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Branding

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Promises to Keep

What is a brand? Is it defined by your company logo? Your product packaging? Your expensive advertising and public relations campaigns?

According to TEC branding experts [Duane Knapp](#) and [Tryg Jacobson](#), these are all elements of branding, but by no means the whole story. In fact, they contend, the notion of branding is often misunderstood by even the most marketing-savvy organizations.

"Branding represents the intangible part of your business," Jacobson says. "Products are tangible. They're made in factories and stored in warehouses; they're things you can hold in your hand. A brand, by contrast, is a collection of intangibles -- ideas, feelings and word associations. These intangibles reside in the real estate of your mind."

"A brand must stand for something larger than just a product benefit," adds Knapp. "It represents a value proposition. Consumers choose one particular brand over another because of this intrinsic value."

In other words, an organization's commitment to *brand value* provides the foundation for a unique promise from the company to the customer.

Knapp cites examples of companies that have failed to brand successfully. "Sears and Penney's are well-known, but not distinctive," he says. "At Wal-Mart, Sam Walton understood from the beginning that people like to feel special and be treated in a special way. That's why he had greeters placed at each store entrance, and this left a definite impression with their customers."

In many years of consulting work with businesses, Jacobson says only once has someone come up with an accurate definition of branding. "This person summed it up in one word: *Trust*. In order to build trust, you need to communicate a perception of value for your brand and deliver on that value every single day. A brand means making a promise *and* fulfilling that promise."

If you make a promise but fail to fulfill it, he adds, "you might have an image, but you don't have a brand."

For Knapp, this "BrandPromise®" methodology must communicate three inherent messages:

- Something will be done for you (the customer).
- We guarantee it.
- We promise future excellence and achievement.

"Think of your company's promise as a short paragraph, typically two to four sentences, that articulates the brand's key distinct elements," he says. "A promise defines the intended functional and emotional benefits from the customer's point of view after experiencing the product and service provided."

Because it incorporates the customer's viewpoint, Knapp contends, a brand promise differs from a company's mission or vision statement. It must focus on answering three questions:

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

"Branding serves as the link between your product's promise and the consumer's desire," Jacobson says. "The goal is to express a set of basic principles that can be understood by everyone who comes in contact with your business -- customers, shareholders, employees, etc. The brand is your reason for being."

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Setting Your Brand Apart (Differentiation)

TEC-sized companies should strive to establish what Knapp calls a "Genuine Brand," and communicate that to people within and beyond the organization. A Genuine Brand is "the internalized sum of all impressions received by customers and consumers, resulting in a *distinctive* position in their *mind's eye*, based on perceived emotional and functional benefits."

"A Genuine Brand highlights specific emotional and functional benefits to the consumer," he says. "Those specifics -- that is, what sets it apart in the commodity market -- is absolutely critical."

Differentiation helps simplify a customer's choices, Jacobson adds. "Nine times out of 10, consumers equate a certain product with a certain product category. This makes the purchasing process much easier for them." For example:

- Soup (Campbell's)
- Razor blades (Gillette)
- Chocolate (Hershey)
- Glue (Elmer's)

"Of course, many other companies make and sell these products, but they generate nothing remotely close to the powerful association these brands possess," he says. "To the consumer, a brand guarantees quality and value. And the stronger the brand, the more customers stay with it -- simply because people don't like to leave their comfort zones."

At the same time, a brand can't afford to be static. Says Jacobson: "Brands reflect what society considers important. As society changes, brands have to change as well, in order to stay relevant to their customers. To make this change successful, a company must understand what their customers are saying and position itself against that. If your brand doesn't reflect that what your customers feel is important, it ceases to be a brand."

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Brand Identity

Terms like "brand architecture" or "brand identity" seek to articulate one key idea: whatever you do, be sure to communicate your brand *consistently, every time*.

"Brand identity starts with a byline that should always appear with your corporate name," Knapp says. "All too often with business cards, for example, you have to ask: What do they do? Proper brand identity postulates that if what you produce isn't obvious with your name, you need a byline. Don't let first impressions confuse your audiences."

He prefers the term: "brand blueprint." This blueprint consists of five basic components:

- **Brand name:** A name that is unique, memorable, distinctive
- **Graphic representation:** An icon, symbol or image that vividly expresses your brand's identity
- **Byline:** A descriptive word or phrase that tells consumers where to place your brand in their mind's eye, and that always appears with the brand (i.e., Whirlpool Home Appliances)
- **Tagline:** The message that expresses your product's functional and emotional benefits to consumers
- **Brand story:** When you identify your brand, be sure to communicate and preserve its heritage.

According to Jacobson, effective brands share the same characteristics:

- Recognizable
- Consistent
- Visual impact
- Dependable
- Trustworthy
- Comfortable
- Quality
- Reliable
- Valuable

Can you sum up the principal features of your product -- how it's used, how it's seen, what it costs? Can you do so in a way that's easily recognized and welcomed in the marketplace? This is your organization's "face to the world," and with it come all the

associations and perceptions consumers have about the business.

Jacobson identifies "four pillars" of branding:

- **Differentiation.** To create a brand, you have to set yourself apart from everyone else in the market. You can't build a brand by being the same.
- **Relevance.** Relevance has to do with appropriateness, meaningfulness and, ultimately, the value of your point of difference. If your product or service isn't relevant, your point of difference won't attract customers or keep them.
- **Esteem.** When you succeed at building relevant differentiation, customers respond with high esteem for your product or service. Brand esteem can maintain high levels even after a brand has lost its point of difference (e.g., luxury and prestige brands).
- **Understanding.** This refers to how well customers understand and believe in your point of differentiation. Understanding also represents an important diagnostic indicator of brand health. For example, when customer esteem for a brand falls below understanding, it means that people know you but they don't like you. If they don't like you, they won't buy your product.

"Many companies make the mistake of thinking they can buy understanding with massive advertising campaigns," says Jacobson. "This approach might create awareness, but awareness doesn't necessarily translate into understanding. You can spend millions on advertising, but if you fail to create a meaningful point of difference, you're just throwing money away. Always ask, 'Are we communicating a single, simple point of difference people can understand and believe in?'"

A clear, well-constructed brand identity benefits customers (making their purchase choices easier) and company alike (generating synergy between products and services, and the ability to leverage current assets). However, when brand identity is mishandled, it creates waste and confusion (conflicting associations for customers, inefficiency in marketing and communications).

"The early boom years of the Internet might serve as a cautionary example about brands," Jacobson observes. "Just consider the cacophony of brands that assaulted the typical Web surfer only a year or so ago. How to make sense of all these so-called brands clamoring for our attention? Easy: tune it out. And that's exactly what happened."

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Additional Resources

Below are links to more best practices as defined by our expert panel:


- [Brand Strategy](#)
- [What is Your Brand Worth?](#)
- [The CEO as Brand Champion](#)
- [Positioning the Brand](#)
- [Extending the Brand](#)
- [Online Branding](#)

[Go to Branding Best Practices](#)


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 A little contradictory Sunday, April 5, 2009

Reviewer: Member [Jim Signorelli](#) from Chicago, Illinois, United States - [See all my reviews](#)

You started by saying that a brand must stand for something more than a product benefit. It represents a value proposition. I whole-heartily agree. But latter you point out that a brand has something to do with emotional and functional benefits. I would argue that products have more to do with emotional and functional benefits than brands do, especially mature products that have substitutes. Brands, albeit emotionally charged, are entirely values based. For example, Harley values rebellion. Disney values magic,

Apple is about user-friendly innovation, BMW is performance luxury etc. etc. Each has products that support their values, which makes them strong brands. Just my opinion, but I think the biggest problem that many companies have is distinguishing what their products stand for vs. what their brands stand for. They are inextricably related, but very different, nevertheless.

★★★★★ Wednesday, August 17, 2005

Reviewer: EE Member [Lawrence Epstein](#) from Orlando, Florida, United States - [See all my reviews](#)
Branding has been a very muddy world for me and my company.

These articles really cut to the chase

Thanks!

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