



Marketing Messages

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Brand building Lululemon style

Brand building is key to a successful marketing strategy. Yet few companies truly understand just how to do it well. **Lululemon Athletica** is an exception. They understand that good branding goes beyond a great logo and advertising.

A quick survey of a recent issue of the **Georgia Straight**, our local entertainment weekly, reveals no less than 24 ads for yoga and related products or services. There are over 30 private yoga studios in Vancouver. And you'll see almost as much yoga mats as lattes in hand on the streets of Kitsilano. Clearly, there is a serious yoga trend afoot in Vancouver. But you knew most of this. Yoga is hot, and nobody knows that better than *Chip Wilson, CEO of Lululemon Athletica*. His company is a brand building success story.

Building a brand starts with a precise definition of the target customer group, its needs and expectations. Although the company makes clothing for both sexes, 70% of the product mix is catered to women. The typical Lululemon customer is female, age 25-35, educated professional, relatively high disposable income (their stuff isn't cheap), active, socially conscious, environmentally aware and open to spirituality.

Lululemon as a brand demonstrates a fundamental understanding of women. They get direct feedback from women on product design through their research and design program, which sponsors women athletes and instructors. They have catered their stores to the needs of female customers and employees. Fitting rooms are extra large to accommodate strollers and most stores have a customer washroom facility and play toys for young kids. They understand that shopping with children is reality for many of their customers. Women staff most stores, and the company has initiated a work place job sharing program.

The next step in building a great brand is to decide what benefits are offered that will give the brand a distinctive position in the marketplace. Lululemon's goal was to provide comfortable clothing for yoga. When they started much of what was available was for men and the materials were lacking in stretch and comfort. Lululemon products are made from a unique stretch fabric developed by the company founder. The product design and fabric were unique to the market and this remains the company's primary benefit over competitors.

Lululemon supports their product benefits with a clear understanding of their target market in all things they do. This is demonstrated through their understanding of how to market to women.

1. **Women's purchase decisions are informed and deliberate.** All employees are well trained and many are women. They are educators. They participate in yoga classes in their community. They live the lifestyle of their customers. Employees don't seem to push product as much as share with customers something they love.

2. **Women talk. You want them to talk about your product in a positive light.** Lululemon's target 25-35 female consumers are trendsetters and decision-makers. They notice clothing. If they like the product, they spread the word. Lululemon understands this and they know how to generate talk. Their website and newsletter are great examples. The newsletter features uplifting articles about healthy living and empowerment. As a position piece it is an extension of their brand without actually pushing product. Customers perceive that the company's values are aligned with their own. The product is based on a quality look and feel. This is not lost on their customer base. They're talking.

3. **When women shop, they see everything.** Store design, lighting, and accessibility is important. In Lululemon's case stores are stylish and easy to navigate. Service is attentive and knowledgeable. If the brand image and message don't match the experience women will notice. The company understands that everything about the in-store experience is a further extension of their brand.

4. **Understand that women crave an escape.** A sheet included with every purchase reads like a manifesto for good living. Among it's suggestions: "Dance, sing, floss and travel. Friends are more important than money. Compliments from the heart elevate the spirit." And an article in their newsletter leads with, "Isn't it time to leave the circus?" Lululemon gets it. Many women crave an escape and they've delivered it. This is brand extension brilliance.

5. **Save her time and keep it simple.** Stores are designed to make purchasing informed and easy. Different cuts and styles are displayed and racked logically. Staff know their products and make suggestions. They're not pushy. They make the shopping experience simple and save customers time.

Lululemon has effectively targeted their market and positioned well the distinct benefits they offer. Building a brand is about promising to deliver a consistent set of qualities, standards, values and experiences. Lululemon has done just that.

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