

Ten Common Branding Mistakes To Avoid

When it comes to small businesses, getting things done seems to take precedent over getting things finished. With only so many hours in the day, it can seem like fighting a losing battle at times, especially if you're bootstrapping it.

As a result, the focus on branding often takes a backseat to other priorities. It's something most owners view as a 'nice-to-have' rather than a 'need-to-have.' Yet such a perspective hinders the truly successful business owner, who seeks to capitalize on every facet of the company's operations.

Now, more than ever, perception breeds reception. Branding begets greater customer equity, but only if it's done the right way. Here's what to look out for:

1. There's no definable brand. The first big mistake of marketing is not having a brand at all. A brand can be defined as the visual elements (logo, company name, slogan or tagline, and color palette) used to convey your company's identity. It evokes a particular emotion, assures credibility, and serves as the first impression to your clientele. You know how important a first impression can be in life; you can't afford to botch this!

2. You're using clipart. If your branding is centered around a graphic made in Windows 95 or another software program that's 3+ years old, this is your wake-up call. You as a company are conveying a lack of technological prowess – a perception that can easily spill over and taint your "expert" credibility. Moreover, your company will never be able to fully own your brand as intellectual property, which will close the door on future marketing opportunities in the future.

3. You're relying on 'nephew art.' In the industry, owners will often substitute the efforts of a seasoned professional designer for the low-cost help of a relative or close friend who has some Photoshop experience. There are crucial considerations during the development process that solely come from dedicated experience in this field. Your nephew is not likely to know the majority of them.

4. Uses names or initials. The rules for naming your boat don't apply to naming your company. You want prominence, presence, and to stick in the minds of your most wanted consumers. Don't waste the opportunity to create a brand name that can resonate with your offerings and target market.

5. Uses photos. Brands that incorporate photos into their logo design are incredibly hard, if not impossible to integrate across your media mix. The standards for professional appearance do not include low-resolution or live-action photography of any kind. Simply look at the biggest brands in the world (Apple, Nike, McDonald's, etc.) for true proof. Spare yourself the headache of trying to get a photo-based logo onto a uniform or website. Opt for a design without photos.

6. Doesn't jive with the industry. Part of truly owning your presence means being appropriate for both the industry, message, and emotion you're trying to conjure. A mortician dressed in a clown suit isn't going to send the right message, despite it being a "creative" approach to business. It's important to be creative, but also to do so within the limits of your industry. You want to eliminate second-guessing with your branding, not encourage it.

7. Not integrated across channels. If you have a brochure and a website with one type of logo design, and a vehicle wrap with another, your company will be missing out on the big power of association. Make sure your true brand identity is present in every aspect of your media mix.

8. Not applicable to all media. Your brand might look spectacular on paper. But the website might be a whole different story. However, if a consumer only sees one or the other, he or she will have two very different perceptions about your company. You need to send the right message at every turn, and that means a strong brand identity that translates smoothly across every touchpoint.

9. Inconsistent messaging. Similar to the previous two mistakes, if your brand's voice isn't consistent across every channel than it may put a fork in your credibility. This is like the politician who looks great during speeches, but then posts off-color remarks on social media. It's inconsistent with the message he or she is trying to convey. Don't let that happen to you.

10. Doesn't differentiate. The final mistake that many owners make is lacking the creative, differentiating aspect in their branding. You want to stand out from the rest, not use the same boilerplate logo and website. That puts you on an even keel with the competition, not ahead of the curve. For the biggest impact and ROI, you need an imaginative, yet appropriate approach.