



Marketing Messages

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A brand is more than an identity; it's a promise to deliver a positive experience

Good branding is important to successful marketing. But what really is good branding? Most of us recognize it when we see it or experience it, but few of us truly understand how to effectively create it. The dictionary defines a brand as a product or service bearing a widely known name, something distinguished by distinctive characteristics. Although accurate in some respects, this definition is devoid of emotional character, which is at the heart of good branding. **Duane Knapp, President of BrandStrategy Inc.**, recently in town for the **BCAMA annual Vision Marketing Conference** believes that good branding starts with asking the questions, "How are you going to be perceived as distinctive? And most importantly, what is your PROMISE?"

Knapp notes, "**Birks** promise is to surprise and delight", not just sell jewelry. The emphasis is on the customer experience while buying jewelry. More important than what or how you sell is the identification of how you will make your customer feel. "A brand has to feel like a friend" are wise words from **Starbuck's CEO Howard Shultz**. Superior and well-loved brands evoke an emotional response. People light up and get excited when they speak of experiencing them. **Lululemon, Starbucks** and **Birks** come to mind. These brands have an attitude and a mindset that makes the experience memorable. Number one brands have three things in common:

1. They are possessed by how their customers feel. They know what their customers are thinking daily.
2. They own a distinctive position in the marketplace. They offer benefits that their competitors do not.
3. That distinctiveness, what they stand for, is focused on functional and emotional benefits. They don't just deliver goods or services; they evoke an emotional response.

Without a brand strategy, you become a commodity, forced by competitors to compete solely on the merits of price. So how do you create a brand strategy?

1. Conduct a brand assessment: Get feedback. Learn how satisfied your customers are. Better yet, learn how delighted they are. Being satisfied fulfills a functional response. Being delighted feeds an emotional response. Compare yourself to competitors. Ask, "How do our customers think about us? How do they think about us relative to our competitors? And how do they think about us versus who they think is the best?"
2. Identify the distinct advantages and value you deliver compared to your competitors.
3. Identify your brand promise. Your promise is the heart, soul and spirit of the benefits you deliver. A promise is never about your product or services; it's about how you want to make people feel. The promise sets the tone.

And remember you must invest time to teach your employees how to deliver "your promise".

Part of the reason why Starbucks has been so successful is because they spent ten times more on training than advertising during the first ten years of business. They realized that conveying their promise through their employees was essential to building their brand.

FedEx is in the shipping business. They distinguish their product with pick up and delivery at anytime, from anyplace. They deliver superior value by guaranteeing, "It will absolutely, positively get there on time". But their brand promise has nothing to do with delivering packages. Their promise is immediate gratification. When you deal with FedEx, you are confident that they will take care of it. **Lululemon** is in the athletic apparel business, but their brand promise is to help you enjoy life and make the world a better place. "We believe that if we can produce products to keep people active and stress-free, the world will be a better place. We aspire towards elevating the world from ordinary to a place of greatness", says founder Chip Wilson. **Starbucks** is in the coffee business, but their brand promise is to deliver a 3rd place. While coffee may be the primary product attraction, they offer a meeting place, somewhere to be at home without being home.

Far too many businesses today compete as commodities, battling for customers on the merits of low prices. Good branding makes your offering so much more competitive and ultimately more valued.

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