



2.08 Market Research & Branding

Advertising Your Brand

"Changing Lives One Workplace at a Time"

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Your Brand = Perceptions

Branding your products and your business has little to do with what you think and everything to do with the perceptions of what others think about your business. A brand is in the eyes of the beholder. It is your image, reputation, and perception, and unfortunately, something you can influence but not control.

The perception of your Brand influences everything. If your customer perceives you as the best, or your product as the most competitive – even though it may not be true – their decisions are based on those perceptions. Your Brand is the sum of those perceptions and is critical because the brand perceptions your target markets have before coming in contact with your business bias everything that follows, for better or worse. So if your Brand is favorable, customers tend to see everything about your business and your products in a favorable light. Of course, they are everyone inside and outside your business, but you should focus more on the people in your target market.

Your Teams Interpretation of Brand Value

And your customers are not the only ones that should be considered when building your Brand. Your team must believe in your Brand's value as they influence every purchase decision step.



A Powerful Presence is Key to A Powerful Physical

This one may be difficult for some companies that are either small or only provide a service. Their office may be located in a more prominent building shared by other companies, and they may not even be big enough to have a sign on the building or the building's marquee. So how do they go about having a noticeable physical presence? Every industry has its conventions or public events that allow for physical exposure. Find out what is available for your industry and get a booth there, have the best of your employees attend to represent your company and reach the public. If there truly is nothing, start one of your own. Another avenue would be to sponsor a local event. You know where your market will be and what interests they have. Sponsorship will get your name out and allow you to provide a physical presence. Once again, if there isn't anything available, don't let that stop you from putting one on yourself. What shared value do you have with your market? Use that as a resource to find a common cause you can create an event.

If you have a physical location where your clients can visit, make sure it is convenient and goes beyond their expectations. They should get the most out of their experience with your company's staff and the general environment when they walk in. Having a powerful physical presence is more than just being there. Look at your mission statement; your physical presence in the industry should embody that. If you want your customers to relate to you, find a way to connect with them.

Intellectual Appeal

Many companies attempt to launch themselves into the market based purely on emotional appeal or connections with their clients. However, much like the different advertising avenues available, you don't want to put all your eggs in one basket. Don't discount the value of connecting with your market on an intellectual front. With information readily available, we can quickly become experts in many subjects. Don't assume that this newfound digital age has turned everyone's brain to mush. Your market wants their intellect to be noted and respected. To connect with your market on an intellectual level, consider the following questions about your company.

- How are you different from your competitors?
- How do you want your customers to view you?
- How are the voice and opinions of your company unique?

By identifying these specific traits of your company, you can create an underlying theme or message that resonates across the board in every piece of communication or advertisement you put out as a company. Your medium for connecting and getting your message out could be through a company blog, e-newsletter, or even posts on social media. Put the spotlight on shared values with your audience and ensure that all of your messages have the same underlying tone to stay cohesive. Don't use jargon, but don't dumb down the message too much. Respect the intelligence of your audience, and they'll respect you as a company.

Social Media is your friend.

Build a valuable presence in social media. As I mentioned, if you want to be innovative and take risks, don't hesitate to try out one of the latest platforms, but don't neglect the established ones. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tumblr, and Instagram are all great platforms to advertise and give your Brand a voice. You don't have to have an account with each forum. Choose what fits your market the best. Also, don't fall into the trap of putting one post out on every single platform simultaneously—all the time. Vary your content between platforms. Your company may

have big news in regard to what you provide, or you may want to advertise the latest post on your company's blog. Those are the types of posts that need to go out across the board. However, don't hesitate to invest in a few smaller posts just for a specific platform. For instance, not all Twitter and Pinterest users are created equal. Understand the difference between the two clientele and be straightforward with them. If they do happen to follow you on both platforms, they will see your attention to detail and be impressed.

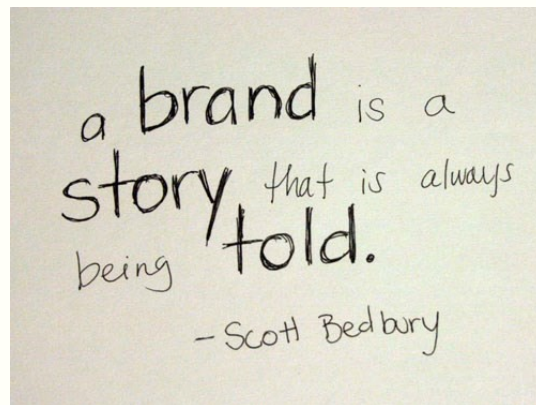
No one likes spam.

Many companies can go overboard in their exuberance to get their name out there. Be mindful of how often you post and the contents of your posts on social media. Also, be aware of how often you send emails to clients. Is it necessary to send something out daily? If you post daily, don't always make it about your company. Promote others. Spotlight a great employee or a leader in your industry. Promote other companies that support or work with you.

Prove Your Stamina

We've all seen those flash-in-the-pan companies. They may be innovative and exciting in their own right, but for one reason or another don't last. They may come out of the gate with much fanfare, celebrity endorsements, and even big first-quarter sales but still flop in the next five years. No one wants to be that company, and no one wants to buy from them. What will you do with your warranties, your gift cards, or the maintenance of your product from a company that has gone under?

If you want to be relevant in your industry in 10- 20 years and beyond, you, have to do more than be innovative and take risks. A snazzy marketing campaign won't be enough to save you. Look at the big picture. How can your market continue to relate to you as the fabric of society changes? You need to prove to your market that you are willing to go that extra mile and continue evolving to meet their long-term needs. Addressing their concerns and building relationships based on shared values will go a long way toward this goal.



Online Advertising

Now that we've covered what it takes to set up a successful presence suitable for advertising, let's look at one of the biggest advertising venues available in today's market.

LinkedIn is an excellent resource because it is where industry professionals go to connect. However, be cautious of posting subject matter that relates too much to your company's products and services. The biggest complaint many people have about this platform is those "selling" posts. If you want to advertise on LinkedIn, go through the proper channels. Your options are Self Service Advertising, Sponsored InMail, and Premium Display Advertising.

The most common option is self-service advertising. Remember, if anything can be labeled "most common," many other companies are doing the same thing. So make sure what you are throwing out there is attention-grabbing and relevant to your product/service. With Self-service, you can create up to 15 versions of your ad. This is because you may need a different approach depending on which market segment you are trying to reach. For example, you can target your ads by job title, industry, job function, location, and LinkedIn group. Another advantage of self-service is setting a budget and timeline for the ad. The ad will run for as long as you want within the budget you set for it.

Try one of LinkedIn's premium advertising solutions if you want something a little more hard-hitting with results. One is Sponsored InMail allows your company to target professionals related to your business with specific messages. This feature is email marketing within LinkedIn, so you need to be careful that your message aligns with those professionals' values. Don't "sell" to them, "partner" with them.

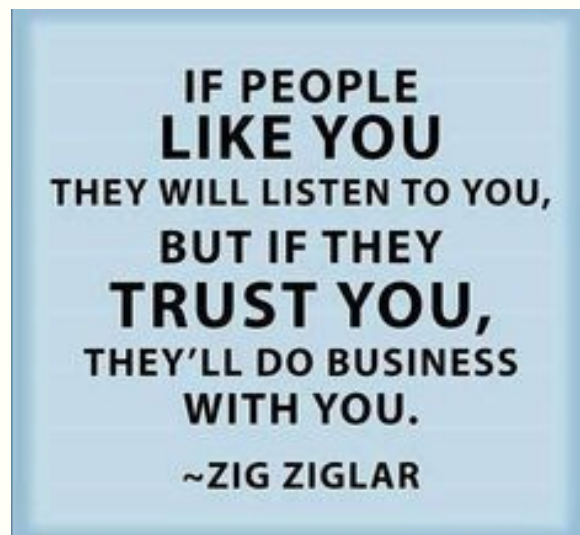
The other option is Premium Display Advertising. This advertising format allows your company to create a display ad that will reach your target audience and is excellent for building brand awareness. Finally, Twitter is another available advertising platform. With Twitter, you have two options: Promoted Accounts and Promoted Tweets.

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Promoted Accounts: This option means your company can use the resources of followers already obtained by your target market. So, if people within your market follow people or businesses that are relevant to yours, your account will be "suggested" and promoted to them. These accounts are listed in the "Whom to Follow" category. The advantage here is creating more brand awareness and focusing on people who are already interested in what they offer.

Promoted Tweets: This advertising option allows you to target audiences by keywords, interests, location, and even the type of device they are using. These tweets appear in people's timelines and can be great company exposure. If you craft these promoted tweets well, most people won't even notice the "sponsored" sign in the corner of the tweet. If it looks like something they would see from their normal followers, they will appreciate your company more and feel less like you're an intrusion in their already busy timeline.

Facebook presents another avenue for advertising and has features similar to LinkedIn. Like LinkedIn, Facebook allows you to run several different ad versions based on the target you are aiming for. Also, like LinkedIn, it will enable you to budget your ad and control how long it runs. The length of time you set for it will dictate how that budget is used, so understanding the schematics of how the system works is essential. Facebook is also great at giving you feedback with data on how well your ad did. This is extremely important to pay attention to because you'll want to see what effects your tweaks may have.



Search Engine Marketing

SEM marketing is what you see at the top of your search results whenever you search for something. The benefit of this prevalent advertising option is that you are targeting a specific market. Therefore, the people searching for a product or service related to what you have are already looking specifically for you. If your website has the right number of businesses and the best SEO, you will easily pull up first in the search engines. However, if you are new to the industry or haven't developed your site enough to pull that rank (and believe me, it's a very delicate process), then SEM marketing may be your best option. Like many other advertising options, SEM allows you to target your market based on keywords, topics, specific demographic information, location, device, and interests.

If you want to get your website to the top of the search list through SEO, you will need to optimize your site. The best avenue for this will be adding links that will attract searches, improving your URL and taglines, and using keywords in your website content. Beware, however, of companies or organizations that offer to (for a fee) get you to the top of the search without playing by the SEO rules. They may be able to deliver the quick results they claim, but they can also get you banned by search engines. SEO isn't easy, and why many companies pay for SEM because the search engines monitor the process closely. Unfortunately, you won't be able to easily loophole your way around the rules, and if you get caught, you could damage your online reputation for a significant amount of time.

Costs

Of course, when it comes to advertising, you have to budget accordingly, and it can be overwhelming because even on a proven platform, you may not always be sure what will work and what won't. So, here are some costs to consider when it comes to the online ads just discussed.

If you are concerned about budget and want to keep an eye on expenses, the most common method is the CPC or cost-per-click method. Like many of the ad options we've mentioned on the various platforms, this allows you to control your budget and readjust your approach if something isn't working. CPC means that you only pay when money when your ad is clicked on.

CPM, or cost per mile, is a cost program that charges for every thousand times the ad is shown. If you are concerned about the cost of CPM, some platforms will allow a fixed cost that allows you to set a budget for how long it runs or is shown.