THE IMPORTANCE OF BRAND CONSISTENCY FOR FRANCHISES
WHY CONSISTENCY IS KEY

One of the keys to building a successful franchise—or any successful business, for that matter—is consistency. We find it especially important for franchise businesses because of the unique three-fold nature of this business model: the corporate owner must attract new franchisees, then meet the needs of both its individual franchisees and target consumer.

Inherent in franchise business is a certain degree of physical consistency. Individual franchisees are expected to abide by rules related to uniform, presentation, customer service norms and the general business processes. The consistency of each of these physical elements in turn helps the corporation meet the needs and expectations of its target consumer, no matter which franchisee they happen to be interacting with.

Consistency between uniforms, presentation, look-and-feel of the brick and mortar locations, and general business processes strengthens the franchise’s ability to differentiate itself from the competition and stand as a credible, trustworthy business. In short, consistency lends weight and credibility to your franchise’s brand as a whole.

But does that same level of consistency remain constant across your branded digital properties?

Ask yourself the following: does your franchise allow franchisees to:

» operate their own websites?
 » manage and execute their own digital marketing strategies?
 » manage and operate their own social media profiles?

If the answer to any of those questions is yes, then consider whether your franchisees are credibly maintaining your brand across these digital properties. Is the brand voice and persona the same across each site? Is the messaging consistent?
Chances are, they’re not. And this inconsistency can only have a negative impact on your overall ability to attract new franchisees and provide your target consumer with the same experience and level of care they’ve come to expect from your business.

This white paper discusses the importance of brand consistency as it relates to franchises. We cover the power of branding and how it factors into relieving some common pain points—both at the corporate and franchisee level. And we leave you with a little advice on choosing the right marketing partner and allocating marketing dollars.

THE POWER OF BRAND

Let’s first define what we mean when we talk about “brand.” It’s a term often misused and misconstrued. Your logo, your trademarks and service marks—all the graphic elements and the things that differentiate your company in the marketplace and make your business recognizable—are all aspects of your brand. But “brand” is more than what people see.

When we use the term, we use it to mean the following: the story your consumers tell their friends and family when you are not in the room. Brand is the sum of multiple touchpoints that goes beyond the first impression (which may be your franchise’s logo or an ad campaign) to include how you meet customer expectations whenever and wherever consumers interact with you.
Brand is important. But how much so? Can the potential value of brand be overstated? Perhaps. Anything can. But the truth is that for franchise businesses, brand can be one the most valuable assets—perhaps even the most important asset, because it lures not only potential franchisees, but attracts and retains your customer base.

Successful businesses can be launched overnight; successful brands take time. Strategy. And sometimes a little luck. So how are brands built?

We like the way CEO, venture capitalist and Forbes contributor Jerry McLaughlin described it in a recent article: “Every day, we have opportunities to shape others’ perceptions. That is what brand-building is about: the deliberate and skillful application of effort to create a desired perception in the mind of another person.”

Deliberation and skill—applied with effort. That’s how we build strong brands. In the next section, we take a look at common features found in almost any successful franchise business.

**BRANDING STRATEGY FOR FRANCHISES: 3 PRINCIPLES**

Franchises thrive when the corporate entity provides these three assets to its franchisees:

- strong brand power
- a playbook for success
- support and experience

Whenever we undertake a marketing strategy for franchises, we start by digging deep into each of those three inquiries. We do it to determine how much brand...
recognition the franchise has and how much saturation it enjoys in the market. We review the materials and resources the corporate entity makes available to the individual franchisees. If it’s all there, we seek to make it better. If a component is missing, then we work with corporate to implement and execute it.

STRONG BRAND POWER
Consistency builds strong brands, so it’s one of our primary considerations. The same graphic design elements, language and writing style should be a constant across all communication channels—from print materials, to in-store décor to digital display ads, landing pages, franchisee websites and the corporate site.

It seems like a simple matter—but it’s easy to lose the forest for the trees. Consider one small example of how we helped one of our long-standing partners, the Invisible Fence brand, improve their paid media efforts.

Invisible Fence is the leading pet containment solutions provider. Invisible Fence products are sold exclusively through a network of trained, locally based professionals who number in the hundreds across the country.

In taking a close look at Invisible Fence, one of the first things we noticed was a lack of consistency with the brand. Individual dealers were using different colors and fonts in the logo. Sizes were off. In a nutshell, the brand didn’t appear unified. And it was having a negative effect on consumer recognition and overall brand strength. By improving their level of consistency, we improved the speed with which consumers recognized and identified with the brand, which lead to higher conversions and more sales.

A PLAYBOOK, SUPPORT AND EXPERIENCE
For certain business-minded and self-motivated individuals, there is an allure to becoming a franchisee. Partly, it’s the chance to operate a business semi-independently from the corporate structure without having to endure the hardships of being a startup.

With that said, there is a certain level of understanding that some aspects of the franchise must be dictated by the corporate owner, and actually—research indicates that most franchisees expect help. This isn’t surprising, considering the other two
behaviors of successful franchises: namely, providing a playbook for success and providing support and the benefit of experience.

Here’s where your marketing partner can come into play. Relatively basic resources, like creating a style guide and providing instructions on how to use it, can go a long way in supporting your franchisees and ensuring consistent brand presence across the country and globally. Style guides apply to all areas of marketing, but you can include sections specific to the proper transfer of your brand in the online ecosphere. Further, you can support local efforts by providing approved digital content, such as landing pages, display advertisements and more. It may mean ensuring your web properties are organized properly.

Consider your corporate franchise website and the websites of your local franchisees. What purpose does the corporate site serve? Does it provide easy-to-find resources for potential franchisees? Does it educate them about the opportunity—speaking to the franchise growth goals and earning potential for a franchisee? Or is it too consumer-minded?

Best practice for franchise web properties is to design and develop the corporate site so that its primary purpose is educational, leaving the individual, local franchisee sites to focus more on transactional aspects. Further, despite the distinct differences in the primary purposes of these sites, both must remain true to the franchise brand. They must be consistent in look, feel and tone.

It’s easier said than done, and that’s why it’s important to choose the right marketing partner.
CHOOSING THE RIGHT MARKETING PARTNER

Not every franchise has the resources to maximize marketing dollars. That includes corporate and individual franchisees. So what can be done? The right agency partner can help.

Agencies are marketing partners. A good agency shares the same goals as the franchise: increase, improve and attract franchisees and satisfy the needs and meet the expectations of target consumers—all while optimizing the return on marketing dollars.

Reputable agencies know they’re just as accountable for the marketing dollars as the client-contact is to their principals. But choosing the right agency isn’t easy.

Quantifiable data alone won’t lend much impact to the decision. Choosing an agency requires you to step outside quantifiable measurements (at least for a moment) and to use intuition. Advertising Age instructs businesses not to “hire an agency,” but rather to “hire a culture.” More than that, it’s about talent and experience. An agency’s culture, talent base and its vertical experience are all critical components to developing a meaningful partnership.

That isn’t to say there’s no quantifiable method for choosing an agency. Advertising trade associations The Association of National Advertisers’ (ANA) and the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4A’s) collaborated on a set of guidelines for agency searches. They also developed a timeline for the process:

- identify a long list of agencies (1 week)
- send the agencies requests for information (2-3 weeks)
- develop a short list and send the short list agencies a request for proposal (4-5 weeks)
- develop and review the finalists; select an agency (6 weeks)
The ideal timeframe for an agency search takes approximately 3 months. It’s a significant undertaking, but it’s also a strategic investment—a bad choice may, at best, waste marketing dollars and time, or could, at worst, undermine the business itself.

When conducting an agency search, spend time internally to develop the selection team. Set the proper expectations early and spend the first week taking a hard look at the initial long list. Keep the initial long list relatively short and focused; use the entire process to collect knowledge about the agencies—not simply data.

At the forefront of any decision, ask yourself: will the agency and the franchise “mesh”? Does the agency share similar values and missions as the franchise? Successful partnerships take commitment, trust and communication—if an agency under consideration falters with any of those three key elements, walk away.

There’s one more thing to consider—does the agency know the franchise business model? Agencies that specialize in helping franchises will be in a much better position to help out quickly and more cost-effectively.

**ALLOCATING MARKETING DOLLARS**

Just as important as finding the right marketing partner is determining how to allocate your marketing dollars. This is sometimes trickier than it sounds, especially with the increasing importance of digital marketing.

Several misconceptions can have an effect on properly planning a marketing budget. One common myth about digital advertising is that it’s cheaper than traditional media. Individual units of digital media may be cheaper than traditional media—video production for a digital property, for example, is much cheaper than the same would be for a television commercial (which would require production costs in addition to costs associated with a particular time slot and length)—but in general, digital advertising requires more time and effort as well as maintenance, specialized knowledge and expertise.

According to the 4A’s, digital marketing requires “significantly more human capital...to service the proliferation of digital channels...relative to the dollars of media spending associated with the output.” Despite the greater cost, digital
marketing promises much greater returns than traditional advertising. “The promise of digital is that the additional cost of targeted marketing efforts can deliver greater value and more meaningful engagement with consumers.”

It’s important for marketers to set aside enough budget to capitalize on the digital opportunities.

Technology research company Gartner, Inc. estimates that the average business spent 12% of company revenue on marketing activities last year. On average, almost a quarter of that marketing budget was allocated to digital marketing services—and that percentage is only expected to grow as 65% of marketers surveyes said they had plans to increase their spend in this category.

Gartner’s estimates provide a skeleton for allocating marketing dollars and determining a marketing budget using the following formula:

\[
\text{Company Revenue (Gross Profit)} \times 12\% = \text{Marketing Budget}
\]

Keep in mind that 12% is an average budget and is used here simply as a benchmark. Once the overall marketing budget is set, the business can allocate the marketing dollars for certain expenditures. It’s a good practice to allocate dollars between traditional marketing efforts and digital efforts within the overall marketing budget. Ad Age predicts that by the year 2019 digital advertising will represent 36% of all ad spending. The following formulas can be used to determine your marketing budget for traditional services vs. digital services:

\[
\text{Marketing Budget} \times 25-36\% = \text{Digital Marketing Spend}
\]

\[
\text{Marketing Budget} \times 64-75\% = \text{Traditional Media Spend}
\]

Note that in an increasingly integrated marketing field, some marketing dollars earmarked for traditional advertising may overlap with the digital spend. The above formulas provide a base amount, but consideration of additional factors will cause the numbers to fluctuate. According to a recent article in Forbes, companies should consider the following factors:

- internal objectives—goals the business hopes to make either on a quarterly,
bi-quarterly or annual basis

> industry reports and the state of the market, in general—world events, the ebb and flow of the market in general and the overall direction of a particular industry must be taken into consideration when setting any budget

> past results—while not wholly indicative of future performance, past results can provide helpful guidelines for justifying increases or decreases in the budget

LEVERAGING A PARTNER WITH EXPERIENCE

Building durable, successful franchises is not easy. If you find yourself in the weeds, know that brand marketing can help.

Because we specialize in marketing for franchises and dealer networks, we know how to drive local traffic and revenue, lower cost per lead and increase unit sales. Whether managing a national brand awareness campaign or developing optimized, local content for franchisees, we understand that brand consistency is more than just important—it’s one of your greatest assets.

Not only that, we have a record for success in the franchise industry, particularly with service-based franchises. We’re ready to help in any number of the following areas:

Get in touch with us. Our brand architects (web designers, web developers and digital marketing professionals) are ready to blueprint, build or help restructure

your franchise business.
ABOUT ONEUPWEB

We come from several walks of life. Near and far. Far and wide. Our aim with every project is to set the bar higher. From humble beginnings to a measured confidence, over the years, we’ve been fortunate to bring home several awards for our work including Addys, Tellys, W3s and more.

These awards aren’t the reason why we’re in this business, but we admit—they’re nice honors, and they’re even better when we bring them home for our clients. Because let’s face it: without you—the collective you, businesses, brands and organizations—there’s no need for us.

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