a heck of a lot better than not deciding at all. Pick a single message—something you can leverage and own and something you like and will stick with.

There are lots of awesome, cool things you can promise and deliver for every Tom, Dick and Mary, but lack of definition will cost you too much and delay your hitting the home run in the branding game. Sometimes you have to be monogamous with your ideas. Pick one idea and give it a chance to mature before you ditch it for something else.

You can tout features and benefits all night long in your advertising and promotion, but your brand needs to be a simple, strong and singular message.

Once you have clearly defined your reason for existence and outlined your special gifts and stuff you love and stuff you hate, the next step is boiling them down to powerful words or phrases that pay. These are by-products of the "who you are" question. Consider a 10-second elevator pitch, a statement of purpose that is added to all media releases and other business documents and a snappy slogan or one-liner promise. Consistently use these words in your communications and your brand will be sprouting up soon.

A brand is a mental imprint. It starts with a clear picture from within an organization with total buy-in from the troops. Whether you are branding a company, product, service or person, assess your identity, define your goals, decide on your special stuff and what rocks your boat. This is the first step to creating and building a brand.

Creating a significant brand is a five-step process. Knowing Who You Are is step number one. Branding principles are universal and applicable to any size business. This article is the first in a series on building and executing a brand. Brands facilitate decision making. Brands reduce risk and anxiety. Brands give buyers choice. They are part of our fabric, culture and society. Whether you are a B2C or B2B entity and or an individual professional, brands make the difference. They are a competitive advantage in a fierce marketplace. Land your brand and rule!

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.

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