5 Things That Impact Your Branding and What You Can Do About It

ZIMMER RADIO & MARKETING GROUP
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Branding is a term that's talked about a lot in marketing, but it's more than just a buzz word. It also refers to a lot more than just ensuring your logo is stamped on all your products. Branding is what defines your company in the mind of customers. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos has notably said, "Your brand is what other people say about you when you're not in the room." Kick Point partner Dana DiTomaso was perhaps more poignant when she said, "Your brand is your promise."

In this white paper, we'll touch on the importance of branding as well as the impact that bad branding can have on your business. Most importantly, we'll cover five separate areas that impact your branding and provide a collection of actionable best practices to help you improve your business efforts.

The Importance of Your Brand

There's a lot of ways for a business to express its brand, but when it comes down to it, branding encompasses everything your business is and influences how customers think about your company and what you can provide for them. It influences brand recognition by defining your voice and visual identity, and what's more, it helps your company stand out from its competitors. It establishes your company's authenticity and builds trust, engendering a sense of value and loyalty that can attract new customers. Here are a few more things to consider:

- 91% of consumers state they're more likely to buy from an authentic brand than a dishonest one.
- 77% of consumers make purchases based on a brand name.
- 82% of investors believe brand strength and name recognition are critical to guiding their investment decisions.
- 45% of a brand's image is attributed to what the company says and how it says it.

❯ 64% of people cite shared values as the reason they have a relationship with a brand.

❯ 90% of all consumers expect their brand experience to be consistent across platforms and devices.

❯ 60% of Millennials specifically expect a consistent experience of a brand across channels.

Branding is what influences each of these statistics, and that's true of any size business, whether you're a startup, a small or medium business, or a larger business or corporation. No business is too small to put an emphasis on branding, especially in a digital age. Quite simply, your customer base may be local, but that customer base may be using the internet to consider solutions from across the nation or around the world. Branding is what allows you to compete for customer attention.

Bad Branding Could Bring Bad Results

Bad branding is bad for your business, and it can include much more than just a weak logo design or a poor choice in colors. It can have a pretty devastating impact as well; more than half of people (54%) don't trust brands. This stems from broken promises, bad experiences, and brand dishonesty. So what does bad branding look like?

› Trying to be everything to everyone, and in eliminating your unique strengths, you become nothing to no one.

› Inconsistent messages and voicing, which confuses existing and potential customers and makes your company a frustration rather than a benefit.

› Inconsistent presence which makes you forgettable: it takes between five and seven times encountering a brand's logo for a customer to remember it.

› Inconsistent design, which can both confuse customers and make your brand forgettable: something as simple as color can improve brand recognition by 80%, so failure to utilize it is extremely damaging.

› A breakdown in customer service, which has a major impact on brand perception: brands in the US lose about $41 billion annually due to poor customer service.

› Little or no reputation management to correct poor service, which generates and strengthens bad word of mouth: there are 2.1 million negative mentions about brands in the US on social media daily.

› Failure to develop relevant and meaningful content, which turns away potential customers early in the path to purchase: 63% of consumers state that they've engaged with disappointing brand content, and 23% of those said they won't engage the brand again after that.

5 THINGS THAT IMPACT YOUR BRANDING AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Fortunately, improving the branding of your company doesn't have to be a difficult process. In this section, we'll focus on five basic areas that have some of the biggest impacts: your logo, style guide, website, social media, and marketing. You'll find a breakdown of why each element matters to your branding along with tactical tips to keep each on point.

1. Your Logo

Many businesses don't understand the importance of a logo. Either they don't have one, they have one that's poorly made (e.g., not hi-res), or they have one that's incredibly old. The truth is, a brand's logo is the easiest way to evoke a memory or emotion about that brand. Consider Starbucks for a moment; can you imagine if they'd never updated the logo from the one they used in 1987, or 1992? Compared to the clean, modern design of the logo Starbucks uses now, the others look awfully outdated.
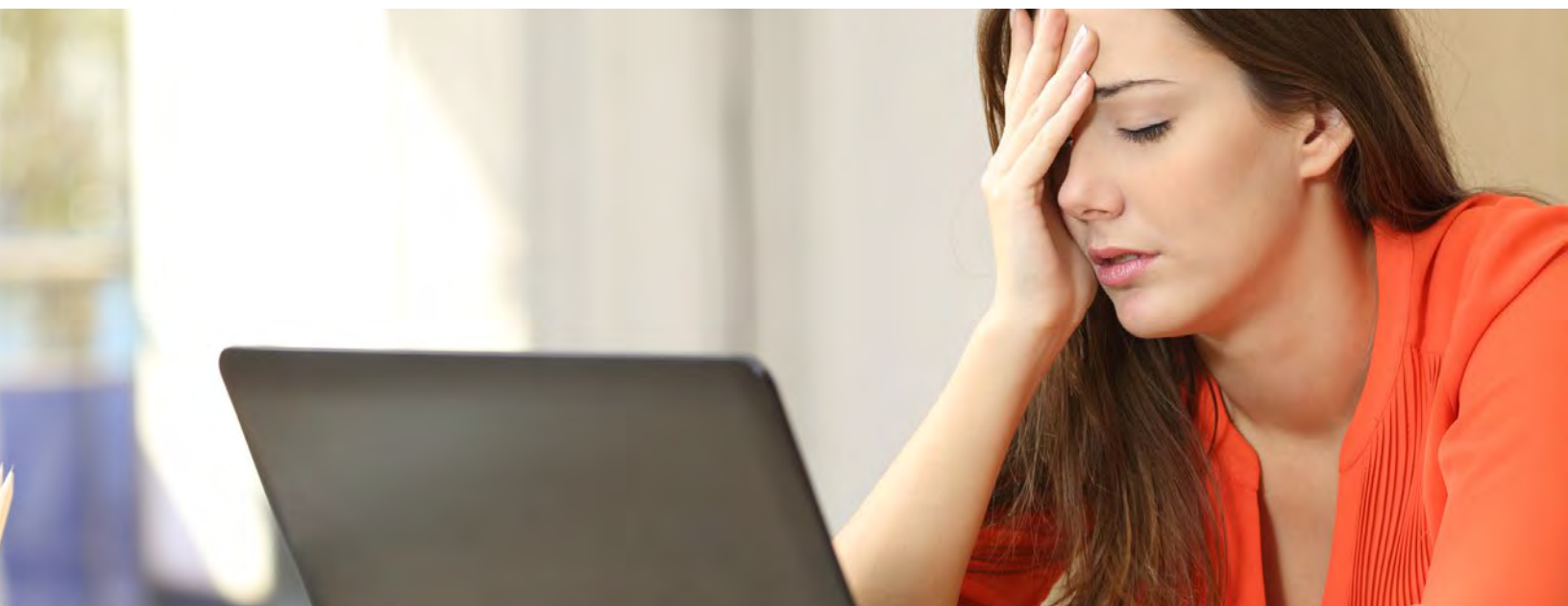
Strictly speaking, your logo is a graphic that often includes the company name along with a trademarked symbol in specific colors. It should be easy to recognize and allow the person to automatically identify it as belonging to your company. A logo should also automatically evoke memories and emotions associated with your company. As you design or redesign a logo, you should always be asking, "what will people associate with this logo?"

TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

- **Keep it simple** — Your logo is going to be used in many mediums and formats, and you want to ensure that it's both easy to replicate and recognizable, whether it's on a hat, the side of a cup, a flier, a billboard, a social media avatar, the corner of a video, or in a display ad.

- **Be unique** — One of the most important aspects of your logo is that it should be as unique as possible. It should point to your brand, and your brand alone.

- **Avoid cliches** — Standing out as unique can be difficult in graphic design, especially if you aren't hiring a professional to help. However, you need to peruse the logos of brands in your industry so you can do your best to avoid the elements that are clearly overused.

- **Consider the psychology of color** — We already touched on the impact that color can have on how memorable your branding is, but it can also influence how customers perceive your brand based on your logo. For instance, red is considered to be a stimulating color, and it's often used by restaurants to stimulate appetite, or by brands who want to increase the sense of urgency, especially among impulse shoppers.

- **Use it to tell a story** — That's right, in the few seconds it takes for a person to get a first impression about your brand based on the logo, you can tell a story with a single icon. The Library Lovers Art Auction logo is a fantastic example: It combined books as the bristles of a paintbrush to capture the underlying concept, and the long narrow shape of the uneven books inspired a sense of motion.

2. Your Style Guide

Most businesses utilize reference and training materials to ensure that their internal processes are consistent as time goes on, such as scripts for sales calls or instructions for utilizing certain equipment. The style guide is the same thing for your branding, and it should lay down how everything beyond your logo should be handled, like the colors and fonts that should be utilized in brand collateral. Essentially, it's the visual DNA for your branding, and it can even include tone, grammar, and which words should or should not be used. This ensures that you present a consistent visual to your customers no matter which device, service, or medium they encounter you on.

TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

❯ **Decide on logo size and placement** — If you provide variations on your logo, they should each be included in the style guide with a notation on how or when they should be used. More importantly, the guide should define how it appears in materials, especially if your logo does not always include the company name. Is it larger than the text and hovering over it? On company documents and releases, should the logo appear on the top left or the bottom right?

- **Choose a color palette** — Choose a complementary color palette that best represents your brand and stick to it. Using random colors may sound fun or quirky, but it can lead to confusion. Defining the colors your brand will use in your style guide ensures that designers will always use the right ones. Is there one core color, or several? Are they meant to be used in the foreground and for text, or as a backdrop?

- **Determine font details** — Similarly, you want to choose a particular font or fonts and stick to them. This includes the typeface itself, the sizes, and when they should be used. Does call-out text use a particular font, while text in the body of a web page or pamphlet use another? Do you need to use a different font on video to express the right tone than you do on your direct mail fliers?

- **Set your brand voice** — Whether a customer is reading your social media page or a brochure about your services, you want to sound like the same company everywhere that customer encounters you. Should communications be extremely formal, or do you want a hip, edgy tone? Are there any differences in the way you need to address your target audience?

- **Set your brand story** — Your brand story is meant to inspire an emotional reaction, to define what people will believe about your company, and to humanize your company's presence and actions. How should your company talk about itself? What elements are most moving?

- **Decide on brand images** — You can use more than just your logo to express information about your brand. A brand image is the visual parallel of your brand story, and may include images of your physical locations or of your staff. These aren't necessarily all pre-defined, but the guide should define how to choose these images. How should these look to best express your brand story?

- **Always keep your style guide updated** — The first style guide you develop is not set in stone as the unchangeable, permanent format for your communications. As your business evolves, so does the way you need to

present yourself to your audience. Just as your logo will need to be updated from time to time, your style guide will need to be updated to ensure your business doesn't look outdated in the way it communicates.

3. Your Website

A company's website is a major piece of its digital presence, and more than other digital formats, it's the unique face of your company in a digital marketplace. Every business ought to have a website, not just to improve its discoverability, but to provide a major touchpoint that can solidify branding. In many cases, it's going to be the basis of a customer's first impression of your company. After all, when someone hears about your business from a friend, a radio ad, or any other advertising, one of the first things they'll want to do is look up your business online. In fact, if they hear your business on a radio ad while they are at work, they might simply do a search from their phone or computer as they are listening. People are also six times more likely to go to your website if they hear your ad on the radio, and nearly 80% will head to your site or Facebook page within 24 hours.

That means your website needs to be easy to find and even easier to navigate. It must follow the guidelines set up in your style guide to establish the right impression and lay the groundwork for every other time they run into your brand. If the colors, tone, or feel of your site are different than what they experienced in the ads that led them there, they're going to be confused and put off, or worse, they may start to distrust your brand. If you make a poor impression, they're unlikely to return, and it could impact the way they perceive other brand communications.

TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

- **Use the same colors and fonts laid out in your style guide** — Consistency is key, and we cannot emphasize this enough. The design, fonts, and colors should match what you lay out in your style guide. That includes the font and colors of body text, hyperlinked text, and headers, as well as background colors and other design elements.

- **Make sure it's easy to read** — The fonts and colors you've chosen for your site need to be easy to understand on screen. That means the fonts need to be a certain style (often a sans-serif font) and colors need to provide high contrast. You don't want to cause eye strain when customers are trying to read your web pages.

- **Ensure your logo is on your site** — The logo is a key piece of branding and one of the most recognizable elements; of course it should be on your site. However, you also need to be sure that its presentation is consistent with what's laid out in your style guide for the rest of your branding. Furthermore, it needs to be a clear image no matter what size it is, where it appears on your site, or what device a customer is using to access your site. That means it probably needs to have a high resolution.

- **Use photos that align with your brand image** — Follow the guidelines set out in the style guide for choosing the best images to represent your brand. Even when you aren't telling a narrative, the images used on your site are still telling your brand story, and need to be consistent.

- ❯ **Don't clutter your site** — Clean and simple use of space is going to be the easiest to navigate and consume. Avoid unnecessary verbiage, ads, and images that can cause confusion.

- ❯ **Remember that your website is an investment** — Don't cut corners when developing your site, as it will cost you in the long run. (This is especially true for businesses that do much of their business online with customers that will never see the business storefront or employees; the website is the only impression of your brand they get!)

4. Your Social Media Accounts

Branding is all about the perception that customers have of your business, and social media is a core way of expressing your company's personality. This is achieved directly by the posts your company makes, and each Tweet, Facebook post, or Instagram photo adds to your brand message. However it's also achieved indirectly, through the conversations about your brand between customers, sometimes even on a global scale. Stories about what your business has done right (or worse, what you've done wrong) can go viral and leave a huge impression on the market as a whole.

It helps to remember that customer service is key to branding, and nearly 60% of Americans with social media accounts feel that social has made it easier to resolve issues and get answers to questions. Plus, 71% of users who have a positive social experience with a brand will share that experience and recommend the brand to others. Social does a lot to drive traffic — Pinterest alone drives 25% of retail website traffic, and 93% of its users will utilize the platform to plan or make purchases. Meanwhile, Facebook alone influenced 52% of both online and offline consumer purchases.

TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

- **Follow the style guide** — While selecting fonts and colors aren't necessarily an option, it's important to follow the style guide's notes on tone and voicing to maintain consistency. Be sure to feature your logo as the user image for regular exposure. Any added media, like images and video, need to follow the guide as well, unless it's being reshared from another influencer. When resharing content, always make sure that content aligns with your brand values.

- **Tell stories** — Your brand needs to be personable and easy for customers to connect with. They don't want to be sold to, and they don't want to connect with an abstract, cold company. Don't be afraid to be funny and make people laugh.

- **Don't constantly push your product/service** — We can't emphasize this enough: Customers don't want a sales pitch. Social media is where they go to engage with friends and family and topics of interest. While promotional content isn't out of the question, it shouldn't be the only content you're putting out.

- **Share behind-the-scenes moments** — Transparency and authenticity are major factors in brand perception. Giving customers a glimpse behind the curtain makes them feel like they can trust and have a relationship with your business.

❯ Add value through your content — When people receive valuable content from your company for free, they're more likely to trust your company and value the products and services they need to pay for. Look for pain points that you can address without hurting your bottom line, like how-to videos or posts that provide related tips and insights.

5. Your Marketing

Branding is especially important in marketing where you're directly reaching out to customers to influence their purchase decisions. This is true across mediums, whether you're running a radio campaign or a direct mail campaign. It becomes even more important when you run a cross-channel marketing campaign that utilizes a media mix. Here, your marketing creative embodies your branding through the consistent use of branding colors or other consistent factors, such as a jingle on the radio or a particular character in a TV ad. Consider Motel 6: Its instrumental jingle and catch phrase ("We'll leave the light on for you.") are present in every commercial from its award winning campaign featuring Tom Bodette.

TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

❯ **Run awareness campaigns** — Awareness campaigns are designed to do one thing: branding. You need to run consistent, ongoing awareness campaigns to build up your brand in the minds of consumers. This is how you position your company as a thought leader and associate your business with causes that customers care about.

❯ **Leverage action campaigns through your overall branding** — The best action campaigns are those that run when the business has already established itself through strong branding. Listeners are already familiar with your company, building trust and legitimacy, and that plays a direct role in which brands they choose to make their purchases with.

❯ **Review and compare marketing efforts** — Be sure you're applying your style guide to all of your marketing pieces, and use the trending impact of those campaigns to understand whether your branding needs to be updated.

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Branding is a critical part of your business and marketing strategy that needs to be addressed thoughtfully in order to ensure your company is memorable and stands out from the competition. This white paper covered five separate areas in which branding is a key influence as well as best practices to help you fully develop each area and maximize your branding efforts.

About Zimmer Radio and Marketing Group

Zimmer Radio is a family-owned company that's in the business of helping your business to grow. We provide a complete set of marketing services to businesses in the mid-Missouri area, from helping you to develop your branding through logo and website design to developing marketing creative for print, social media, and radio. We feature nine different radio stations that reach more than 275,000 listeners. At Zimmer Radio, we believe that the product is sacred and the customer is king, and we put an emphasis on understanding your business goals to develop a marketing mix that will help achieve those goals.

If you're interested to see how we can help your business with branding and other marketing strategies, contact us today by calling (573) 875-1099 or by filling out the form on our contact page.

Contact Zimmer Radio & Marketing Group for help developing your marketing plan

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