



Venture Portland Case Study - Branding Guide for Business District Associations November 2011

I. Intro

This document provides some general guidelines to help you think about how to develop a brand for your business. It is often useful to work with a Brand Strategist or a branding/advertising agency to help in this process. A good partner will provide recommendations from the perspective of an objective third party, which is very valuable in creating a brand. However, you can use these exercises to get started and begin understanding the heart of your business and exploring your brand possibilities.

II. Brand: What Is It, And Why Is It So Special?

*Brand is about your clients and what they need, not about you.
It's the relationship between your products and services, and your clients' experience of you.*

It goes beyond commerce. It goes beyond products.

Brand taps into an emotional connection with your target audience. This mysterious connection surpasses logic, and creates a bond of loyalty...that feeling that makes you drive out of your way to go to your favorite coffee shop even though it costs two times more. You make the effort because it feels good to go there: it meets a *feeling* need.

It takes effort and focus to create a great brand. Instead of fading away in the late 1990s as many predicted, Apple decided to re-create itself to stand for **imagination, design and innovation**. From then on, Apple's intense focus on brand was executed in everything they produced: packaging, advertising, product design, stores, and customer service. The result is the love affair that Apple owners have with the brand, which only continues to grow.

Though you may have a small business far from the size of an Apple or a Pepsi, you will also benefit from understanding your customers and connecting with their hopes, dreams and aspirations. Find the heart of what you do well that connects with your customers. Do you make them feel safe or stable because you deliver dry cleaning on time, which helps them feel sane during a frenzied day of work? Do you bring a splash of transcendent beauty with your floral business? Look for the mystery behind the obvious in what you do.

"Most businesses are obsessed with downplaying Mystery. They are determined to frame the world so it fits their own systems and processes. Mystery opens up emotion. Mystery adds to the complexity of relationships and experiences. It lies in the stories, metaphors, and iconic



characters that give a relationship its texture. Mystery is a key part of creating Loyalty Beyond Reason.” *Lovemarks*, Kevin Roberts, p. 83, 85.

III. What Is My Brand? How Do I Discover it?

It is tempting to look at the competitive landscape and want to be everything to everyone. But deep down, we know that is not possible. We love brands because they leave a clear impression and we understand exactly what they provide, both in terms of a feeling and a specific service or product.

Determining what you really do best requires honesty, and sometimes a bit of research. Here are some steps that will get you started.

a. Clarify your position.

Define what single thing your company stands for to your customers. Choose one key thing to focus your position. Good positioning often forces hard choices, so you may need to bring in a third party, such as an ad agency or marketing consultant to help you get clear about what you stand for.

An example of the structure of a positioning statement would be, “We are the only X that solves Y problem in Z unique way.” X is the category of the company, product or service or other offering you’ve chosen to own. Y is the unmet need of your target audience. Z is the differentiation, advantage, or key positive distinction you have over your competition.

In the case of Venture Portland, competition wasn’t as much of an issue as lack of awareness. In this case, the positioning statement served to clarify the organization’s purpose in a compelling way:

Venture Portland is all about....building Portland’s vitality through vibrant neighborhood business districts.

Positioning is something you use to focus your business internally. It determines your brand, business and marketing/communications strategy.

Positioning Exercises used in Venture Portland Branding:

Business District Association Survey

This survey included several basic questions about what APNBA does for members, and how it is most effective.

For your business, this might mean asking why your customers choose you, what they like most about what you provide. You might also ask prospects what would cause them to choose you. People that choose competitors are also valuable: why don’t they choose you and what would make them change their mind?



R.I.P. Headstone

If your business were to expire, how would it be remembered? What was the cause of death? What legacy did it leave behind?

This exercise will give you more feedback about what stands out about your business in your customer's mind. It could also give you clues as to what you could do better, allowing you to address customer needs as part of your refreshed brand.

Example from APNBA:

Kind, but not great!
Cause of death: no recognition.
Small organization that tried.

As you can see, this small haiku-like bit of information speaks volumes about how one person sees the old organization.

b. Tell Your Story: Your Values

Remember, your brand ultimately lives and thrives on **story**, not just strategy. So next, you need to get in touch with your values.

Is there something in the story of your business that reflects your values? Is it a commitment to local products? Is it that you started a bread company after getting out of prison and believe in quality and second chances? Find out what you stand for.

Exercises used in Venture Portland Branding:

Adjective Checklist

From a list of adjectives, have members, customers and/or stakeholders select three that best describe your business. Try not to be literal; choose adjectives that describe the personality of the sum total of your business: what you do and who you are.

Brand Meaning Exercise

Show several logos of major brands and what they represent. Examples include Volvo=Safety, or Harley-Davidson=Rebellion. Ask members, customers and/or stakeholders what one word describes what you offer.

IV. Bring It To Life

Once you have collected your research, you'll begin to see a picture of your brand take shape. Again, it is helpful to have a consultant or agency help you see beyond your current vision to the future possibilities, and to bring the brand to life creatively.



APNBA wanted to move from an antiquated, not-so-visible version of itself to a relevant, dynamic, progressive brand. This meant choosing a name and developing a look and feel that reflected those values. Ask yourself what your business needs to both stay true to itself and become relevant. Is it a logo change, or a refresh of your color palette? Is it a new business model that better reflects your values?

Remember, just like Apple....implement the brand in all that you do. That means your customer service, the people you hire, the way your website looks, the copy in your brochure, the design of your store, the quality of what you deliver. This is what creates a strong impression, and builds brand equity.

V. Measure your Efforts And Keep It Alive

After 6 months to a year, survey your members, customers and/or stakeholders again with the same questions in step 2. If you wanted to shift your brand, check to see that people are picking up on the change. Notice whether customers comment on small changes you've made, and count those as part of your research. Did you make some part of a dreary process a bit more enjoyable for your customers? Did you spruce up the interior of your restaurant, or hire people that exemplify enthusiastic service? Is that new signage or logo attracting the attention of new customers?

Continue to refine and improve aspects of your brand as you learn what works and what resonates with customers. Keep in mind that you earn loyalty by showing customers you are listening and genuinely care about where they are coming from, not just promoting your products or services to them. Perhaps you begin a small social media campaign to show greater receptivity online to the public. Or maybe you revamp that website that has been a low priority and no longer fits with your new image. Whatever it is, keep your brand fresh and alive by nurturing it and cultivating your relationships.

Further resources

Books

BrandSimple: How the Best Brands Keep it Simple and Succeed. Alan P. Adamson.

Roberts, Kevin. *Lovemarks.*

Neumeier, Marty. *Zag, The Number One Strategy of High-Performance Brands.*

Websites

ibrandstudio.com/inspiration/
<http://www.brandingstrategyinsider.com>