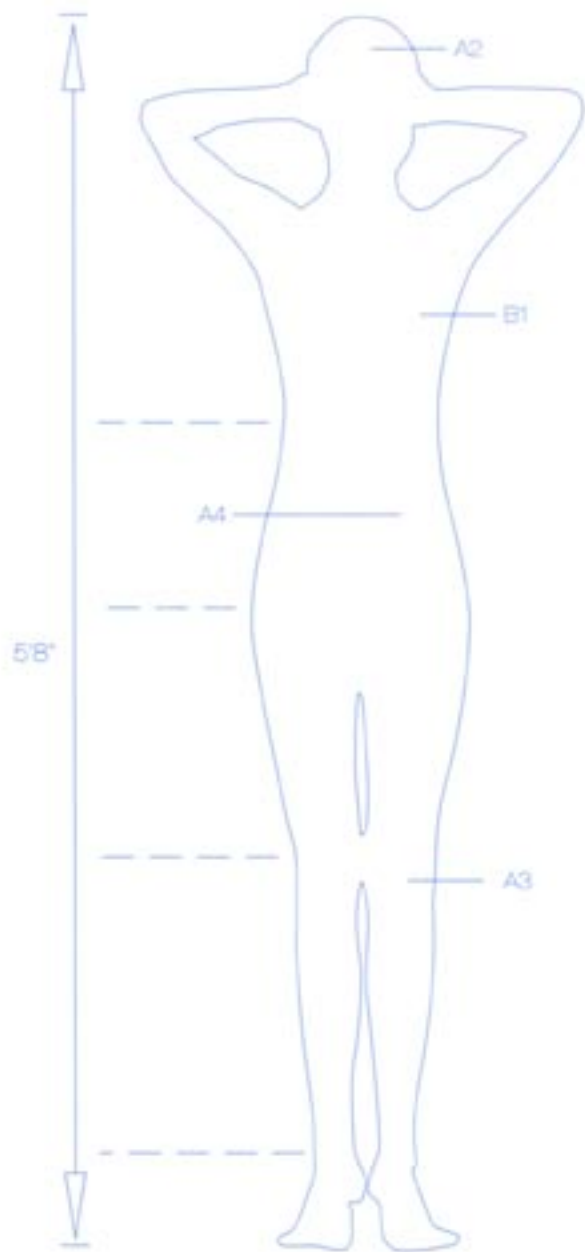


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SEARCHING FOR YOUR BRAND

by Randall Smith

Who Are You? The New Way to Brand

by Randall Smith

The competitive pressures in business, particularly during an economic downturn, have turned increased attention to branding strategies as a means of gaining a discernable advantage. Successful business-to-business and consumer marketers have both recognized branding as a strategic business tool.

Branding is much more than coming up with an attractive logo or catchy phrase. Though there is no standard definition of “brand” or “branding” within the general public, or even within the industry, it’s still a major marketing force.

Proper adherence to both old and newly developed branding principles can unify a company’s core brands through all fronts and establish the strongest possible perception in the customer’s mind.

For many companies, the branding process can be a soul-searching odyssey that can lead to defining who they are, what they stand for, and why customers should place their faith in their products or services.

Principles of Branding

What the customer thinks, what he does, and ultimately what he buys is driven by his perceptions. Although customers can perceive things differently, no one discounts the cumulative effect of the company image as perceived through a managed brand. Brands are experienced through various encounters with things such as a company’s Website, letterhead, office environment, or even its receptionist. Brand efforts must permeate every level of an organization and every point of a customer’s experience to be effective.

How potential customers and clients “feel” is the operative word. People are seeking to connect with the brand. For this to happen, the brand must appeal on an emotional level.

Brands should be thought of as a set of values implied by the product, service or experience, and not the symbol, which is usually an artifact, such as a logo. The symbol is just the manifestation of the brand, the visualization of the emotional reality.

All of the values associated with the brand, good or bad, are brought to mind when the symbol is seen.

Brands, just like reputations, must be maintained. Successful branders of products, services, and experiences universally accept this concept. A white paper published by the American Institute of Graphic Arts (www.aiga.com) describes this process of maintaining these reputations or brands — in a dynamic and evolving environment — as “largely, an art”, though it is an art with defined edges.

Technically speaking, a brand is not created by designers or other professionals. It is created in the minds of customers, audiences, and participants through experiences with the brand. Brands, therefore, live outside the company or “brand owner.”

Brands are multifaceted experiences, and can only be created by multidisciplinary teams. Branding teams may include designers, marketers, engineers, scientists, and other consultants that shape the eventual outcome.

Traditional vs. Modern Branding Techniques

A traditional approach to branding may accurately gauge current market conditions, but it fails to evaluate the meaning and future of those conditions. Modern techniques monitor cultural changes, values, and marketplace trends with intuition and intelligence to create responsible and courageous solutions.

Traditional branding describes the relationship between the company and the customer as a promise to deliver. Brand-design programs require the formulation of a written Brand Promise that specifically states the company commitment. For example, International Truck & Engine, which recently implemented a significant branding program, summed up its commitment in a succinct 20-word Brand Promise: “International listens, understands, and delivers the best ways to move our customers ahead. On the road and in their business.”

More recent branding philosophy suggests contract law as a more useful model than a promise. As opposed to one-way promises, two-way contracts require both parties to fulfill their responsibilities. A successful brand is a relationship that both gives and asks for commitment from the customer.

connect asked a few of the best and brightest in the Utah branding community to give some feedback on which local organizations have some of the best logos and branding. The following organizations were nominated for review...

- 1) Franklin Covey
- 2) Gurus
- 3) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
- 4) Utah Transit Authority
- 5) Snowbird
- 6) Novell
- 7) Artichokes & Co

Here is what our panelists had to say...

David Newbold (richter7)

A number of the logos listed are somewhat boring, in my opinion. What makes them significant is not their bland design (LDS Church & Novell), but the comprehensive, synergistic manner in which they are applied. And, how well they work in a number of different mediums. Not many of those listed are conceptual in the least. They get black marks from me, for that reason. I find logos built on a design concept — rather than mere typography — are more memorable, more interesting, and more worthy of admiration.

You can have the best logo in the world, but if you’re unable — because of ill-fated strategy or absence of marketing funds — to let the world enjoy it and attach relevance to it, it’s essentially a wasted effort. That’s sad for another reason, too. Quite often, the most enjoyable, interesting logos are done for very small businesses. Perhaps it’s because they are more willing to take risks, or have fewer layers of approval. Whatever the reasons, the award annuals are full of marvelous logo designs that most of us will never see or appreciate.

Randall Smith (modern8)

I think that this discussion would be more interesting on which of these companies has built the strongest brand. Or indeed if any of them have. Regardless of the specifics of the logo design, has it contributed to the brand message? Which of the companies has a clear message and do we associate that message with the company when we see the logo? Within the limited scope of its market and with little or no marketing budget, I think Guru’s has done a remarkable job of branding exactly what the enterprise is about and surprisingly, it’s more than just serving food. Granted, the message takes place primarily within the restaurant, but it’s clear when you’re there.

Many of the nominees on the list are there, not because of a clear brand message, but because of the quality and intelligence of each

successive solution contributing to an ongoing successful corporate identity. I think that applies to Franklin Covey, Novell and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, whose logo is little more than typesetting. Novell has had some missteps with their logo design, but has maintained consistency through color and typeface. Franklin Covey has done a good job in catalogs and stores. But which of these organizations own their space? Just what does Novell do anyway? Can you explain it in a dozen words?

Brands exist in the mind of the consumer. The brand owner isn’t the company. How it’s perceived in your own mind determines the success of the brand. That’s why brands are so much more than a logo. They are established by every encounter with the organization, from the receptionist to the Christmas card, from the website to their advertising.

Thomas Melanson (independent)

I have to agree with Dave. Logos that are based on a strong concept not only are much more memorable, they also are easier to build a solid brand around. A number of these do have a small pictogram that they are trying to pass off as a concept. Franklin Covey has the handy compass. The concept here is they help guide you down life’s path of choices. Guru’s Foundation has the little, squatty guy. Emblematic with arms out stretched ready to disseminate wisdom, which emanates from his dotty head, or at least serve you up a bowl of Thai pasta. Their concept was based on the whole idea of the franchise not only serving food, but also giving back to the community through service and other means. Now UTA’s I really don’t understand. My guess would be that if they are two lines, busses and trains, taking you to the center of something. The city? It has always reminded me of the old British subway logo, the Underground, but not nearly as clean. (The logo, not the transportation.) The LDS church’s logo has a concept, although very subtle. They have placed the name Jesus Christ slightly larger and in the center. The idea is to illustrate the emphasis of Jesus Christ and His teachings being the focus of the church. Snowbird is a good example of a nice logo working on different levels. Recognizable at first is the geometric bird. But as you look at it longer, the negative shape of the wings can be thought of as slopes and the wings themselves can be read as hills; one cold and blue for winter skiing and one green and living for summer hiking. None of these have reached Nike and CBS levels of being able to drop the logo type completely and communicate the company within only an icon. But these are much smaller audiences, and I doubt that they ever will. The ultimate success of a logo is how well they communicate with their audiences. A few of these could still use some work, but conceptually they do offer something and they do communicate with their audiences.

The 5D Process to Branding

1) Discovery: Questions About Today And Tomorrow

How is the brand currently perceived? What is the current position? Figure out where the brand now stands, before you figure out what direction to take it. What are its strengths and weaknesses? What are the opportunities and threats? What are the strategic goals behind existing marketing efforts? Who is the primary target and how do they behave?

This is the investigative and research phase. Armed with new insights, talk to the competition, to vendors, and to customers.

2) Distill: Questions About What's Most Likely to Work

Once it's determined where the brand is now, and what it is to become, discuss how to get it there. What tactics are appropriate to achieve the strategic goals? What tonality and aesthetic is appropriate for the target? What is the Brand Contract, the target's "take away" after engaging the brand? What mechanisms are necessary to achieve an accurate measure of success against strategy? What efforts are necessary to continue the relationship once begun?

Comb through pop culture icons and societal clues, and look for new concepts on which to base or revive ailing brands. In this phase, identify opportunities in the marketplace through sifting, sorting, organizing and segmenting the information gathered during the Discovery Phase. For example, branding positions identified in advertising from both competitors and non-industry sources may be analyzed to develop a pallet of images for both analogous and contrasting comparisons. The solutions that result must be in line with the values and lifestyles of the target market.

3) Depict: From Questions Come Answers

From these questions come a direction that can be confidently pursued. The direction is depicted in the form of a Concept Board and is the final step in the pre-design process. The Concept Board takes the client's complex business strategies and molds them into a visual/verbal representation that cues and triggers customer emotive values. This is the "litmus test" against which all creative decisions are measured, keeping the work focused and on strategy.

4) Design: The Creative Solution

Though this is the hardest part, it's the most obvious; the best understood, and needs the least explanation.

5) Deployment: Put it out There

Post it, print it, publish it, and make it. Immediately after launch, begin to generate findings. From this valuable data will emerge more questions, which will continue the focus on the most efficient, effective way to meet brand objectives.

No matter how much brand designers design and name, if a brand isn't viable or sustainable, it won't be strong enough and, thus, not successful. On the other hand, well-managed and well-executed brands that keep business objectives and target audience in mind will effectively capture the customer and maximize return on investment.

Randall Smith is President and Creative Director of modern8, a Salt Lake City-based consulting firm, that specializes in brand design and reconstruction for business-to-business marketing communications. modern8 recently developed "Perception Branding", a proprietary visual process of brand design. More information is available at www.modern8.com. Randall can be reached at randall@modern8.com. ■■