

BRANDING

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS BRANDING AND WHAT IT DOES FOR YOU

BRANDING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT OFF-THE-BALANCE-SHEET ASSET OF ANY COMPANY. YOUR BRAND IS MUCH MORE THAN YOUR LOGO, NAME, OR SLOGAN—IT'S THE ENTIRE EXPERIENCE YOUR PROSPECTS, CUSTOMERS, AND EMPLOYEES HAVE WITH YOUR COMPANY, WHAT THEY PERCEIVE ABOUT YOU, AND HOW YOU MAKE THEM FEEL. BRANDING IS A PROCESS, NOT A RACE, AND NOT A LONE EVENT. A WELL-MANAGED BRAND IS ALWAYS MAKING ADJUSTMENTS.

At its core, branding is the most intense and effective form of persuasion. When done right, branding creates a culture that you can use to influence your internal (employees) and external (customers/prospects) audiences to take the actions you desire. It makes tangible the intangibles of culture, and gets all stakeholders moving in the same direction as they enthusiastically rally behind the same images and ideas. Branding motivates people to do the “right” thing, as defined by the company, along with:

- Differentiates you from your competition by bringing your competitive position and value propositions to life
- Positions you as a certain “something” in the mind of your prospects and customers so they automatically think of you when a specific need arises
- Tells your prospects and customers what they get when they purchase from/participate with you—often, culture is the tipping point for these decisions
- Builds your culture, creating a strong and cohesive organization of employees focused on common goals, who are committed to delivering your message to the marketplace
- Motivates internal audiences to rally around a common idea and actively support your organization’s objectives so you live up to your brand promise and deliver what your external stakeholders expect from your brand
- Boosts the bottom line through the cost-savings byproducts of efficient performance (a/k/a cohesive effort), brand recognition (a/k/a marketplace knowledge of your services/products), and brand loyalty (a/k/a continuous participation/buying from the brand)
- Creates brand equity, which supports your pricing structure by creating a more valued product/service in the eyes of your stakeholders

INTRODUCTION

WHAT BRANDING DOES FOR YOU

Branding is about the experience conveyed and the emotional impact that your company/service/product has. Branding extends to every aspect of business—how the receptionist answers the phones, what salespeople wear on sales calls, email signatures, your positioning statement, and every piece of marketing collateral you use (e.g., newsletters, emails, brochures, posters, invitations). Everything you offer and every day-to-day interaction you have with your market is an extension of what your brand promises.

Internally, branding mobilizes constituents to consistently deliver the brand promise. Without a solid culture where the brand promise is defined, confusion and inconsistency results, which waters down the company's efforts.

OUR SERVICES AND APPROACH

CREATING A BRAND EXPERIENCE

In the end, it is the internal and external customers who define the brand based on their experience, as intended by the company. Sage helps with the creation of that experience so your audiences take away what you want them to. We provide different levels of branding, from creating a complete brand identity (including logo design and core messaging) to designing and implementing specific branding and communications campaigns.

STEP 1 **DEFINING THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT & DEVELOPING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY**

Brand strategy is the how, what, when, and to whom you plan on communicating your product or service. Your brand's strategy should be based on company goals and consider your current culture and what you want your ideal culture to be.

PROJECT/BRAND SUMMARY

Our efforts begin with an intense focus on creating a comprehensive project/brand summary, which we use as the collaborative tool to plot the pathway from start to finish. This initial step starts with an intake of information to create a true understanding of your goals and position within the market. We focus on the following:

- **Culture:** We start with your authenticity—the core purpose, vision, mission, position, values, and character.
- **Competitive Advantage:** Our strategy focuses on what you do best. Chances are you're not the only company out there selling your product or service. We figure out what your company does best beyond what you sell, and make it a part of your brand strategy.
- **Ideals:** We factor in not just where you are now, but your aspirations of where you want to be.
- **Emotions:** It is critical to find a way to connect to your customers—both internal and external—on an emotional level. Emotions are the driver of action.

CREATING A BRAND EXPERIENCE

That's the essence of developing a brand strategy—the foundation of your communication that builds authentic relationships between you and your audience. We define a brand strategy that you are able to use in marketing, advertising, public relations, and social media activities to consistently and accurately reinforce your character. Without defining the core strategy, one-off messaging results and all channels of communication become a hit-or-miss expense.

STEP 2 MESSAGING

Every company needs a voice that reflects your brand. Sage helps you find your voice and then applies it to all written communication and incorporates it into the visual imagery of all materials.

POSITIONING STATEMENTS

Every great brand has a fundamental brand message: a compact positioning statement that declares why the brand matters and what it stands for at its core. Messaging provides the words that help customers and prospects understand a firm's value (why it's useful) and values (what it believes in). Your entire brand, including your logo design, should be focused around a consistent brand message.

We ask the following questions to hone your brand message:

- Who are you? (How am I to relate to your brand?)
- What do you do? (Does this brand have any intrinsic value to me?)
- Why does it matter? (Are there mutual benefits to engaging this brand?)
- Why should I care? (Is it enough to make me act accordingly?)

We develop a positioning statement that communicates the values and key differentiators that define your brand, and then use that core message consistently. Consistency in your message is the key to differentiation. We don't talk about things that don't relate to or enhance your brand. If it doesn't tie back to your brand's message, you will have trouble differentiating yourself from competitors.

CREATING A BRAND EXPERIENCE

CONTENT

Creating the right amalgamation of content is critical when writing copy that supports your brand message and tells your story to your markets. Your messaging appears in many places. We conduct the appropriate research so you invest your branding efforts on the platform that communicates to the right channels and that matches specific campaign objectives. Sage helps develop content and implement creative design for a range of branding tools including:

- **Advertising campaigns (internal and external).** What components should be part of your advertising campaign (e.g., posters, advertisements, emails, mailings)? What theme will consistently convey the same core message throughout the campaign? What publications should you target?
- **Brochures.** How do you want to tell your story? Will you use this only when meeting face-to-face with clients or is this something you plan to mail? What size brochure is appropriate?
- **Websites.** What is the purpose of your websites? Do you use it to attract new prospects? Is it a resource for information? Is it a recruitment tool? Does it set the tone and establish your brand identity with the general public?
- **Business cards.** What graphics and typography should you include on your business cards to reflect your brand? Are titles important or areas of expertise?
- **Email signatures.** How can you format your signature to reinforce your brand image? Again, are titles important or areas of expertise? Is there a footer that all company emails should include?
- **Client presentations.** How do you make sure that your client understands who you really are at your core? Do you have the visuals to reflect your brand message? Is your written message concise? Does it support what you are saying?
- **Social media.** How do you use Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter? What is the purpose of your social media engagement? What other organizations do you follow? How do you engage your followers?
- **Taglines.** What words sum up the tone and premise of your brand?
- **Emails.** How frequently do you want to email your clients? Should you send emails for invitations, training, announcements, reminders? Are your emails consistent with the look and navigation of your website? Do your emails include links to your social media sites?
- **Videos.** Who is the spokesperson for your company in a video? What clients will agree to be on camera? What projects can you highlight?
- **Holiday greetings.** What holidays do you want to celebrate with your clients? What is the emotion you want to evoke (e.g., good will, tradition, fun, excitement, comfort)?
- **Direct mail/invitations.** What tone do you want to convey? What size should the piece be? Is it a self-mailer or in an envelope? Should the envelope have writing on the outside? How should the piece be folded (or is it flat)?
- **Newsletters.** Who is your audience (internal, prospects, current clients)? How frequently should you send your newsletter? Should it be print or electronic? Should you post it on your website? How long should it be? How long should the articles be? Are there regular columns/sections?
- **Case studies.** What clients are willing to provide testimonials? What format/structure should these take? Do you have photos you can use to illustrate your project?
- **Posters.** What is your visual theme? Is there a slogan that conveys the theme and reinforces your brand message? Is your message concise and easy to read at-a-glance?

CREATING
A BRAND
EXPERIENCE

STEP 3 VISUALS

Brand identity is highly influenced by its visual presentation. If your brand visuals aren't connected to your voice and brand message, there is a subtle disorientation that happens, and things don't feel lined up on an intuitive level. Everything needs to be tuned into your message's essence and deeper story. Brand confusion waters down your audiences' perceptions of who you are and what you have to offer.

Visual brand starts with a strong foundation—a solid logo and corporate identity—and evolves into visual storytelling. Your brand visuals directly and subliminally communicate your company's values and personality through compelling imagery and design style. When properly designed, brand visuals create an emotional connection between the brand and the consumer. Like messaging, successful visuals create a memorable experience for the consumer, encourage repeat business, and boost the company's economic health. Through design, you showcase the brand's unique personality.

Sage's designers are intuitively poised to align the many subtle nuances that support your brand. We understand what that looks like, and design a finished piece that makes sense at a core level and speaks to the right people. By bringing in visual thinkers at the initial stages of your campaigns, we help you visualize your story across different channels. Our designers create all brand identity materials, ranging from initial logo concept and development, to defining artistic elements such as color and font styles, to designing marketing collateral and final work products, as outlined above.

We achieve effective visual brand identity through the consistent use of particular visual elements to create distinction:

- **Color:** We employ color to create differentiation in a visually cluttered marketplace and to convey different emotions and aspects of your brand.
- **Continuity:** Creating a consistent image creates recognition, backs up your brand position via voice and language, and engenders trust for the brand between you and your markets.
- **Connection:** By pulling out the elements that need to be illuminated, we create the connection that motivates people to use you as their resource or service provider.
- **Core Message Translation:** We keep your visuals to the point and on-topic to your brand message.

SUMMARY

CREATING, NURTURING, AND STEERING YOUR BRAND

Sage works with you to create a brand identity that is aligned with your corporate goals, values, and ideals. We are also equipped to maintain the consistency of your brand with the changes you experience in your business. We start with developing a brand strategy that accurately reflects your culture AND who you aspire to be. We reinforce this strategy through positioning statements and consistent messaging in a variety of forms. Sage's creative team then creates the content and visuals to support your brand identity—from initial logo design to work product content creation, design, and implementation.