

perception brandingsm

modern8



The competitive pressures in business, particularly during an economic downturn, have turned increased attention to branding strategies as a means of gaining a discernable advantage. Successful business-to-business marketers and consumer marketers have both recognized branding as a strategic business tool.

Branding is much more than coming up with an attractive logo or catchy phrase. Though there is no standard definition of “brand” or “branding” within the general public, or even within the industry, it’s still a major marketing force.

Perception BrandingSM is a proprietary visual process developed by modern8, a consulting firm that specializes in brand design. Perception BrandingSM defines a brand’s persona as an emotionally charged platform for developing brand-design solutions. According to Randall Smith, President and Creative Director of modern8, these principles, properly applied, can unify a company’s core brands through all fronts and establish the strongest possible perception in the customer’s mind.

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Perception BrandingSM reflects business objectives in a targeted positioning strategy. For many companies it can be a soul-searching odyssey that can lead to defining who they are, what they stand for and why customers should place their faith in their products or services.

[**PRINCIPLES OF PERCEPTION BRANDINGSM**] Behavior is driven by perception. What the customer thinks, what he does and ultimately what he buys is driven by perception inside his mind. Although customers can perceive things differently, no one discounts the cumulative effect of the company image as perceived through a managed brand. Brands are experienced through various encounters. How do people feel when they visit the web site, pick up the company letterhead, meet in the offices or talk to the company receptionist? Brand efforts must permeate every level of an organization, and every point of a customer’s experience to be effective.

How potential customers and clients “feel” is the operative word. What is their perception? People are seeking to connect with the brand. In order to help them connect; the brand must appeal on an emotional level.

Brands should be thought of as a set of values implied by the product, service or experience, and not the symbol, which is usually an artifact, such as a logo. The symbol is just the mani-

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festation of the brand, the visualization of the emotional reality. All of the values associated with the brand, good or bad, are brought to mind when the symbol is seen.

Brands are like reputations and must be maintained. This is a universally accepted requirement for successful branders of products, services, and experiences. How to maintain these reputations in a dynamic and evolving environment is still, largely, an art, though it’s an art with defined edges.¹ Technically speaking a brand is not even created by designers and other professionals. It is really created in the minds of customers, audiences, and participants through experiences with the brand. Brands, therefore, live outside the company or “brand owner”.

People are afraid of change, and yet brands need to be flexible, adaptable and elastic. The question is not “Is our logo going to survive trends?” The real question is how can you ensure that your customer connection will stay relevant?²

Brands are multifaceted experiences, and can only be created by multidisciplinary teams. Perception BrandingSM teams may include designers, marketers, engineers, scientists, and other consultants that shape the eventual outcome.

[**PERCEPTION BRANDINGSM VS. TRADITIONAL APPROACHES**] The differences between the methodology of Perception BrandingSM and the process of traditional design or conventional marketing is shown in a matrix from an article titled, *The Next Strategic Weapon in the War to Win Consumers*, by Terry Shook.³

TRADITIONAL DESIGN/MARKETING	PERCEPTION BRANDING
Empirical Data	Pop Culture
Statistical market research	Watch, ask, read, absorb
Marketing disciplines	Brand contacts
Invention	Emulation, simulation
Quantitative	Qualitative

A traditional approach may accurately gauge current market conditions, but it fails to evaluate the meaning and future of those conditions. Perception BrandingSM monitors cultural changes, values and marketplace trends with intuition and intelligence to create responsible and courageous solutions.

[**BRAND PROMISE OR CONTRACT**] Traditional branding describes the relationship between the company and the customer as a promise to deliver. Brand-design programs require the formulation of a written Brand Promise that specifically states the com-

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pany commitment. For example, International Truck & Engine, which recently implemented a significant branding program, summed up its commitment in a succinct 20-word Brand Promise: “International listens, understands, and delivers the best ways to move our customers ahead. On the road and in their business.”⁴

Perception BrandingSM suggests contract law as a more useful model than a promise. As opposed to one-way promises, two-way contracts require both parties to fulfill their responsibilities. A successful brand is a relationship that both gives and asks for commitment from the customer.

[5D: THE PERCEPTION BRANDINGSM PROCESS] 5D is the process by which the brand becomes a physical presence. This methodology puts each project through a strategic pre-design process that thoroughly defines and articulates the brand attributes, the brand promise and a profile of the target audience.

[1.0] DISCOVERY: QUESTIONS ABOUT TODAY AND TOMORROW. How is the brand currently perceived? What is the current position? Figure out where the brand now stands, before you figure out what direction to take it. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the brand? Opportunities and threats? What are the strategic goals behind existing marketing efforts? Who is the primary target and how do they behave?

This is the investigative and research phase. Armed with new insights, talk to the competition, to vendors, to customers.

[2.0] DISTILL: QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT'S MOST LIKELY TO WORK. Once it's determined where the brand is now, and what it's to become, discuss how to get it there. What tactics are appropriate to achieve the strategic goals? What tonality and aesthetic is appropriate for the target? What is the Brand Contract, the target's “take away” after engaging the brand? What mechanisms are necessary to achieve an accurate measure of success against strategy? What efforts are necessary to continue the relationship once begun?

Comb through pop culture icons and societal clues, and look for new concepts to base or revive, ailing brands. In this phase, identify opportunities in the marketplace through sifting, sorting, organizing and segmenting the information gathered during the Discovery Phase. For example, branding positions identified in advertising from both competitors and non-industry sources may be analyzed to develop a pallet of images for both analo-

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gous and contrasting comparisons. The solutions that result must be in line with the values and lifestyles of the target market.

[3.0] DEPICT: FROM QUESTIONS COME ANSWERS.

From these questions come a direction that can be confidently pursued. The direction is depicted in the form of a Concept Board and is the final step in the pre-design process. The Concept Board takes the client’s complex business strategies and molds them into a visual/verbal representation that cues and triggers customer emotive values. This is the “litmus test” against which all creative decisions are measured, keeping the work focused and on-strategy.

[4.0] DESIGN: THE CREATIVE SOLUTION.

Though this is the hardest part, it’s the most obvious; the best understood, and needs the least explanation.

[5.0] DEPLOYMENT: PUT IT OUT THERE.

Post it, print it, publish it, make it. Immediately after launch, begin to generate findings. From this valuable data will emerge more questions which will continue the focus on the most efficient, effective way to meet the brand objectives.

No matter how much brand designers design and name, if a brand isn’t viable or sustainable, it won’t be strong enough and, thus, not successful. On the other hand, well managed and well executed brands that keep business objectives and target audience in mind will effectively capture the customer and maximize return on investment.

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1. White Paper, *Brand Futures: Possible Scenarios*, ALGA Brand Design Group
 2. *Emotional Branding*, by Marc Gobe, pg. 158 (New York, Allsworth Press, 2001)
 3. White Paper, *The Next Strategic Weapon in the War to Win Consumers*, by Terry Shook.
 4. *@Issue, The Journal of Business and Design*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Spring 2002, pg. 29

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