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2014 BUYERS GUIDE

Drive your brand



by Rich Poryaki

Growing up horseback riding in western Canada, I learned about brands at an early age. Ranchers need a brand to differentiate one cow from another. The concept of branding is as simple as that. Standing out from the rest of the cattle for the right reasons.

Every business has a brand. Some are better than others. For the most part, your brand identity – which is how your customers view your company – is made up by your reputation. If you tank the price, pay late and have a lot of defects, your brand is cheap and marketing is not going to help. If you compete based on product selection, service or quality, and you can “walk the walk,” then you are half way to success and all your brand needs to do is communicate an honest message about you. Image is everything, but in this market it has to agree with reality.

Cell phone companies, airlines, credit cards, TV cable providers and banks are the masters of false branding. They are commoditized services that treat consumers like dirt and then spend millions of dollars every year on feel-good advertising campaigns and event sponsorships trying to offset the stank that is left on consumers each time we have to deal with them. And yet, we keep lining up to take the abuse. The reality is that fenestration is not the telecommunications business and no one has even close to a monopoly so we can't afford to leave stank on our customers when they deal with us. This is real branding. Say what you do and do what you say.

All of our great efforts to build an effective corporate culture and get better at what we do are useless if we don't communicate them to the market. Creating a logo or slogan is far less time, expense and effort than changing our processes, but can have a much larger impact on the amount of business actually coming into the shop. Logos and slogans are effective tools that marketers can use to influence brand identity and increase awareness through visual recognition. A well-designed logo ties everything together into a larger strategic message. Take Nike. Nike hasn't manufactured

shoes for years. They contract manufacturing out and work on apparel design and branding. I look at Nike and see overpriced apparel made in sweatshops because I am not Nike's target market. North American teenagers see it otherwise, because Nike has crafted its brand to appeal to the group that is going to buy new shoes every year. Don't even get me started about designer purses. It's all about brand perception. You cannot and should not attempt to please all of the people, all of the time.

Brainstorm your brand names. Research the competition and make sure no one is already using any of your favourites. Visit a domain registrar like GoDaddy and confirm website domain availability. Interview three graphic designers, discuss the process and find out who owns the final artwork. Like photographers, some designers legally retain ownership of the logo and are simply licensing the logo to the client. Don't get caught in that trap.

Keep the number of colours for your logo in mind if you want to print on promotional items or apparel. Usually, the more colours a logo has, the more it is to embroider or screen print for golf balls, hats, coffee mugs etc. When the final version is approved, it is always a good idea to create a grayscale version for black-and-white printing and faxing.

Keep it simple. Don't get caught up in paralysis by analysis. Developing a brand can take six weeks, six months or longer. The average window and door company shouldn't take more than a few months to develop a brand and begin executing a promotional strategy. Sure, there are dozens of long-term decisions that need to be made quickly, but the alternative is to spin your wheels and go nowhere.

Do your due diligence and get feedback from outsiders, but within reason. Marketing has to be a collaboration, but business is not a democracy. Killing time waiting for consensus is a big mistake. Creating an average logo or brand name is far less risk than not doing anything at all.