



10 Ways to Improve Your Brand

by **Linda Carlberg** CEO | CCO SmartSyt™

Branding has been used for many centuries. Ancient Roman glassworkers marked their wares. Trademarked jars of wine have been found at Pompeii. A brand of herbal paste known as Chyawanprash has been in continuous use in India since 1100 BC.

The word “brand” comes from the Old Norse word “brandr,” meaning “to burn” – a practice producers used to burn a mark on their products.* Branding is still used today to separate a business from the rest of the “herd.”

With so many options for consumers to choose from – especially online – your business needs every advantage to succeed. Here are ten ways you can improve your brand to make it stand out, be remembered, and drive more sales.

A Solid Foundation

The Right Company Name

First, does the name of your company make it easy for the average person to clearly know what your business does? Is it easy to spell and pronounce? If not, it will take more impressions (and expense) for consumers to learn what you have to sell and to find you. A company like Samsung® is known and understood because of its long history and the millions of dollars they’ve spent in advertising. If you have neither unlimited time nor budget, make a smart name choice from the beginning. If your current name is off target, you may benefit from changing it as soon as possible, accompanied by a positive campaign that introduces the change as an improved focus on today’s customer needs.

The Right Tagline

Next, your tagline should further clarify the consumer’s understanding of your business, by description and/or benefits. A simple business name like “Bob’s Plumbing” may tell the consumer immediately that Bob’s business sells plumbing services, but what differentiates him from his competitors? The tagline must help set his brand apart. For example, “*24 Hour, Guaranteed Service for Less*” packs three benefits into six words (they’re on duty 24 hours, their service is guaranteed, and it’s competitively priced).

The Right Logo

Most people hear the word “brand” and immediately think of a company logo. Yes, the logo is part of the brand and it has an important job to do, but as we will see, it doesn’t do it alone. The basic components of most logos are:

- The letterforms (font)
- The icon or symbol
- The color(s)

Using our simple example of “Bob’s Plumbing,” the word “Plumbing” could be a bold font, while the word “Bob’s” could be in script resembling his signature (helping to make it unique and easier to remember). The icon could be integrated into the company name by using a pipe wrench as the letter “P” in “Plumbing.” Since Bob specializes in copper re-piping, his colors could be metallic copper and blue (to symbolize clean water). Each element integrates with the other to help the viewer understand and remember Bob’s business.

Depending on the business or product, there are countless variations. The Coca-Cola® logo is so effective that it’s recognized using the letterforms of many languages. Before aluminum cans, the original container was a distinctive glass bottle patented in 1915 that is still iconic even now, 100+ years later.

*Source: Wikipedia.org



“Branding: the sum total of a company’s value, including products, services, people, advertising, positioning, and culture.”

Webster’s New Millennium™ Dictionary of English

Values



Business Image

Consumers judge your business based on its image, like it or not. They will give you a mental score of good, bad, or indifferent. For example, we’ve all driven by a business with a faded, broken, dirty sign. It sends a strong message, such as: a) the business isn’t doing well, b) the owners don’t care about basic maintenance, or c) quality is not a priority. To the consumer, it appears something is wrong and they drive past – especially if the business is a restaurant or a hotel!

An indifferent reaction isn’t much better than a negative one. The goal is to get the consumer’s attention and take positive *action* – to buy from *you* and not the other guy.

When was the last time you “drove past” your own business? What message are you sending? Would customers say:

- They’ve been around a long time, but they don’t seem to be keeping up with the market. There are newer, better options.
- I’ve heard/read they’ve had some issues. I’m not sure I trust them.
- My experience with them wasn’t a positive one. I don’t think I’ll be back.

If you want to be known for quality, integrity, and excellence, you must send the same message publically. I’ve worked with many businesses that focus solely on their products and operations but forget to think like their customer. Of course there are many factors that make up a company’s image, but you might be surprised at what a fresh coat of paint, clean facilities, a change of uniform style and improved signage (outside, inside, and on vehicles) can do. Your customers will see the change and morale will improve for your staff as well.



Business Culture

The people who work for you are not just an “asset” ... they’re people! I remember when I had my first business, I couldn’t understand why all my employees weren’t ready to set the world on fire with me. I’d swing a big 100 pound carrot of opportunity in front of them and wait to see who would grab it. One day I realized I was asking them to build *my* dreams ... when they had dreams of their own. It hit me when I was a guest at an employee’s wedding. As he placed the wedding ring on his bride’s finger, I knew how hard he worked to make that dream come true. My business helped him – and he had helped me.

Are you known for employee appreciation, healthy communication, generous incentives, and clearly defined paths for improvement and promotion? Do you share or do you take all the profits and put them in your own account? Happy employees help create a healthier company. Healthy companies strengthen their brand long term, from the inside out.



Business Values

Have you recently – or ever – put together a document that describes what your business values are? Are you all about hitting quotas and sales numbers with room for little else? Of course a business must do both to survive, but *why* you do it is also important.

As mentioned above, valuing employees is critical to build strong *esprit de corps* internally. But what about the outside world? Do you support a charity? Have you organized an event that gives back to the community where you work? Does your company have both a bank account *and* a heart - or does it only take without giving?

I’m not saying to give to try and manipulate the public into thinking your business stands for something it really doesn’t, just so it can make more money. On the other hand, consumers “vote with their dollars” and often buy from brands that are *honestly* working to make a positive, healthy difference in our world. What can you do to *help*?



Selling Your Brand Message:

7

Business and Product Stories

Many businesses write a mission statement and usually an Executive Summary for their business plan – once – and figure that’s all there is to it. Others don’t even get that far.

Telling your **business story** in a compelling and engaging way is important to document for internal use (employee education, recruitment and training, etc.), as well as to inform the public about why they should choose to do business with you. Most often, the story is told through a well-produced video that features the company founder and a small number of others, for example: a key employee, a long-term customer case study, a sales channel representative and an “average customer” testimonial. By filming company facilities, you can also give a tour to anyone, anytime.

Using video to tell **product stories** is a *highly* effective way to increase sales. For example, you can give demonstrations, show instructions for assembly, teach the customer how to use your product, or detail the quality of materials and construction. Professional and persuasive presentations can sell for you 24/7.

Telling business and product stories with video brings them to life. It’s a wise investment and a multi-use “workhorse” that provides customers with valuable information to use when making a decision about which brand to choose – and trust. Video can be viewed online on-demand, distributed via a link in social media, played at events and meetings, and more.

8

Marketing Content

Today, the access to stock photos, illustrations and other “plug-ins” has both benefits and drawbacks. For example, if you need an image of an ostrich for an ad this afternoon and don’t happen to know anyone who has one, a stock image is a great choice.

However, here’s a word of caution for you “do-it-yourself” types out there. There’s an art to finding the right “plug-in.” Just because something is cheap doesn’t mean it’s effective. What may look “good enough” to you may be an obvious display of cutting corners to your audience – or worse! Who hasn’t seen a website or a brochure with a super-perfect stock photo of multi-ethnic models sitting at a conference table? Did you believe they were actual employees of the business? In some cases, stock images are perceived by viewers as deceptive and deliberately meant to fool the viewer – and they know it.

There’s no substitute for marketing content that is custom-fit to your unique needs and brand, even if it means paying more for a photographer, an illustrator, copywriter or other talented specialists who know how to get it right. Your marketing content needs to be *genuine, honest, authentic, and uncommonly good*. Yes, it will cost more than hiring an intern.

9

Marketing Tools

Not long ago, agencies on Madison Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard had a monopoly. Marketing tools were mostly print: direct mail, catalogs, newspapers, and magazines – and for those who could afford it, media: television, radio, and billboards.

Since then, the way we communicate, buy and gather information has forever changed thanks to the Internet. A business website became mandatory well over a decade ago. Many “traditional” marketing methods continue to be replaced by more efficient, interactive tools.

Today we’re even more connected and mobile, with less patience to wait for what we need/want. On-demand is the *norm*. Information and entertainment sites, new apps, and ecommerce options appear every day. It’s not just important for businesses to stay current, it’s essential. Whether you hire a team or build one in-house, choose those who have the skills and experience to leverage solutions that drive the most response. If *you* don’t invest, your competition *will*.



Keep your brand fresh and relevant. What worked in the past – even just a year ago – may be very different than what works today.



Give Your Customer What They Need

The competition for customers is higher than ever. Anyone with Internet access can research products before buying, whether online or at a physical location. This means the playing field has become increasingly more even, but businesses that “play a better game” will win.

Learn to think like your customer. Give them what they need to make a positive buying decision when and where they want it.

Here are some possibilities:

- Provide access to expanded, valuable information beyond what the competition is giving
- Offer a bundled, greater-value purchase option that’s only available from your business
- Give consumers promotions they can tailor to their own preferences
- Provide VIP service, access, or special programs for loyalty

Remember in the end, “the customer is always right.” Do everything you can to make it easier for them to choose *you*.

All ten steps are required to build a strong brand that consumers follow and return to again and again. They apply whether your business is large or small, established or just starting up. This isn’t a “one and done” checklist. Revisit each step regularly to fine-tune your brand and keep your edge.

Hire professionals to do the jobs you can’t afford to do wrong. Marketing is one of them.

SmartSyt™ builds *Modern Marketing Power Tools™* designed to help today’s business sell faster and more frequently online. We create the experience. Contact us to learn more about how we can help you sell more today!

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Call: 951/493-6711

