

# Is Your Ego Getting In The Way Of Profits?

## When Your Reality Clashes with Customer Perception

By *CHRISTINE L. PILCH*

**M**any people think that a brand is simply the logo that you slap on your business card and stationery, when in fact it is much more. Your brand is what your customers *think* and feel when they hear your product name or see your logo.

Your brand conveys the value you provide. Business owners and presidents believe that they have something of better quality, faster, or cheaper than their competitors. After all, their job is to be excited about what they sell and excite their customers. Unfortunately, many of these leaders mistakenly believe their own perception of their products is shared.

The reality is that perception from the outside looking in is the only one that matters. When this fact is taken to heart, it can be the turning point to making a lot more money.

### Self Perception

A problem comes in when an assumption is made that potential customers understand and believe the purchase advantages that owners perceive of their own products. See how ego enters into the following scenario:

Mary's flower shop has several competitors. Her store has a great ambiance, she has a creative knack for arranging, and her clients are always happy. She knows she should be getting a larger share of business, so she decides to consult with a marketing specialist. After a thorough market and site analysis, Mary is told that she has not differentiated herself from her competitors, and the perception is that her service is not actually any more valuable than any other shop's.

In her own mind she believes that her store is more attractive and she does better work than the competition for a competitive price. She doesn't like being told that her work

is perceived as average, so she doesn't agree with the assessment.

Mary's ego is keeping her from growing her business. She does not understand the most important component of positioning and branding — that the only perception

space introducing you wastes valuable time that would be better spent demonstrating to customers why your product is the best value for them.

Surely you've also seen ads featuring business owners and their children or pets. Such a distraction

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that counts is that of her potential customers. Mary has not branded her business to convey any special or unique quality. There is no significant differentiation. She is nothing more than another florist when an occasion arises and her services are needed, so she is unlikely to achieve the status of a vendor of choice, one that people would be willing to go out of their way for.

Rather than committing to change customer perception about her shop, Mary continues to trust her ego. If only she could understand the real problems, she must differentiate her store in the minds of potential customers to give them a compelling reason to buy from her. Overcoming this challenge would surely earn her a larger share of business.

### Head Honcho / Look-At-Me Advertising

Ego also comes in when a company owner or president decides to be the public face of the product or service. This might work if your product is a personal skill or talent and *you* are the reason someone would purchase your product. Otherwise it will not bring in more business.

The precious seconds or print

only serves the ego of that individual. It does nothing to give potential customers a convincing reason to buy their product. Unless the product or service is for children or pets, their inclusion doesn't contribute any value whatsoever. They just help to create a worthless brand.

Ego advertising takes the focus off the only people who matter, those few who are interested enough to view your ad. People take action only when they identify with something or perceive a high enough value to act on the particular impulse that the ad is intended to trigger. Advertising works when people connect and see themselves, their problems, needs, wants and goals. Head honcho / look-at-me advertising proves that a company is more interested in itself than its customers.

### The Dangers of Being First

There is also ego at the center of the use of "we." You have to be very careful about speaking in the first person in your advertising. It is difficult to drive home the benefit of your product when you're busy filling your space and time with a message that, "We've been in business for 25 years," or, "Our service is the best," or "Come see us."

Lots of companies have been in business for a long time, every company claims to have great service, and most businesses want customers to frequent them. None of that is unique. In fact, generic messages like that are implied, so why waste precious time or space reiterating them?

Such egocentric messages turn around advertising and take the focus off the only people who matter, those whose attention you have fought hard to earn. All you get is a second or two before your message is dismissed as noise and your precious potential customers turn their attention elsewhere. Why waste time talking about something uninteresting to consumers? They don't care about you. They only care about themselves and how you can solve a problem they have. Instead, try turning the 'I' and 'we have' into a description of the benefits that 'you get.'

Looking into the heart of how your product or service is perceived, and admitting that there is a break between your personal belief and the perception of your potential customers, is very difficult when viewed from within. All too often, business leaders can't see how their own egos may be preventing the development of a strong differentiation of their product or service in the minds of customers. They believe that customers already realize the wonderful value their product offers, and they spend lots of money reminding the public how terrific they are, rather than talking about how their customers will benefit. Recognizing that customers must perceive an intrinsic value to act upon a marketing message, and getting out of the way of that message, is a big step toward increasing profits.

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