

## Don't Always Think "Branding"

The branding craze hit its zenith in the 1980s as a marketing principle, making it outmoded now. Yet hardly a month goes by when a potential client requests branding. It's amazing what businesses and organizations think they can "brand." As you've read many times in this column, you simply cannot brand a product, a business, a service, an entity or an individual unless you understand the challenges involved. By challenges I mean the concentrated spending of many millions of dollars over a long period of time. Unless you're the size of a Kimberly-Clark or Yellowstone Park, not many organizations have the resources for efforts of that caliber?

I know. I know. That's disappointing news to impart to the small-to-medium sized business owner in this market, but the truth just might set you free. And maybe reading this now will stop the branding insanity long enough so the real work of employing sound marketing principles can kick in and actually help you.

Let's start with the basic question: **What is a brand?**

It's a product, a service, a business entity or an individual whose name or graphic depiction elicits an *emotional response* when heard or seen. If the branding is done well (millions of dollars spent over time), a collection of memorable qualities that surround the branded entity should immediately come to mind. Think Kleenex. Think Target. Think Intel. Think Oprah. Think Coca-Cola. Think American Idol. Think the NFL. Think Garfield. Think Doctor Who. Think Doc Marten shoes! You get the picture.

Here's a test: If you are able to create a product (or service, etc.) that licensors would eventually want to buy licensing rights to, then, my friend...you probably have created a brand. If not, you probably haven't, no matter how high your personal opinion of your business happens to be.

Given this, that's why your advertising agency or PR firm or marketing group or marketing manager should be wincing *painfully* when you ask for branding. Why? Because unless the request is feasible in terms of time and money, their branding efforts are doomed to fail; it's tantamount to emptying the ocean with an eye dropper.

If that's the case, what might your marketing plan include, if not branding efforts? I contend—along with a slew of other marketers – that what you need instead of the much misunderstood branding, is savvy, well-planned *positioning*.

Positioning establishes the qualities or attributes surrounding your product or service that speak compellingly to the wants and needs of your target market. Affordable. Credible. Efficient. Beautiful. Innovative. Fast. etc. Those are examples of positioning ideals. They are fluid, too, meaning they change as your target audience's requirements change. And they change as your competitors come up to speed alongside you.

Example: Maytag is the appliance BRAND, while its POSITIONING as the lowest maintenance appliance brand has needed to change to address other qualities, such as appliance aesthetics.

Keep in mind that you cannot create a brand without first creating positioning, that's why you can't even begin to brand with one, singular campaign. If you have a modest marketing budget (less than several million dollars), concentrate on your positioning and forget the pricey, labor-intensive branding you think you may need.

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