

Change Your Perspective

Revising a Marketing Message Can Transform a Company

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When business slumps, the root of the problem is usually not the design of your ads, how much you spend on advertising, or the number of calls your salespeople make. The problem is usually in the message you're conveying to your potential customers.

In other words, if you're using the wrong bait, the fish just won't bite.

Your advertising has to immediately interest your customers and communicate your product's value and why they should buy it from you. Since people ignore anything that is irrelevant, if your message is off-base, you're spending money to lose business.

Many companies have prospered due to the specialized trade skills of their owners. Despite the fact that these individuals are authorities in their fields, many are confused when it comes to the meaning of branding, what it is, and what it could do for them.

These owners don't recognize their business's own growth potential. If only they could refocus their messages and redirect their offering into something their customers perceive as real value. This could save so much wasted money, time, and effort, it could turn a company around.

Large consumer product marketers understand the importance of perceptions. Memorable logos like those used by Coke, McDonald's, Nike, Apple, Starbucks, or Mercedes can be recognized in a fraction of a second. In that short time, most consumers can also describe what each brand means.

So how does this happen?

How do these companies acquire this real estate in our brains?

Despite the millions of dollars spent to keep their names in our collective minds, it's what these companies did *before* they spent their advertising dollars that counts most. These companies would never spend millions on a campaign, then cross their fingers

ing something that interests them, you will be tapping into some of the same strategies the world's most successful brands have been using for decades.

The fact is, nobody but *you* cares who *you* are, what *you* have, what *you* can do, how *you* do it better or how *you* sell it for less. The fish don't care how good a

because your message is now about them and what they want. This is the beginning of the branding concept.

Do your advertising messages address your customers' needs and show them how they will increase their profits, decrease their risks, gain emotional pleasure, or avoid pain? Reframing your offer can make a huge difference between successful and irrelevant advertising messages.

Once you understand who you're selling to and how to craft a more appealing offer, the next step is to understand how to distinguish your company or product from everyone else. How can you make the fish go after your bait rather than all the rest of the fishermen's in the pond? If everybody wants the same fish, what can you do that no one else can do to get customers to consistently choose only you?

The best way to do this is to define your value and your unique distinction. This value proposition separates you from everyone else and provides a clear reason for your customers to choose your product or service over your competitors'. Your value proposition is not what you say, it's what you are.

Your marketing and sales teams must be able to communicate your value proposition to all stakeholders. They should be able to articulate this distinction in one sentence and understand who your customers are, what they get, and why they buy from your company instead of the competition.

To test your distinction, compare one of your company's ads

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and hope for success. Before communicating or designing anything, they first understood who their customers are, exactly what these customers get, and why they feel their company is the best provider.

Any company of any size can use the exact same strategy in its market niche, and it doesn't cost a lot. In fact, continuing with an irrelevant message is more expensive than stopping everything you're doing and regrouping. You have to use the right bait.

Change Your Thinking and Change Course

The first step in changing your company's direction is to change the way you think. When you reframe the way you think and shift your focus from telling customers what you have to present-

ing something that interests them, you will be tapping into some of the same strategies the world's most successful brands have been using for decades.

To communicate something of value to your customers, you have to first take the time to understand exactly who *they* are and what *they* want. By learning everything you possibly can about *them*, you'll be able to speak to *them*, in *their* language and about the things that *they* care about.

When you truly understand that your customers only care about what they get, you can shift away from references about yourself or your company and focus first and foremost on serving their interests.

Then an amazing thing will happen. They'll actually begin to listen, read, and pay attention

with that of a competitor. Are you both saying the exact same things, or is one of you making a unique claim? If you could simply exchange logos on the ads, neither has a distinction.

Without a meaningful differentiation, you risk becoming a commodity competing on little more than price. Until you create a compelling difference that will drastically tip the scales in your favor, your business will be in a weaker position.

Your Value Proposition Builds Your Brand

Companies have personalities with unique strengths and weaknesses. Their brand essence, or corporate culture, is comprised of unique selling points and personality traits. While your business strategy drives what your organization does, your brand essence drives how you do it.

Have you ever encountered a company that you would like to do business with, but you just don't like the people or the way

they operate? This company may have great products or services, but it fails because it projects a lousy personality.

Since people buy from people they like, doesn't it make sense to spend a little bit of time and effort to find out how your business is really perceived by your customers? When you define the essence of your brand personality, you can purposefully interweave it throughout everything you do. That can lay a foundation and direct your entire company.

Because brand development is a discovery process that unearths distinction from within, it is important to define congruent brand values that are embraced by internal staff and your external audience. Your authentic company culture becomes much easier to describe and promote when you are living it every day, as opposed to some abstract or made-up marketing pitch.

Your brand essentially becomes a promise of a particular and consistent customer experience within each and every trans-

action. It's a reflection of how your customers feel about your product and what they expect every time they interact with you.

Developing a brand is not a marketing initiative, it's a corporate initiative. Definition of a distinctive brand must include the buy-in of the CEO or president of a company from the onset. This top-down approach is essential, because if top management doesn't understand and endorse it, no marketing effort will ever be fully supported and able to live up to its potential.

Your brand is not a logo, color palate, artwork, or a musical tune, although they are elements of it. Your brand is what all of the physical elements represent. It is a feeling, an emotional connection and a promise of a consistent experience.

Nike's brand is not the swoosh, Tiger Woods, or Michael Jordan. It represents an athletic attitude. Their tagline communicates that attitude succinctly, meaningfully, and powerfully with, *Just Do It!*

The Volvo brand is what its logo represents in the minds of the target market, safety at a premium. The company doesn't need to use the word "quality" because everything it says and does is quality. Its value distinction is so clear and so consistent that the Volvo name has become synonymous with safety.

Learning to view your company from a new perspective will profoundly change the way you communicate and provide a highly concentrated focus for all future marketing communications. Branding does for your company what electronic fish finders do for fishing. ♦

Dennis Kunkler and Christine Pilch are partners in Your Brand Partnership. They collaborate with clients and agencies to get results through positioning strategies; Inquiry@YourBrandPartnership.com, Expect Results.