

## BRAND STRATEGY

# THE ART OF BRANDING

Guy Kawasaki | April 21st, 2009



In this Web 2.0, user-generated, Open-Source, social-networking world, it's so easy to forget that just because something can be done doesn't mean it should be done. All branding, no matter whether it's on a billboard, blog, website, or Twitter, should adhere to these simple principles. Here are nine keys to the art of branding.

- 1. Seize the high ground.** Great branding positions your company along the lines of doing good, empowering people, increasing efficiency, and fostering creativity. There's nothing about screwing the competition or making a lot of money. Think about it: When have you ever bought a product to hurt its competition?
- 2. Create one message.** Volvo stands for safety. Toyota stands for value. Audi stand for four-wheel drive. Ferrari stands for sexiness. You should be so lucky that your brand stands for one thing. Trying to make it stand for more is futile, stupid, and downright dangerous. Apple will never stand for corporate computing, for example, no matter how hard it tries.
- 3. Speak English.** Not so much English per se, but speak without jargonese. Your, and your employee's, fluency with technology terms and acronyms doesn't transfer to the rest of the world. At most, people walk into Best Buy wanting a HDTV; how many come in asking for 1080i with HDMI connectors?

- 4. Strive for humanness.** People relate to brands in “warm and fuzzy” social terms: does it make me feel happy, safe, secure, cool, or sexy? Brands thrive along emotional parameters and not bits, bytes, and dpi. For all the steel, rubber, and glass that a Harley Davidson represents, the brand comes down to being powerful and cool.
- 5. Apply the opposite test.** Most companies describe their products or services as if they have the sole marketing message out there. “Our gizmo is fast, secure, and easy to use” they say. It’s as if every competitor is saying, “Our gizmo is slow, hackable, and hard to use.” Therefore, take the opposite test: Is what you’re saying the opposite of what your competition is saying? If not, you’re both saying the same thing, and your branding isn’t effective.
- 6. Cascade the message.** Let’s just say that you have created the ultimate branding message. Hallelujah, your work is done, right? Nope, not at all. Obviously, you have to spread the word, but you have to cascade it too starting from the CEO all the way down to the the summer hire in the mail room. And don’t forget your board of directors.
- 7. Focus on PR and word of mouth, not advertising.** Many companies don’t have much money to advertise these days, but advertising isn’t the most effective way to establish a brand. Truly, branding starts with the quality of what you make. Then PR, word of mouth, and other less formal and cheaper channels (like Twitter) take over.
- 8. Examine the bounce back.** After you’ve cascaded the message and spread it externally too, listen to what bounces back because people might not have heard, understood, and accepted what you said. You may think that your brand stands for sexy, but if people still think it stands for safe, your branding isn’t working.
- 9. Flow with the go.** Ultimately, your customers, not you, decide what your brand stands for so when you get the bounce back, consider altering your branding. (Or, if you have an established brand, returning to your roots.) You may tweak some of the parameters of what your brand stands for, but ultimately it’s the one thing that customers have decided, so take that and run with it.

There you go: nine simple practices to improve your branding. I hope these tips help you change the world because that’s what a good brand does.

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