



Build a Brand in 30 Days

by Simon Middleton
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Take-Aways

- Your brand is the image your product or service has in the minds of your customers.
- Strong brands are “compelling, authentic and relevant.”
- Your business must be profitable, but money is not your only motivation. Connect your deeper purpose to your brand.
- People buy a brand when it aligns and connects with their needs and feelings. Branding is an emotional process. Your values humanize your business.
- The “Morphological Analysis” – a grid you can set up to clarify your brand’s traits – can help you formulate your branding strategy.
- Identify your target market and learn about your audience.
- To differentiate your firm in the customer’s mind, you need to know your competition’s strengths and weaknesses as well as your own.
- Positioning determines how people think of your brands relative to other similar brands.
- Position your brand against the weaknesses of your competitors’ brands.
- Your staff will become brand ambassadors if you talk to them, listen to them, and “empower and respect” them.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
7	8	6	7

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) What branding is and is not, 2) Why branding matters to your business's success, and 3) How to use a systematic process to communicate your brand to your target market.

Recommendation

Self-proclaimed “brand guru” Simon Middleton explains in clear, easy-to-understand terms what branding is, and then he tells you how to do it in this systematic guide to do-it-yourself branding. Even though he writes for small-business owners and entrepreneurs, Middleton’s process applies to large businesses and corporations as well. He makes his subject so enjoyable and even inspiring that reading his guide is like having a conversation with a witty, knowledgeable and helpful friend. However, Middleton ambitiously proposes that you undertake a different branding activity each day for a month. But even if you decide to stretch the 30 days to three months or more, he does explain how to get the job done. And it costs a lot less than hiring an agency or consultant. *getAbstract* recommends Middleton’s advice, if not the exact timing of his process.

Abstract

Basic Branding

To develop and implement a branding strategy, you must understand what branding is and is not. Branding is often confused with marketing, advertising or even logos. But branding isn’t part of a marketing strategy, and it isn’t just your slogan. Your brand is the image of your product or service in the minds of your customers. It is “all the meanings that all your possible audiences carry around about you in their heads and in their hearts.”

John Lewis is a British department store. When they hear its name, people who are familiar with the brand associate it with “quality, service, value, partnership” and the “middle class.” Even though its customers come from a variety of backgrounds, they all distill the same meanings from the brand. The Nike swoosh also evokes a shared set of associations, including “achievement, sport...fashion, quality...high-profile sponsorships.” Nike’s brand creates an aura and personality Nike cannot achieve through its products alone.

Why Brand?

Consumers don’t base all their purchasing decisions on analyzing features and benefits. Often they rely on their emotional connection with a brand. Whether they are purchasing a car or a cup of coffee, a brand association with a set of meanings streamlines their buying decisions and turns them into repeat customers. Without a brand, your product is merely a commodity. People patronize your brand because it aligns somehow with their needs and feelings.

Connect the concept of branding with a deeper meaning by considering two brands you like. Write down five ways you find their meaning significant. Then compose a list of the meanings of your firm’s brand. Strong brands share certain traits. For instance, they are “compelling, authentic and relevant.” The members of your target market, be it a neighborhood group or a national constituency, know the brand and associate it with

“If starting a business is challenging, then creating a brand is more so.”

“We buy not with our rationality and our intellect, but with our eyes, noses, hands and hearts.”

“Brand is a kind of shorthand.”

“Building a brand is absolutely as much an act of the imagination as it is a rational process.”

“We respond to the best brands because they capture some aspect of our humanity and reflect it back to us.”

“Brands, like people, are unique: or at least they should be if they want to succeed.”

“When times are tough and everything is going pear-shaped, yes, strategy will come to your aid like nothing else.”

similar connotations. They recall its name, logo and slogan. A well-branded business doesn't have to constantly explain itself.

Strength is not the only characteristic that determines a brand's image. The public may widely recognize and understand your brand, but it could still evoke negative associations. Consider North Korea and South Korea. You may have similar perceptions of both, but your image of South Korea is likely more positive. People may talk about brands with negative images, but those brands enjoy little repeat business and their advertising rings false. But when a brand has a positive image, the public gives it generous free buzz, peer-to-peer recommendations, repeat business and upbeat feedback.

Purpose and Strategy

Money may have motivated you to build a business, but it doesn't wield the same power as purpose. Discern the inner meaning that fuels your business and make it the basis of your branding. People respond to brands that speak to a facet of their humanity. Connecting with your emotions and understanding your goals will help you develop your brand. Branding is an emotional process, but running a business is not about emotion alone. Strategy also plays an important role. A well-defined strategy acts as a compass when things are moving forward and when you hit roadblocks. Strategy identifies your ultimate goal. Don't confuse strategy with tactics, which are the methods you employ to achieve the results you want.

Your strategy should call upon the skills you have or can develop, and what jobs you need to delegate or assign to outside resources. While you may enjoy balancing the books, for example, perhaps you lack the design skills required to set up an appealing window display. In this case, you could function as your own bookkeeper but hire an employee with creative talent.

“Morphological Analysis”

A Morphological Analysis (MA) can help you create the basics of a brand strategy and understand the qualities of your business that you can brand. Create a grid with four columns and eight rows. Say, for example, that you want to open a coffee house. Head each of the four columns with one aspect of that task, such as “location, style, customer type and business emphasis.” In each of the eight rows, write possible options for each heading. For instance, under location, you could include “mall, city precinct, business district, sidestreet, mobile van, college campus, village” and “seaside.” Once you complete your grid, consider all the various permutations. Determine which ones resonate with your original idea, offer new possibilities or connect to you emotionally. Decide which combination of options you want to explore further.

Your values humanize your business. However, labeling yourself as honest or reliable doesn't mean much because such values are too broad and all businesses claim them. To define meaningful values for your brand, create a new MA grid of any size and write one value that matters to you in each box. Analyze each value's applicability to your brand to see if it is “genuine,” “compelling internally,” meaningful to consumers, unique to your business and easy to communicate. Ask yourself if you “would fight to preserve this value.”

Understand Your Competition

Any product or service will have competitors. Don't be intimidated; be knowledgeable. Assess your competition locally, nationally and globally. Pinpoint its strengths, and think

“Brand building for small businesses can be lonely stuff.”

“To achieve the impossible nirvana of being loved by everyone you would have to become so flexible, so malleable, so nebulous in fact, as to become meaningless to everyone, too.”

“The trouble is that good and bad experiences do not have equal weight in our psyche.”

“Bland values are as worthless as no values at all.”

about how you might deliver a better brand experience. Look for elements that consumers associate with the competing brand, and consider how your brand is different.

Know Your Market

Identify your target market. Remember that you can’t be all things to all people. Trying to please everyone only brings a loss of brand specificity and focus. Define the customer you don’t want to target. For example, if you run a bed and breakfast inn, you may not want customers who demand 24-hour room service, insist on having pets in their rooms or expect cable television.

Analyze Your Brand

The exercise nicknamed “the six-leg spider” will help you better analyze your brand. Draw a circle in the middle of a large piece of paper, with six lines radiating from the center. Label and complete each line by answering these questions:

- **“Product/benefit”** – What is your product or service? How does it benefit customers?
- **“Desired positioning”** – How do customers perceive your brand relative to your competition’s brand?
- **“Style”** – How does your brand interact and connect with your customers?
- **“Mission”** – What is the purpose behind your product or service?
- **“Vision of the future”** – Where do you want to be in the long term?
- **“Values”** – What are your company’s values? Which values did your MA isolate?

Positioning

Positioning refers to “the space your brand occupies in the hearts and minds of your audience relative to comparable brands.” Imagine you own a bike shop that sells high-end cycles. Down the street is a sports store that sells bikes and other sports equipment. Instead of thinking of that store as a competitor that is siphoning off your business, position your store in relation to it. You have high-end merchandise while it sells knockoffs. Your staff is knowledgeable; the other store’s employees are generalists. Your customers are passionate cyclists, not weekenders.

Create a concise positioning statement for internal use that defines your brand’s strengths and goals. Outline the methods you can use to achieve those goals and what your brand means to your customers. Include a positioning line in your ads to crystallize your brand image, such as your product’s slogan, like Nike’s “Just do it” or Budweiser’s “King of Beers.” Keep your slogan short, simple and authentic. Avoid puns and foreign languages. Write several possible taglines, check for spelling and grammar, and test them on a sample audience before making a decision.

Advertising Basics

Marketing and advertising are not interchangeable. Marketing includes the activities that bring your product or service to market. Advertising is paid space in the media. When you create a print ad, radio spot or television commercial, you control the message. Media relations is a broad term that often includes public relations efforts. You might not pay for PR, but you also don’t control its message. However, a story in the press carries more credibility than paid advertising.

Publications, broadcasts and websites rely on press releases and media packages for content. A typical media package, which you send via email, includes:

“Running a business and building a brand are not activities for the easily hurt.”

“Entrepreneurship is a kind of spirit, a state of mind, perhaps even a personality type.”

“It takes courage, not money, to use the power of imagination in your brand.”

“The brutal truth is that nobody (honestly, nobody) cares about your brand as much as you do.”

- A cover letter introducing your product.
- A description of your product or its recent newsworthy aspect or activity.
- Background details, including several high-quality photographs.
- Your full contact information.

For press releases, sum up your main point in a three- or four-word headline, write a short first paragraph with the gist of your message and then add any other pertinent material. Almost no one reads press releases all the way through, so put the essential information at the top.

Ad Creation

Creating effective ads is a skill many small-business owners lack. Knowing what pitfalls to avoid will help you spend your budget efficiently. To determine the main objective of your advertising, decide whether you want to build awareness, generate sales or clarify your positioning. Be clear about your target audience. Identify the geographic area where they live, as well as their priorities for products and services. Find out which media they use most often, and purchase advertising that aligns with their whereabouts and interests. You may want to contract with advertising professionals to write and design your ads or make your media buys.

A web presence is mandatory. Your brand’s website should be visually engaging, accessible, informative, compelling, current, interactive and better than your competitor’s. Consider displaying your brand on other sites and online marketplaces, such as eBay. Study search engine optimization so that you know how to manipulate your website to try to earn a higher rank in online search results. Establish a social media presence through networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Image, Inside and Out

Everything you do either reinforces or negates your brand image. You interact with customers through a variety of vehicles called “touch-points,” which make people feel as if they’re having either a positive experience – thus enhancing how they react to your brand – or a negative experience, which accomplishes the reverse. Rate how well your brand performs in “general communication, online experience, packaging, branch experience, follow-up experience” and in handling complaints.

You want your employees to become fervent supporters of your brand since they represent it, so communicating effectively with them is as important as communicating with your customers. Follow four general guidelines to encourage your team to support your firm's brand strategy:

1. **“Talk”** – Reach out to employees in good faith and with enthusiasm.
2. **“Listen”** – Seek out and pay attention to what your employees think and feel.
3. **“Empower”** – Make your employees understand what your brand means to you.
4. **“Respect”** – Always honor your employees’ ideas and emotions.

About the Author

Simon Middleton founded The Brand Strategy Guru. He hosts *The Brand Effect* on British television.