

## Branding as an important part of marketing strategy

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The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers.

Therefore it makes sense to understand that branding is not about getting your target market to choose you over the competition, but it is about getting your prospects to see you as the only one that provides a solution to their problem.

The objectives that a good brand will achieve include:

- to deliver the message clearly;
- to confirm your credibility;
- to connect your target prospects emotionally;
- to motivate the buyer;
- to concrete User Loyalty.

To succeed in branding you must understand the needs and wants of your customers and prospects. You do this by integrating your brand strategies through your company at every point of public contact.

Your brand resides within the hearts and minds of customers, clients, and prospects. It is the sum total of their experiences and perceptions, some of which you can influence, and some that you cannot.

A strong brand is invaluable as the battle for customers intensifies day by day. It's important to spend time investing in researching, defining, and building your brand. After all your brand is the source of a promise to your consumer. It's a foundational piece in your marketing communication and one you do not want to be without.

Brands typically are made up of various elements, such as: Name, Logo, Tagline or Catchphrase, Graphics, Shapes, Colors, Sounds, Scents, Tastes, Movements and Customer relationship management.

Customers experience brand in numerous ways: products, packaging, price, marketing, sales personnel, etc. Each of these contacts or touchpoints molds the customer's impression of the brand. Some of these touchpoints are obvious, like product performance, and one-on-one customer interactions. Other touchpoints, such as the product manual, monthly statements or post-sales support, may be subtler in their brand effects.

Brand image creates expectations. It defines who you are, how you operate, and how you're different from your competitors. In essence, your brand image is a promise - a promise that must be kept.

If the brand is a promise you make, then the customer experience is the fulfillment of that promise. The customer experience can't be left to chance. It should be actively designed and controlled in a manner that enhances your brand image. It must consistently reinforce the brand promise across every customer touchpoint or the value of the brand itself is at risk.

Here are five easy steps to build a strong brand and an optimize customer experience:

1. Identify your reasons-to-believe.

Your brand promise is irrelevant if your customers do not believe it. Therefore, your promise must be supported by reasons-to-believe. This will automatically add substance to the promise and define specific expectations for the customer.

2. Identify customer touchpoints.

Each individual step in your business process contains a number of touchpoints when the customer comes in contact with your brand. Your ultimate goal is to have each touchpoint reinforce and fulfill your marketplace promise.

3. Determine the most influential touch points.

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