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WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT PEACE, LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING?

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INFLUENCES OF A PREDOMINANT RELIGION ON UTAH'S BUSINESS CLIMATE

column

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when you need to re-brand

I recently prepared a branding proposal for a local 50-year-old company. It was comprehensive, involving both strategy and creativity. The company is still sitting on the proposal, but I think it is a textbook example of a company that really needs to evolve its brand because it will truly benefit from it. I don't think everybody is in the same boat — some companies don't need it. But here are some reasons why this company needs to refocus its brand (check for your own similarities).

This company clings to its history. It eulogizes its past and acclaims its former accomplishments. Unfortunately, when continually looking back, it's hard to stay relevant. Customer viewpoints that shaped the brand in the past are no longer true. (This isn't uncommon. I have another long-term client with the same problem.) Though the company leads in technological developments, the brand expression doesn't communicate it.

A few years ago, the company went through a graphic revision of the company name and logo. Management believed that the activity was re-branding the company, not realizing that a brand is not a logo. Nor is it an identity, a company's products, or a new ad campaign.

A company doesn't own its brand; its customers do. A brand is a person's gut feeling about your company. Brand management is how a company manages the perception of the brand in minds of people — mostly achieved through brand differentiation.

Every time you engage a customer with the brand, no matter what the touchpoint, you should communicate the brand promise: the "take away" (the single most important thing you want him/her to understand about your company, whether navigating your Web site, reviewing company literature, or in an exploratory phone call.)

This particular company doesn't have a brand brief. It's navigating without a plan. The brand brief is the litmus test against which decisions are made. It includes adjectives that describe the brand personality and attributes. It contains images that evoke emotional response and bring visualization to abstract ideas. It has sections on situation analysis, stakeholders, known parameters, the target market, competitors, and assessing results.

Brand definition is just as important internally as it is externally. Every employee should be a brand ambassador, not just those in the marketing department. Each should evaluate decisions recognizing whether it helps or hurts the brand.

There are three major divisions within the company, each selling to different markets. This is inherently difficult because an unfocused brand doesn't stand for anything. The brand architecture between the divisions is not clear. It neither displays a graphic relationship between the divisions, nor clearly differentiates. The result is that the company doesn't capitalize on the equity of the parent entity, nor does it appeal to the target market of the divisions.

Federal Express is a company that has done it right. Divisions of the company, like FedEx Ground or FedEx Home Delivery, each share graphic, color and naming strategies that capitalize, yet differentiate.

Here's where a well-conceived and well-executed re-brand makes the most sense. The company's products are among the most expensive in its industry. The company can't compete based on price. In this case, you must raise the perception of the brand's value. You have to be willing to pay more because you believe you're getting more.

I've been buying Apple Computer products since 1984. Macs cost more than comparably equipped PCs, but I keep shelling out the extra dollars because I believe they're worth it. Of course, it could be because I like the style and design, or because I believe Macs lead technologically or maybe they are better suited to my industry.

Regardless, my perception of the Apple brand is what I call charismatic; a brand for which I believe there is no substitute — thus my willingness to pay the higher price. It's also interesting to note that brands that define such strong loyalty pay more attention to style and design. Aesthetics are one of those symbolic cues upon which we often base choices because we're simply too busy to compare features and benefits in our information overload society.

Perhaps by the time you read this, I'll be in the process of helping my client with a new brand strategy. But if not — well, I got a column out of it. fin