

# SMALL Business Times

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## Build a great brand for your business

BY HARRY S. DENNIS III, for SBT

**B**randing? Yee-haw! A cattle issue? I don't think so. How well do you think your branding iron is working to draw attention to you rather than a competitor's brand? What is a brand and how does it work to provide an important source of business value?

My thanks this month to a couple of The Executive Committee (TEC) experts on the subject—Duane Knapp and Wisconsin's own Tryg Jacobson, neither of whom deals with cattle.

"Branding represents the intangible part of your business, a collection of intangibles—ideas, feelings and word associations that reside in the real estate of your mind," Jacobson said.

"It represents a value proposition," Knapp said. "Consumers choose one particular brand over another because of this intrinsic value."

Both of these experts are emphatic in their belief that branding translated means "trust." How do you build the perception of trust in the mind of the buyer? It's by delivering your promise every day, the same way. Interestingly, if you make a promise but can't deliver, you create an image, but not a brand. Your brand, not your image, is your reason for being.

The real trick in branding is creating differentiation. Here are some easy examples: soup (Campbell's), razor (Gillette), film (Kodak), chocolate (Hershey's), and glue (Elmer's). And the ultimate example: an employee says, "Will you 'Xerox' this for me (on a Canon copier)?"

But merely having a strong brand percep-

tion is insufficient. If the brand ceases to have importance or relevance in the mind of the customer, it ceases to be a brand, just like that.

### So how do we create a vibrant brand?

Knapp says you need:

1. A name that is unique, memorable, distinctive.
2. An icon, symbol or image that vividly displays your brand's identity.
3. A descriptive word or phrase that tells the customer where to place your brand in their mind's eye ("TEC" means chief executive officers working together).
4. A brand tagline that expresses your product's functional and emotional benefits to customers.
5. A "brand story." When you identify your brand, you also communicate its heritage and its origins, typically the business founder's values and business principles.

Jacobson states that effective brands share these attributes: recognizable, consistent, visually impactful, dependable, trustworthy, comfortable, quality, reliable and valuable.

He adds that...

### There are four "pillars" of branding:

1. **Differentiation.** To create a brand, you must set yourself apart from everyone else in the market.
2. **Relevance.** Is it perceived as appropriate, meaningful, and does it communicate your point of difference and uniqueness?
3. **Esteem.** Do customers feel good about using your brand vs. a competitor's brand? Brand esteem, others have said, is



closely tied to brand loyalty.

4. **Understanding.** Customers need to understand and believe in how your brand is differentiated from a competitor. If they are unable to do this, they will give up on your brand.

Many firms think that the simple answer to branding is to turn the problem over to a public relations firm and let them deal with the issues of brand identity and sustainability. This can be a lethal mistake. While their involvement can be, and should be, significant and beneficial, you must do the basics first, which this article has tried to address.

I agree with Knapp that the following basics — at minimum — entail the management team addressing three major brand questions, perhaps, as a part of an offsite strategic planning session:

1. **What business is our brand in?**
2. **What differentiates our products and services from our chief competitors'?**
3. **What is superior about the value we offer our customers?**

Reduce this information in writing, and then do something bold. Sit down with a focus group of customers and see if they concur. I would suggest that you retain an outside resource to moderate this meeting. Some market research firms specialize in working with customer focus groups.

I'll go one step further. Do a trial focus session with a random group of employees before you hold your customer meeting. Use input from this group to refine the approach you take with your customers.

Now, with real "perceptual" cash in your branding bank, the use of PR and advertising can be used to augment your

market penetration capabilities. I would suggest that they take your analysis and present a brand-build plan to you, before you commit funds.

Let's move off the specific area of branding and discuss other implications of this important part of your business identity.

- 1. Everybody in the business has a stake in branding. Do they know what that stake is? I'll give an example. A third-shift supervisor at a local area manufacturing firm always cleans the factory floor of all debris following each shift. Why? Customers could be visiting the plant the next day.**
- 2. A well-defined brand can actually cost less in advertising to maintain than a less well-defined brand that needs constant advertising to heighten awareness (which does not necessarily equate with brand acceptance).**
- 3. A high-profile brand adds to business goodwill, a very important issue in the event of a business sale.**
- 4. A high-profile brand makes it easier to attract and keep quality employees.**
- 5. A strong brand makes it easier to build supplier partnerships.**
- 6. A strong brand can facilitate success with a public offering.**
- 7. A strong brand can facilitate success**

**with joint ventures.**

- 8. A strong brand makes it much easier to introduce new product or service offerings (remember the trust issue?).**

Well, I could go on and on, and I'm sure you could, too, with other positive branding implications. The issue of branding goes far beyond a recognizable logo. It can truly enhance business value in logarithmic proportions. Until next month, good branding.

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