



# what's your **Brand Strategy**

Developing a cohesive brand usually takes a deliberate approach.

Brand strategy is one way to link everything your company does together: from making products and providing services to marketing efforts. A brand strategy creates brand awareness, sampling, and loyalty by making a brand stand out amongst its competitors, who are offering similar products and services. Your brand should demand attention and create interest and a desire to sample or buy your product or service. Since most customers are constantly inundated with marketing materials from various competing brands and companies, how well your brand stands out in the clutter of your target customers' daily lives will dictate how much money you make.

At the end of the day, brand strategy drives revenue. It's about raising your bottom line.

More than the hours-long branding sessions themselves, brand strategy can provide the building blocks of the company itself and become your ticket to finding new customers and improving your margins.

Consistency is king here. Visual representation and messaging have to be in sync and consistent across all marketing materials, and they must reflect how the company presents itself to everyone—its own workers, investors, customers, and competitors. More than consistency, every piece of marketing collateral has to feel like it belongs to a single, cohesive unit. Any inconsistency or even slight contradiction can lose you clients.

When everyone is speaking in one voice and the brand attributes you see below become second nature, developing marketing strategies, materials, and campaigns becomes much easier and more effective. Your brand strategy should create or redefine your culture around the brand attributes while constantly pushing the brand message, even when you aren't saying anything.

How can you identify and define your brand, and control how others think about it? That's the question that brand strategy tries to answer.



## Brand Identity

Just like in everyday life, you have to know yourself. Knowing your brand takes more effort than you might think. Let's start with the services and products your company offers. Starting from this obvious point allows you to build a foundation for your brand's identity. If your company manufactures specialized parts for engineering companies, for example, your brand identity will be far different than a cloud-based communications platform.

The brand identity goes beyond the products and services themselves, however. The next step in this progression concerns your clients. What are they looking for? What are their 'pain points'? Can they afford your product or service? What are your customers' values? What separates and makes your brand different from the competitors' brands?

The idea isn't to shift your entire company culture to match your presumed customers' values, but to present to them a brand that shares at least some of their sentiments and provides the things and services they need. The brand identity and overall strategy should take the consumer's needs to a higher emotional level of fulfillment, self-actualization, or transcendence. When your brand is known to go above and beyond to this level of fulfillment, people form an emotional connection to it. The truly transcendent brands make their customers feel fulfilled on many levels, and customers reward the brand with continued business. Customers then want to spend a lifetime with their trusted, beloved brand. Think "A Coke and a Smile", "Avis: We Try Harder", and "BMW: Designed for Your Driving Pleasure". What feelings do those well-known marketing slogans evoke in customers?



## Brand Perception

When marketers talk about brand perception, they're talking about what people think when they hear about your brand, see your logo, or read an article about your company. It's not enough to be 'top-of-mind'. It's about the emotional response to your brand.

Your brand perception must have a positive emotion attached to it. The stronger the association between emotion and your brand, the more successful your brand strategy is. When your customers start to have an emotional response the moment they see your logo, walk into your store, sample your product, or engage with your employees, your strategy is working.

How do you make customers connect emotionally? One way is to solve their problems. Most customers, whether they're other businesses or people walking into your store, are trying to solve a problem: Their dog needs food. Their factories need better parts to run more efficiently. They want to feel more confident by buying a new wardrobe or going to the salon. When your brand is the first thing they think of to solve their problem, you're doing it correctly. In addition, aren't only buying the product or service you're offering that will solve their problem or make their life easier in some way, they're also buying the image associated with your brand's perceived character, reputation, personality, and feeling... so making your brand perception positive counts.



## Brand Difference

The brand difference contains the elements of your products or services that separate it from your competitors. Defining your unique product attributes is the first step in differentiating your brand.

For some companies, this is easy. If you have your niche cornered and you manufacture specialized, high-quality products, you've already differentiated yourself from your weak or non-specialized competition. It's more difficult for other brands that sell common products like soda, but you have to take what you have and clearly define it. What is good about your products and services? What is better about your product than similar products?

Your brand must present key attributes in the brand's services or products that uniquely separate your brand from your competitors.

For some brands, this is where demographics and psychographics merge into one brand strategy tool. Emotional connection with a brand's attributes establishes trust and loyalty, which leads us to Brand Position.

## Brand Position

Your brand's position refers to your target customers and the reasons they're engaging with your brand and buying your products or services in preference to others. Part of the reason why your brand should appeal to your target customers over your competitors comes from your brand difference, of course, but here we're looking for concrete reasons you're giving to target customers to interact with your brand. We're never straying too far from the customer, but the brand position has as much to do with your internal decisions as it does with your customers.

Here, we're looking for the sum of all experiences a consumer or customer has with a brand. What are the aspects of your brand that appeal to your audience? How do your customers select your brand over a brand offering similar products? Are your products more affordable than your competitors? Are your services simply superior? Do your products appear utilitarian or luxurious? Are they high-end or entry-level?

I'm a Pepsi drinker. I don't stay loyal to all Pepsi products, but when given a choice of cola-flavored, syrup-infused, carbonated beverages, I usually go for the Pepsi. The idea that Pepsi Cola tastes remarkably different than Coca Cola is absurd, but I choose Pepsi because I have an emotional connection with the drink.

I won't go into all the deep-seeded reasons why I choose Pepsi over Coke, but the idea is to establish emotional links with your customers based on your unique approach to solving their problems.

Too often, businesses miss their target audience because they don't know who is truly drawn to their products or services—they're trying to capture customers from the wrong demographic and marketing the wrong brand attributes to the wrong people. Brand positioning attempts to understand why your customers should flock to your businesses based on their needs and their personal experience of your business. A good brand positioning statement relates to the desired and actual brand perception about its products or services.

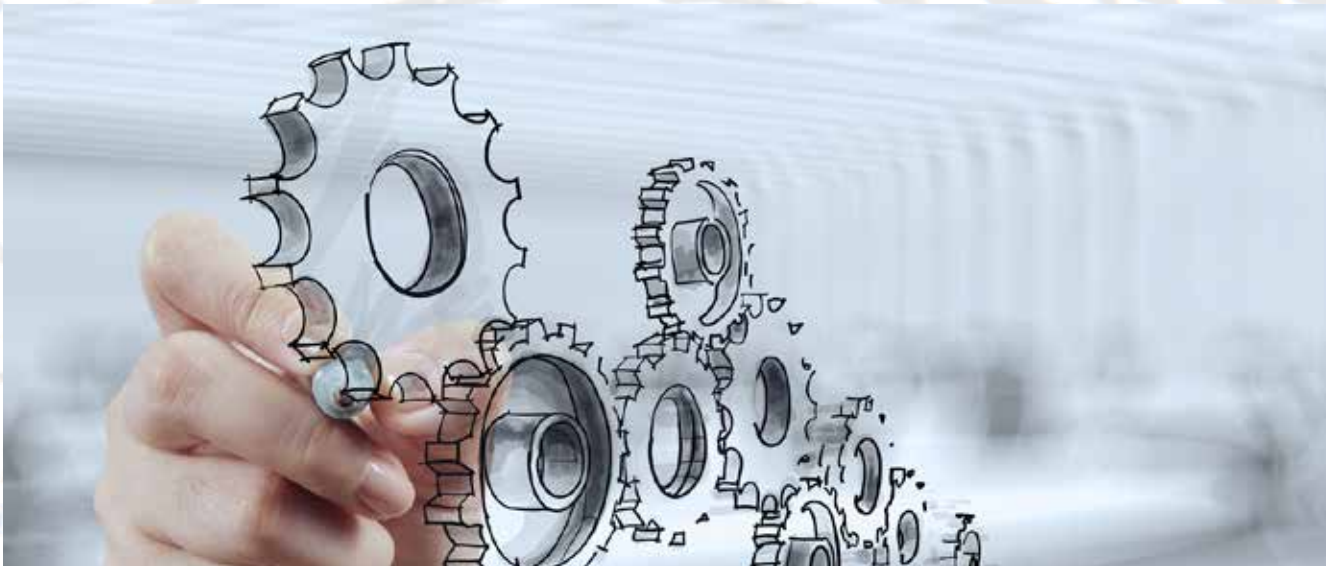


## Brand Promise

Your brand promise is what exactly you will deliver to meet and exceed your customers' expectations. What are your customers' deeper needs, and do you have the ability to serve those needs? This is an extension of your brand's positioning. The brand promise is the tangible benefit that makes your product or service desirable to them. You can do this in two ways: spell out your promise to the public—some companies even label their brand promise literally their 'promise—or your brand promise can manifest itself more subtly in the expression and delivery of the overall brand experience.

All brands and businesses purport to satisfy their customers' needs. The differentiation here comes from the ability to deliver at a higher level than your competition.

People buy toothpaste because they expect cleaner teeth. But why do they buy Crest over Colgate? Because they view Crest as being better able to deliver the benefits their products promise. Your brand promise matters to customers. If you don't deliver what you promise, they'll walk—you won't matter to them. This is true across all product and service categories, and for customers of all walks of life.



## Brand Benefit

This concept is pretty straightforward. After you've promised benefits to your customer, it's time to deliver on those promises. The benefit is the end-result of a customer engaging with your brand. What have you delivered to the customer besides the basic service or product? What problem have you solved for the customer? The closer your brand benefit is to your brand promise, the more satisfied customers you'll have, and the more positively your brand will be thought of.

The brand benefit should also reach your customers on a higher level. A customer needs a product—a tool, let's say. This particular tool is difficult to come by and expensive, but it's the kind of tool that makes any backyard project, home improvement effort, or any simple household task much easier (I want this tool now). If the customer knows that they can purchase this tool from you, either because they've heard good things about your products or they've purchased products from you before, and the tool you supply to them will help them make their home a better place to live, they'll come back to you again and again. The higher level of fulfillment here isn't the high-quality, useful tool itself, it's the benefits the customer then gets from buying the tool. The customer is fulfilled with the tool he or she wants, and he or she is fulfilled in making their house a home.



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# Brands that Work

## Brand Image

Your brand's image relates to the visual signifiers your brand carries with it. The big, mass consumer corporations take this very seriously. That's why every time you see the Golden Arches, you know it's a McDonald's, not a Burger King. But logos are not the only thing incorporated in your brand's image. Logos themselves might not be that important to a business-to-business manufacturer, for example. For them, the brand's style, voice, and essence are more important. The brand image is also its unique spoken, written, and visual language.

How are less obvious brand image aspects like style, voice, and essence communicated to potential clients? With patience and a strict adherence to the uniform brand attributes that make the business unique. Getting a positive reaction to your brand's name, letterhead, sales representatives, etc. takes a long time to achieve. If your message is consistent, your visual style is consistent—that is, your business cards look the same, your emails are written with the same tone, your uniforms, etc.—and you consistently deliver on your brand promise, you'll start seeing your customers forming positive opinions of your brand and sticking with them whenever they see any representation of the brand.

## Why is Brand Strategy so Important?

Above all, your brand strategy has to be consistent. Everyone must be working toward the same ideals. Your organization has to buy into the brand, too. Once your brand is consistent, customers will recognize your benefits, and you'll see better customer loyalty and trust. Brand strategy will only increase your business's bottom line if the deliverables and messages of your brand become incorporated into your company's culture. Your brand strategy isn't just a way to show your customers and potential customers why they should purchase your products and services, it should also be a way of life at your company.

Company leadership needs to take this concept to heart. You need to be your brand's champions and agree with the significance of a brand strategy to communicate it to the rest of the organization. The best brand strategy sessions end with the company building their culture around the brand attributes and constantly pushing its message.

In other words, once you have a brand strategy, you can use it to sell more products and services and make more money only when everyone has bought into it and made it central to the company culture. Brands have to speak and act in one voice, or you'll lose your customers' trust and loyalty.

“ your **brand**  
is **more**  
than a **logo!** ”

