

New brand identity development is a complex business filled with many challenges. Perhaps the biggest is differentiating the brand so it is authentic, ownable, original and unique. Whether creating a new brand or revitalizing an existing one, identity and its essence are critical to a brand's long-term value.

Most new brand identities result from a business opportunity – the launch of a new product or service or, for existing brands, changes in the category or competitive landscape. Further complicating new brand development is the over-saturation of brands in the marketplace as companies discover that creating and managing brands add value to their businesses and help them compete more successfully.

So how does a new brand distinguish itself in this crowded global marketplace? And what are some of the critical elements for success?

Understand Your Target

To create a successful brand identity you must know and understand your target audience and how to reach them. The new brand needs to connect and be relevant in the consumer's mind. You need to examine what motivates your target audience and consider how trends, such as fashion or color, may affect your brand's identity. Consumer preferences are often influenced by popular movies, music or major sporting events such as the Olympics. It is important to get to know your consumers on a personal level – beyond watching them behind a two-way mirror at focus groups. Interact personally with your consumers, observe them and understand their habits. Defining your target audience as females aged 25-54 years is too broad. Take the micro-approach to understanding your consumers so you can connect with them emotionally.

Create an Emotional Bond

A brand identity is built around two types of deliverable benefits. First is the foundation on which your brand is built – what your product or service is or does. The second benefit is strictly emotional and what keeps the relationship going and builds brand loyalty. It is what you want consumers to think, feel and do after seeing your brand. To achieve long-term success, a brand must connect at the emotional level to its consumer base. It needs to build a personal relationship with the consumer and create trust. The brand needs to promise a level of performance and reliability that ultimately causes repeat patronage and builds market share. Consumers develop a bond with their preferred brands through the way a brand fits them and becomes a part of their lifestyle.

Be Unique/Be Personal

A brand needs to express its identity clearly and in a unique manner. The brand's identity needs to distinguish and differentiate the product or service. You need to develop a personality for your brand as though it is a person with whom you can identify. Think of it as your best friend. Your brand needs a soul! This is not a simple task because the identity may be expressed through a variety of mediums such as graphic identity, product design, service ethic or environmental design. The brand essence needs to be well thought-out so that it can leverage its attributes to articulate and project its personality with constituents. This is what gives the brand dimension and reach.

Integrate Your Marketing Elements

Starbucks Coffee is an excellent example of a brand that has been built through multiple dimensions. Coffee is just a commodity.

However, through stringent brand standards that include graphic identity, premium product standards, quality service ethic and cool environments, it is Starbucks! The Starbucks **experience** begins upon entering the store when you immediately engage the brand through your senses. Great aroma, cool environment and music combine to set a mood.

A Starbucks employee, trained in the art of coffee, serves your custom-made drink. Whether you enjoy it in the relaxed, intellectually stimulating environment, or hit the road with your latte, you have just treated yourself to a reward. What has motivated you to part with \$3 for a cup of java is the brand and how it makes you feel inside. The Starbucks brand delivers a promise that keeps customers coming back because they love the experience, the feeling they get from the brand. They are emotionally attached.

Be Consistent

The Starbucks brand has been so successful because all of the brand's elements reflect a 360° integrated marketing program. All messages that you communicate about your brand must be true to its core essence. If you keep experimenting with your brand's personality, you will create confusion and risk diluting its ability to establish equity and heritage upon which you can continually build.

You should evolve your brand to remain competitive. However, in doing so, you must remain loyal to your brand and hold onto its values. Your brand should represent a consistent experience for your consumers across a variety of mediums, including television, print, packaging, promotions and the internet. This is how you build recognition and establish a known entity.

Avoid Becoming A Commodity

Brand identity management requires a 24-7 commitment. A brand, whether under development or already launched, needs constant nurturing. It needs to remain top-of-mind with consumers and not get stale. You need to constantly take inventory of how the brand is being perceived as well as what your competition is doing to out-market your brand.

Brands need to be able to respond to market conditions and to protect their position within a given category. Brands can lose their edge through inconsistent management, product quality, and increased competition or price sensitivity.

The bottom line is that brands need constant attention to continually differentiate them in the saturated marketplace, to remain unique, and most of all avoid commodification.

The brand and its essence need to be authentic and consistent with the brand promise. It needs to be believable and memorable. It also needs to be unique with a clear point of difference versus other products or services in which it directly and indirectly competes. With the proliferation of branding in virtually every category, it is challenging to develop a new identity that is truly unique.

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