

Building a Brand

What do you think of when you see Nike? Starbucks? Sony? How about companies in the B2B space, such as UPS? Google? These examples are names you know, but branding is definitely not name recognition. When you were reading the names above, what was the sum of all the thoughts and feelings you associated with them? That's the brand.

A brand is an idea. It is tied to emotions, experiences and human needs. And it is something that you build in your own mind—it cannot be built for you.

So if the customer builds the brand, what good is marketing? Well, even though the brand can't be directly handed to customers, marketing can guide and influence its development. In fact, doing so is essential.

Your company doesn't have to be a global powerhouse in order to build a brand. And no, your company does not have to have a "consumer products" focus. Brands are valuable—even critical—for companies in all industries.

However, brand building is very complicated. There's no formula or step-by-step procedure. And you can't force it—it has to "happen." There are, however, some guidelines that Pepper Group recommends in order to help maximize the growth of your brand.

1 » KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND BE CONSISTENT

This is the foundation. The best brands are differentiated in the market. They have a clear positioning, strong key messages, a great graphic identity and a definite overall "style."

All of this forms a brand's core essence. For example, Starbucks' essence, according to Scott Bedbury, their former SVP of Marketing, is Rewarding Everyday Moments. Notice that it does not mention coffee, beans, or baristas. It represents the "idea" that Starbucks wants its brand to be. The essence of a brand has to be communicated consistently, clearly and creatively—a process commonly called Integrated Marketing.

2 » BACK IT UP WITH REALITY

The coolest description of essence, the best logo, and the most creative marketing are a total waste of time if it's all just empty hype. There has to be solid performance within the business to build a brand. The brand has to deliver a positive experience. The reality of the brand must reinforce the idea that is at its core.

Consider UPS. Do they back up your ideas about them with performance? You bet they do. If they didn't, what would their branding efforts be worth?



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3 » MAKE IT A WAY OF LIFE

Influencing a brand goes far beyond what's typically considered marketing. A brand is the sum total of everything, positive and negative, that the customer associates with it. It's the direct experience with the product or service, the people representing that brand and every single touch point. It's also an experience with the distributor, a post on a blog, a friend's perception, an impression of the website, a recent article, a shipping delay, a problem resolved, and all the emotions that customers have connected to that brand.

You must pay attention to everything and take responsibility for ensuring that the brand is always presented in the best manner possible. You must also work with employees so they not only understand the brand but also live it and hold deep, positive feelings about it themselves.

Research proves that stronger, better brands mean more sales, better profits, and a more valuable company overall. While it may seem daunting, building a brand brings incredible returns. Just ask Starbucks, UPS and Google.

