

Keeping Your Brand Fresh

Your brand, brand message and brand promise are integral parts of your connection with your customers.



By Stan Pohmer

I recently came across a fairly succinct definition of a brand: “The intangible sum of a retailer or product’s attributes: its name, packaging and price positioning, its history, its reputation, and the way it’s advertised.”

Your brand helps define who you are, what you offer, the way you operate and what you stand for as a company. Your brand sets expectations for your customers that can be measured based on their experiences with you. And your brand is your calling card to consumers that aren’t currently doing business with you, to help them make the decision to shop your store, if your brand aligns with their personal needs and values. In my simple mind, a brand is nothing more than a promise you make to your customer (or potential customer) of what they can expect from you if they choose to do business with you.

It took a lot of effort, time, and emotional and financial resources to develop your brand, and we tend to believe that, once a brand is created or established, it is a static and unchanging message and concept that we can use for our business forever. But the recent pandemic and rapidly changed consumer behaviors have shown that, instead, a brand must be a living, breathing and changing image of your business that is constantly evolving and adapting to the new needs and expectations of your customer, and staying in synch with your customers’ needs and wants is the only way you will maintain any sense of relevancy with them.

Brand Commonalities

Try this: think about the consumer brands you most favorably respond to and believe in; it might be one or two of these extraordinarily successful brands ... Apple or Lululemon, Nordstrom or Pinterest, Google or Target, Amazon or McDonald’s, Disney or Starbucks, Costco or Microsoft, as examples. What are the three biggest common denominators that they share in their brand success?

First, they were all built from the outside in, meaning they first identified what their customers needed,

wanted and expected, and then combined this with their individual brand value propositions to create their brand message or statement.

Secondly, as their customers’ wants and expectations evolve, they are continually updating and revising their brands to keep pace with their customers.

And thirdly, they all have integrity, the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. These brands have all gotten increasingly in tune to their customers, how they live and their lifestyles.

These three common denominators are core to the creation and constant evolution of their value propositions and brand messages, those statements used by a brand to tell customers why they should buy from them and not from their competitors; it defines how your offerings fill their needs, the benefits you offer that makes their experience with you better than with your competitors, and why you should be their preferred choice.

So the key questions for you to ponder ... does your brand reflect today’s marketplace and customer wants and needs? Does your brand message and promise communicate what you stand for and what you can deliver, setting realistic expectations for your customer? Or is it time to think about updating and refreshing your brand, evolving to better reflect who you are today?

The post-pandemic customer has been conditioned to expect retailers to address things like convenience, transparency, digital/social, knowledge and education, service, and wellness; does your brand realistically convey these expectations to your consumer?

Refreshing Your Brand

Your goal in refreshing and updating your brand is to connect with the consumer on multiple levels both emotionally and physically through their shopping experience. You want your customer to be passionate about you and your brand. As you think about your brand and your brand message and promises, consider these 10 Commandments as brand guideposts.

1. **Understand who you are and who you are not ...** What value do you bring to your customer? Are you enabling your customer to become emotionally attached so the brand becomes part of their lifestyle? And don’t

mislead your customer; setting false expectations for your customer is the fastest way to drive them to your competition!

2. **Clearly define your target customer ...** Don't try to be all things to all people. Though we'd all love to appeal to all consumers, the truth is that most of your sales and profits come from a small niche of the marketplace. This small but very loyal base are the ones who connect with your brand emotionally, and the ones that you should focus on with all your energy, resources and marketing.
3. **Build an ownable narrative ...** Telling your story authentically is the best way to communicate with your customer, a narrative that is reflective of your brand, but also completely relevant to the end user. Your company and your team are unique, make sure your customers know about your uniqueness and how it benefits them.
4. **Talk with your consumer, not at them ...** Be honest and open; transparency builds trust and a believable connection with your customer.
5. **Be disciplined and focused ...** Clearly define what you are trying to accomplish, what it will take to get there, and what resources will be needed to make it happen.
6. **Create a "reason to believe" ...** Your brand message sets you apart; without a differentiated brand, you are just another retailer or a commodity in the consumer's mind. What's your "passion point" that customers can rally around?
7. **Ensure your leaders are likable, believable and accessible ...** Management must build trust and confidence in all your constituencies — employees, customers and your supply partners. Being authentic, honest, approachable and credible are essential in making this a reality.
8. **Be consistent in all communications ...** No matter where or how your customer sees or hears your brand message — advertising, social media, on your website or in your store — the message must be the same.
9. **Find a North Star ...** Every company, no matter how small, needs one individual who is the brand manager, the person responsible for ensuring that your brand is always relevant and in synch with consumer needs and expectations, and is constantly monitoring the marketplace for changes that you'll need to address — and has the power to make the changes needed!
10. **Stand for something beyond profits ...** Consumers admire companies who believe in the greater good. Whether it's something like sustainability, reducing fertilizer usage and run-off, water conservation or recycling, you have a story to tell that your customer can relate to and builds their trust in you.

Remember that your brand, brand message and brand promise are living, breathing and integral parts of your connection with your customer and must be nurtured and refreshed as consumer needs and expectations change and the marketplace evolves. 🌱

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