

TMS

TOTAL MARKETING SOLUTIONS



Marketing Resources from Total Marketing Solutions

Everything you wanted to know about branding but were afraid to ask...



"Think about how much better off a brand would be if it took the time to make promises, keep them and be transparent about its communications."

Seth Godin

The Benefits of Brand

Branding has significant business benefits. Not only in terms of impact on the market place but also the value of the company, the longevity and sustainability of the business, and staff morale. A catalyst for change, re-branding is often used as the flagship project to help introduce new working practices, company restructuring, new marketing campaigns, or in conjunction with key moments or developments of a business lifecycle. However, how do you create a successful brand?

Brands have a life of their own. It's down to those who own the brand to make sure it thrives and prospers, and to know when it needs reviving or replacing. There are three distinct stages in a branding lifecycle:

- **Review:** This is your foundation stone. Assess your brand regularly in terms of the market, your identity, and fit with your business objectives. A thorough brand audit and analysis will provide insights about your business and your brand. It will also highlight any brand issues and disconnects with your audience.
- **Create:** Once you have a thorough understanding of what your brand should be, you can move onto the creative phase of branding: develop your brand strategy, design a brand that works across all media, and produce artwork. This is critical to the long-term success and viability of your brand.
- **Manage:** Now that you have invested in your brand – you need to protect it and manage its use, and communicate what it is and what it stands for effectively. The first logical step is creating usage guidelines. Brand asset management is vital – particularly when you have a number of staff or third parties who need to use your brand material.

Build a brand well – and you will build a brand that lasts.

Why is branding important?

The branding of your company, product or service offer is an essential ingredient to the longevity of your business. It can influence your success or indeed failure in the commercial world.

- It represents who you are...
 - Base your brand on the idea of transparent honesty. Your people need to live the brand – everyone needs to understand it, own it, and practice it.
- It says where you are going to...
 - You should be able to quantify and value the key attributes of your brand. These qualities should communicate the values your business stands for to both your customers and your people. Your brand strategy should be dynamic and flexible, but also able to grow organically.
- It reflects your identity...
 - You should consider your customers' perception of your products or services and the perceptions of those inside the business. How you view yourself and how people view you, are equally important and highly relevant.

- It reinforces your values...
 - Your people should demonstrate your values in their behaviour and actions at all times. This behaviour will ultimately support your external image providing you with a real personality. In essence, your brand is a living and breathing entity that promotes what your business actually stands for.
- It helps you align yourself...
 - You will only be able to effectively communicate the personality of your company when you align your internal processes with internal and external understanding of your brand.
- It gives you integrity
 - Your brand is not a cloak for your company to wear when convenient. It is a genuine expression of its own unique identity and personality.

What makes a successful brand?

You will create a successful corporate brand when every instance of your visual identity is consistently in line with your core brand. This is not just in terms of the logo or type style but also use of colour, imagery, positioning and context.

A successful brand can fulfil a whole range of key strategic goals when implemented correctly:

- Increase sales [through brand recognition]
- Portray core values [through creative implementation]
- Engage new customers [intrigue and interest them, create a good first impression]
- Improve customer relations [maintenance of a strong brand shows a pride in the company]
- Increase morale amongst employees [shows that the company is interested in its image and its values]
- Add bottom line value to the business [strong brands have equity in the marketplace that can increase the value of a company]



“Changing your existing brand is a sensitive process. You need to think carefully about the rationale behind changing the brand.”

Branding: To change or not to change?

Changing your existing brand is a sensitive process. You need to think carefully about the rationale behind changing the brand. It is important to understand the current values and consumer perception of the current brand. There are only a few instances where completely changing the brand can be acceptable: when the brand is failing in its key aim to be memorable and has no market value; when you need to reposition your brand downwards; or where a slow change can be tolerated by the market.

No brand will go on forever. It is important to understand how well the current brand is known and what it stands for. There are situations where there is no choice but to replace a brand – often driven by the market place itself. As new markets open up and replace old ones it is often better to change the brand straight away rather than try and make an old or obsolete brand work in this new space.

The value of consistency in real terms costs no more than being inconsistent. In fact, you could argue that being consistent saves money as it means there are fewer decisions to make in the implementation process. Continuity and consistency of brand usage shows clarity of thought, joined up thinking, healthy communication skills, processes that work and managerial vision. Misuse of your own brand shows a company that is confused, unstructured and undisciplined. How do you want your customers to view you?

"A brand audit should be undertaken at regular intervals to maintain standards."



There are three distinct stages to go through when changing your brand:

1. Auditing your brand
2. Creating your brand
3. Managing your brand

The following sections provide more detail on each of these stages.

1. Auditing your brand

If you're looking to introduce a new brand, rebrand, or create some control around an existing brand, your first step should be to undertake a brand audit. A brand audit encompasses every aspect from marketing strategy, market positioning, competitors, internal processes and technical issues. It should be undertaken at regular intervals to maintain standards, stop complacency and ensure the brand is constantly in line with your business model.

It will help you determine whether your brand is working, and a few tweaks are required to make it perform better, or whether your brand and your customers' perception of your offer is disparate and confused, and therefore requires a complete re-brand.

The phases of a brand audit are:

- 1.1 Analysis and Formulation of Brief
- 1.2 Brand Audit
- 1.3 External Qualitative Research
- 1.4 Internal Qualitative Research

1.1 Analysis and Formulation of Brief

This is a consultative phase involving all key stakeholders, the leadership team and influencers within the organisation. To communicate clearly with your audiences, you must know who you are, who your customers are and where you want to be. A strategic analysis should cover your core values, business model, corporate ambitions and desires. The brief should outline the scope of the project, your specific requirements, and the additional phases required.

1.2 Brand Audit

A brand audit will help verify the brief before any other work is undertaken. It involves assessing the current business, product or service strategy, highlighting those elements that are working well, and identifying areas of weakness that need to be improved or changed.

Auditing current usage is not a small task in most organisations but time spent in this process will pay you back many times over. Every department needs to be accountable in the process, from purchasing through to sales. An audit of current usage is particularly relevant when you implement corporate brand guidelines retrospectively.

It's essential to assess misuse and incorrect usage; you'll not only find countless instances of misuse but probably a whole range of data used in the wrong context. This process can be cathartic. Almost like an amnesty, it will help to engage employees in the process of change and ensure that they are stakeholders in the implementation of the new guidelines. This process is often easier to manage with the help of an external agency.

Today's successful identities are the ones that work well across all media, in static or animated form. You need to check your brand against original source data and specifications in all applications.

TMS Tip

Use of an external agency will ensure anonymity of the answers and total impartiality. The scope of this phase can be quite broad and the nature of the interviewing process means it is often more labour intensive.

Your logo data must enable the best and most economical options for production and implementation. Use the audit to look at your facilities for producing branded items in-house and make recommendations about the processes, data formats and equipment used. This can very often lead to significant cost savings or economies of scale that will easily pay for the cost of the audit itself.

Quality and consistency are the watchwords, is your logo the same every time your target audience see it – across all media, countries, departments, offices or partners? Are there issues with colour, layout, size or quality?

Very often new applications for logos arise and people try to find a quick solution. If they compromise the colour or quality, the impact on the brand can be fatal. For example if every one of your branch offices or country marketing departments all go and do their own thing – before long you have a mass of different logos representing the company image that you have invested in. This will weaken your brand.

1.3 Internal Qualitative Research

Internal research gives assurance to the leadership team and validation that the brief is correct. It also identifies key issues and can help to refine the brief further, adding detail and ensuring that it is as comprehensive as possible.

Use internal answers as a catalyst for change. This research typically takes the form of a set of questions applied to key personnel. The answers should form part of the questions you ask externally in phase 1.4. It is vital that you test internal perceptions with the external audience to verify views and measure the importance of issues.

1.4 External Qualitative Research

External research provides insurance for the whole process of re-branding. This phase is usually undertaken as telephone interviews. Ask your customers, prospects and third parties their opinions and views against a set of relevant and structured questions, based on the results of phase 1.1 and 1.2.

The results will determine strengths you need to promote and encourage, which form a key part of the brand framework document. Identified weaknesses will form part of an internal process for improvement. From this research, two key areas will become apparent:

- How you view yourself (internal)
- How those you want to do business with view you (external)

2. Creating your brand

Once you've undertaken a thorough audit of the brand, you can move onto the next stage, creating your brand. The most important decision to make about your brand is the name. The name is the one thing that will probably follow the brand for its whole lifetime. The look of the brand may change; the colour of the logo and look of the stationery but a brand is ultimately a name.

It is vital that it is not a generic anonymous term but is something that sounds and looks great and ultimately builds its own personality and presence. International considerations are important to consider in choosing a name for a global or corporate brand.

Associate your brand with a key value or phrase to further build your reputation. When people say the name of your company or product – what is the next word they would say? That word needs to be positive and position your product or company exactly. You can create the word in many ways including tactical positioning, pricing or a strap line.

It is vital that a suitable and effective URL is also available. Web presence has become so important that it has been known for brands to be named after an available domain name and not the product or company it is promoting, such as Cahoot, Google or Amazon. Do not release your new brand until you can secure the matching web address to support it.

The phases of brand implementation are:

- 2.1 Brand Strategy
- 2.2 Creative Design
- 2.3 Artwork Production

2.1 Brand Strategy

A re-brand can help immensely when trying to convince customers that a change to the company's direction is a positive thing.

It is essential when repositioning that you bring your key customers with you. A re-brand and new identity creates a great opportunity to approach your audience and talk about what your company strategy is and how it will benefit everyone.

A corporate brand framework document should identify key conclusions from the research phase, and encompass the thoughts and desires for the new brand.

The corporate brand framework should include:

- Brand vision
- Brand value
- Brand ambition
- Brand personality
- Definition of the company, product or service as an individual person

Assess any future marketing or commercial activity against the framework document. This will act as a benchmark not as a cast iron decision maker, but as an aid in the process.

2.2 Creative Design

The design of the brand is a critical element in the drive to make your brand recognisable. The colours, the font used for the typography, the proportions and the shape used are all part of the visual development of the brand. People have natural psychological responses to certain colours or shapes, which need to be integrated when you develop your brand.

The key elements taken from the results of the qualitative research and the brand framework document will determine the nature and direction of the design phase. The next step is to create design concepts for the look and feel of the logo, device, typography and colour ways. By applying colour symbolism and psychology, a 'reason for being' will be evident in all brand elements.

The brand needs to work across all media, including web and animation. Many organisations create their corporate identities in animated form first, for TV or web, and use the stills or frames for the static version for print. BT's new logo is a good example of this. Review your logo if it is quite old or has been developed for use in full colour applications like web and not been adapted for economic print production.



TMS Tip

Developing multiple brands across specialist markets leads to more success than expanding one brand. If you have a product or service that can hold its own in a market place, give it a new name. Keep things simple and make sure your prospects clearly understand your brands. Narrowing the focus of your brand enables you to grow it further. Being a high quality specialist will enable you to dominate a market.

2.3 Production Artwork

Once you have sign-off and approval for the chosen brand, you can produce the data and artwork for the logo and brand elements. This phase is dependent of the scope of the project but normally includes the stationery layout and logo data suitable for all formats.

3. Managing your Brand

Once you've created your brand, you need to manage it throughout its life. Managing your brand is like any other business process. It's the responsibility of every employee to maintain and respect the values of the brand and the image of the company. As your organisation grows and requirements change, so do the needs of the brand, often resulting in logo compromise or abuse. In today's digital businesses, these misuses can often spread like a virus and will inevitably appear on a client's radar. You should avoid this at all costs.

The phases of brand management are:

- Production of corporate brand guidelines
- Brand asset management
- Communication

3.1 Production of corporate brand guidelines

Re-branding is great for a company and its employees, but how do you manage the implementation of data across the whole business? The real key here is to introduce a set of guidelines. The guidance documentation should cover all the main uses of the brand with sensible and clear instructions on how a logo should, and should not, be used. The scope of this documentation can vary. The content can however be developed organically once the basic rules have been established.

Scale your corporate guidelines to fit your requirements: whether you're an SME, a large corporate, a major company brand or a product brand you will benefit. Usually organisations use a phased approach to ease the implementation process.

Ensure your corporate guidelines include pantone references of the main logo, with illustrated examples and diagrams to help communicate this across countries. Most guidelines include logo usage, fonts and document templates to buildings, vehicles and signage. Some even go as far as copy style, dress codes, telephone manner and user interface. Additional logo artwork may be created for some applications, for example embroidery for clothing, to ensure consistent production methods and therefore quality.

It's vital that you provide users with the correct data in usable formats, enabling them to implement the branding instructions easily. Data is usually provided in a range of formats, including document templates for use in print production or for online usage.

The creation of a delivery device and an easy to use central reference point will help you to effectively disseminate the guidelines across the company. This could be via the company intranet, on shared drives, the web or on CD.

Consider integrating approval and access levels into a digital solution, to ensure people follow the correct processes for implementation of branded items. It will also allow you to track and measure activity within the application, for management information and reporting purposes.

TMS Tip

Take advantage of the power of word of mouth marketing [womm]. Publicity is the way to promote a brand, not advertising. This is great as PR generally delivers far better ROI than advertising. A brand should gather momentum and create awareness by being strong and successful. Interesting stories and news should surround a solid brand. The best way of creating publicity is to have a great looking brand and brand story. What other people say about your brand is more powerful than what you say about it.

3.2 Brand asset management system [BAM]

It's essential that you communicate and manage your new corporate brand effectively. Use the latest technologies to control issue states, updates to artwork and documentation. Brand Asset Management [BAM] solutions for example, allow you to manage the whole brand in a clear and effective way via a web site.

The content of the site can vary: from logos and collateral to sales tools and presentations. The 'community' who are interested in these items can log on at different access levels. They can also receive up to the minute email bulletins keeping them in touch with the latest updates to the brand.

3.3 Communication

It's essential that you communicate and manage the introduction of the re-brand effectively. Getting the support of key internal and external stakeholders is vital to the success of the re-brand. Re-branding projects can take time, and rightly so, but it is essential to keep communication channels open and active throughout the process. People will be keen to monitor projects that affect the image of the business, especially if they are involved in focus groups or market research.

There are a number of opportunities to get people excited about your re-brand including launch parties, PR and local events. Do not miss the opportunity to raise your profile and create some media awareness.

Entering your brand into awards is another fantastic way to leverage free exposure and raise your company's profile. It is also a good way to benchmark how good your brand actually is when compared to others in a particular sector.

Summary

Branding is more important than ever when business becomes difficult for any reason, ultimately products and services can come and go but your company's brand must remain constant. In the new economy where relationships with customers are the lifeblood of business then a strong brand is the foundation on which you can build success.

Contact TMS to discuss your thoughts, concerns or your brand.

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