

Develop Your Brand: Brand Strengthening Solutions

Can you describe in just a few words or images what it is that you do? Your brand can. Whether you've been intentional about that brand or not, your prospects are forming an opinion about your company based on that brand. Here are some ways to develop and strengthen that brand so it speaks accurately, and loudly, about what you do.

Develop your brand

1. Be intentional! If you've ignored branding, you've simply ignored being intentional about it, which means the general course of your business has decided for you what your brand will be. End that today by committing to look vigorously at your brand. Be willing to make hard decisions and dramatic changes if necessary.
2. Be unified! Identify all the areas where your brand is demonstrated (for example: products, fleet, signage, and advertising). Are they all the same (with obvious size and proportional differences)? Or, are the colors, font faces, and slogans different? (Note: they CAN be different under certain circumstances but if they are different, you should have a reason for it).
3. Be distinct! If you and all of your competitors use similar advertising techniques, your prospects won't have a big enough reason to choose you over someone else. Identify areas where you can differentiate and highlight that in your brand.
4. Be sensitive to your market! Although you need to differentiate, you will still need to be sensitive to your market's needs. For example, a brand for a company marketing to seniors may not be successful if they try to differentiate themselves as "young and hip."

Strengthen your brand

- Try to state in ten words or less what benefit they get for using your products or services. Use that as your slogan and make sure it's on everything.
- Incorporate your slogan into the way you answer your phone.
- Look at your product line-up and be willing to change or eliminate any products or services that don't match up with who you claim to be.
- For inspiration on quality branding that speaks to your target audience, look to non-competing businesses targeting the same niche. It doesn't matter if you sell cars and they sell ties, if you're both marketing to executive men, there's something you can learn from them.
- If you have more than one niche market, create more than one brand but have some kind of similarity between the two.
- Avoid cliches in your branding about "great customer service" and "competitive pricing". These

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are so frequently used that they tend to lose their meaning. They are good principles to brand, just find a better way of saying it.

- Make your slogan and your logo somehow intertwined so that you don't need to find a way to put both on your marketing material, one will do the job.
- Avoid disparity. Make sure that your logo and slogan are only on things that support the message. (I'm reminded of an autobody shop whose name is plastered over their courtesy cars, which are in terrible shape).
- Create a master list of the things you do that influence your brand (your locations, your employee's dress code, your pricing strategy, your logo, your fleet, etc.) and keep it updated. That way, when it comes time to look at your brand and update it, you have everything in one place.