

On the Importance of Branding-By Roberta Perry

I participated in a brand discovery session last week with a client. It was both one of the most enlightening and compelling planning sessions I've ever attended. It solidified in my mind that developing your brand is the single most important step you can take toward success in your business. Your brand becomes the foundation of all your communication, promotions and public relations planning.

This session was facilitated by two of the most sought after Consumer Behaviorists and Brand Strategists in the country. Fran and Bill Lytle lead a group of stakeholders through their trademarked BrandReflections® process to reveal what the current impression of my client's brand is and what she would like it to be. We learned how the brain is wired and decisions are made, noting the difference between the evaluation process of men and women.

It was incredibly evident from the very beginning of the session that not **one** press release, logo, pixel of a website or ad should be crafted until you distinguish your brand. Once the brand essence is established, communications strategy seamlessly falls into place.

Let's start with a definition of a brand. In some dictionaries, a brand is an iron stamp used red-hot to leave an indelible mark; a stigma, trademark, or particular kind of goods. The Lytle's take it beyond that by saying brands are living, breathing entities that are like people. They have personalities, relationships, souls, personal values and belief systems.

Although uncovering a brand is a powerful process, there are 3 steps you can take to get started.

1. **Define your true product in 20 words or less.** Also known as your unique selling proposition, this statement helps consumers manage their brand expectations. It spells out what you provide or do and why you are unique. An example: The nighttime, coughing, achy, sniffing, stuffy head, fever, so you can rest medicine. (Nyquil)
2. **Identify your single word equity.** This is the "one" word that states who you are, what you stand for or want to be known for. An example: Safety (Volvo)
3. **Characterize the culture of your brand.** The culture is the personal values and beliefs the brand represents. Fran Lytle says that the easiest way to do this is think of your brand as a person. What's its personality? Is it reliable? Sincere? Influential?

Friendly? This will help you more easily connect people with your brand. An example: As a company, and as individuals, we value: Integrity and honesty. Passion for customers, for our partners, and for technology. Openness and respectfulness. Taking on big challenges and seeing them through. Constructive self-criticism, self-improvement, and personal excellence. Accountability to customers, shareholders, partners, and employees for commitments, results, and quality. (Microsoft)

It takes a good deal of self-reflection to define your brand, so I suggest you write, reflect and fine-tune over a few days. You're asking yourself tough questions, like who am I and what do I stand for. But getting through it will result in easily identifiable target audiences, smarter, more effective communications plans and less wasted time on activities that don't produce revenue.

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