



Organizational Branding 101

EXTENSION

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The goal of this article is to explain what a brand is, why it is important and steps your organization can take toward developing an effective brand.

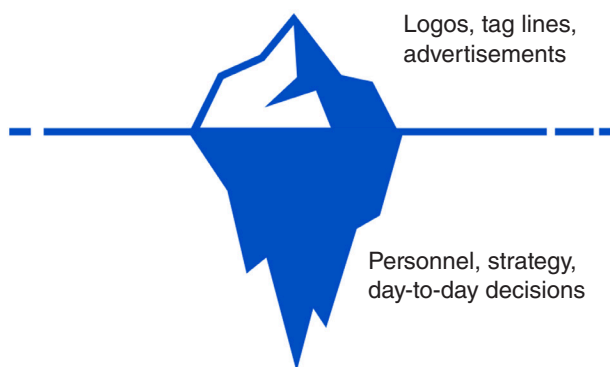
What is a Brand?

Oftentimes, brands bring to mind communications-related concepts, such as logos, names and slogans. While a common misconception, these are not the actual brand. They are physical representations of the brand.

A brand is the meeting ground between an organization's actions that develop a product (i.e., a good, service or idea) and how the public reacts to this product. The brand helps the public identify the product, increase their awareness of the product and creates meaning for the product (Franzen and Moriarty, 2009).

Think of a brand like you would think of an iceberg (de Chernatony, 2001): The public can see part of the iceberg above the water (i.e., logos, communications), but the majority is unseen below the surface (i.e., organizational strategy, day-to-day decisions). Although the bulk of the brand is below the surface, the visible part is still important. A brand the public is unaware of is basically the same as a brand that does not exist.

Successful brands are likely succeeding below the surface and above the surface. Picture your favorite brands. What makes them your favorite? Was it their logo and communications, or was it a history of good experiences with the brand? These are not mutually exclusive components. Effective logos and communications can help your brand stand out in a crowd and help people recognize your brand quickly if they have had past positive experiences.



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Why are Brands Important?

The most important part of a brand is that it helps build a relationship between the organization and members of the public. From the organizational perspective, this relationship can help an organization weather turbulent times, including a crisis, by acting as a protective bubble for public perception. One of the most prominent cases of branding and crisis communications coming together is the Tylenol tampering case of 1982 (de Chernatony, 2001; Lundgren and McMakin, 2004). Seven people died after taking tampered Tylenol. Tylenol was able to survive the crisis through a combination of its response to the crisis and its existing relationship with members of the public.

Organizations are less likely to survive a crisis if there is no relationship with the public or if that relationship is not good. Keep in mind, building a good relationship generally takes years of good experiences.

Outside of turbulent times, brands also are beneficial because they help reduce the public's uncertainty when they are choosing a product or service (Franzen and Moriarty, 2009). If you eat a lot of fast food, you know what to expect when you go into a national chain, no matter where you are in the country. If you were a musician looking for a new guitar, you would likely know the brands of Gibson, Fender, Martin and Taylor, including whether or not their products met your preferences.

Steps for Branding

There are four key steps to follow to engage in effective branding: 1) determine your organization's identity, 2) gather the right people, 3) develop your brand identity and 4) do what you said you would do.

Determine Your Organization's Identity

Branding is about more than communications. If you want to have an effective external component, you need to be building on a solid foundation with the internal component. This begins with determining your organization's identity.

One way to determine identity is to follow the approach outlined in *Good to Great* (Collins, 2001) by answering three questions: What are you passionate about, what can you be the best at and what can make you financially successful? Answering these questions can help you determine your niche in the world.

This core assessment should help guide all of your organization's decisions, allowing you to concentrate on your organization's priorities. By answering those questions, you can help determine what your niche is within your respective market.

Gather the Right People

The next step, and possibly concurrent with step 1, is to make sure you have the right people with you. Everyone is a brand manager (Wæraas, 2008). While executive teams may create the stated goals of the organization, the employees at all levels need to embody these goals. The people who build products and provide services will be operating independently and have the ability to improve the organization's success.

When you go to a restaurant, you are likely not going to interact with the person who founded the restaurant. Your experience is going to be more directly affected by the server and the person preparing your food. If those individuals are not on board with the brand's mission, then they could hurt your experience at the restaurant.

Develop Brand Identity

Developing an effective external brand means having consistently used brand materials. One way to improve communication consistency is to create a brand identity guide to serve as a reference for team members. This guide covers basic uses of branding elements that are used for the organization. The guide should be simple, allowing for flexibility if situations arrive that are not explicitly addressed.

The following elements can be included:

- **Name of the organization** – If the organization has acronyms, abbreviations or other shortened versions of the name, the guide will outline when it is appropriate to use the full or shortened versions.
- **Logo** – First and foremost, this states what the organization's logo is. The guide will outline any modifications that can be made in its use, such as using the logo in black and white, and how the logo should not be modified, such as never stretching it.
- **Colors** – This includes the colors that should be used with the logo and other visual elements. Be specific about the colors, such as using specific RGB and CMYK codes.
- **Typography** – This includes the font your organization uses. If you use different fonts for different purposes (e.g., body text vs. headings), the guide explains when to do so. You should also include a default font size.
- **Other elements** – In the guide, you can include slogans, elevator speeches (30-second explanations of the organization) and any other communication element you would expect every employee to know. That said, simplicity is essential, so do not include components for the sake of including components. Include only what you need. You can always amend the guide at a later date if a specific situation keeps occurring.

Do What You Said You Would Do

The final step for branding is to do what you said you would do. Tips on branding typically focus on communications. While effective communications are important, organizations must uphold their promises for a brand to be effective. Basically, you need to develop trust with the public.

Trust can be broken down into the three components: integrity, competence and goodwill (Rawlins, 2008). Integrity means the organization will act morally and ethically. Competence means the organization is reliable and capable of accomplishing its goals. Goodwill means the organization is compassionate, charitable and respectful. Building trust with the public means addressing all three components.

Communications are important, but the success of a brand depends on the organization holding up its end of the promise, including providing a good product, good customer service and any other attributes an organization wants its brand to possess. Good communications will not make up for a lackluster product.

Conclusion/Final Thoughts

Developing an effective brand can help improve an organization's success. But once an effective brand is developed, your work is not done. You are going to need to continue to operate effectively as an organization (i.e., internal brand), and you are likely going to tweak your communication materials (i.e., external brand) through time. While the work never really ends, long-term brand success will keep paying dividends over time.

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