



New B2B Brand Building

Branded wine and generic cheese?

By Jean Van Rensselar

From the buyer's perspective, a strong brand means accountability. For example, if I have the choice of getting my car repaired at the local repair shop or at the dealer – most things being equal – I'll choose the dealer because the dealer's brand is an implied guarantee.

Brands are most important in segments – like car repair - where the perceived range of product and service quality is great and quality is hard for the average person to determine before the purchase.

Consider the grocery store. People tend to choose name brands for product categories with:

- A wide variation in quality
- Quality that's difficult to judge before the purchase

But they'll choose generic brands for straightforward products in transparent packaging. For example, shoppers will choose a brand of wine they know because the quality of wine varies enormously and it's nearly impossible to tell what it tastes like by looking at the bottle. But they'll choose the cheapest cheddar cheese because the packaging is transparent and...well... cheddar cheese is cheddar cheese. Have you ever heard anyone in the produce section complain about the brand of broccoli?

If you're selling products and/or services in a category where quality varies significantly and buyers have a hard time verifying the quality before the purchase, you can definitely benefit from building your brand.

One of the basic tenets of B2B brand-building is to forget about “wowing” your customers and instead focus on being consistently better than everyone else. And you don’t even have to be that much better to pull away from your competitors; you only need to be *a little better all the time*.

Research shows that people will pay more for products and services if they come from a well-known company. Think of it this way, if a strong brand is an implied guarantee, buyers are willing to pay for the guarantee.

The 4 benefits of well-branded B2Bs

B2B clients give well-branded companies greater leeway and more opportunities than their lesser-known competitors. This leeway includes:

1. **Access:** Anyone who's ever tried to see a C-suite executive knows half the challenge is simply getting in the door. If the person you're trying to see has heard of your company, that's a big advantage.
2. **Permission to take on Bigger Projects:** Clients place more trust in well-branded firms. That extra amount of trust gives branded companies the go ahead to take on projects bigger than even more experienced competitors.
3. **A Second Chance:** The difference between a lesser-known company that fails and a well-branded company that fails is that the well-branded company will get an opportunity to restore confidence.
4. **A Shorter Sales Cycle:** There's no need to spin and cajole when prospects already know and trust your brand.

Basic brand building

Brand building is a science and it's not complex. It does require strict adherence to simple guidelines and – most of all – diligent monitoring and follow through. Brand building is basically laying a smart foundation and paying attention to detail. Here are four essential steps.

1. Start with a quality product or service

A quality product/service that delivers superior performance is the foundation of a strong brand. While high quality is a prerequisite to entry, it's not enough to set your brand apart from the competition.

2. Identify your brand's differentiator

Decide on the singular distinction for your product that is most important to your target market. If your brand is not first in its category then consider creating a new category. For more on this, read W. Chan Kim's *Blue Ocean Strategy*.

3. Develop a consistent message

Brand attributes in your message need to be authentic and verifiable. Your brand should readily tap into your target market's needs and evoke a gut-level response. Once you know what you want to convey, create a messaging guide and distribute it to everyone in your organization.

4. Market the brand and live the message

Your branding effort must permeate your entire organization and communicate through all marketing channels with one voice, in the same tone, and in the same style. In other words, your brand image must be consistent and constant across all channels of communication. Whatever your brand image and differentiator, you have made promises to your market that you must deliver on. Remember, your brand is nothing more or less than these promises.

B2B Brand-Building Checklist

Is your company well branded? Go through the following list to find out.

- My brand aligns with my short and long-term business goals.
- I've performed thorough research to test the effectiveness of my brand.
- My brand communicates and delivers on a clear promise
- My brand is distinctive within its segment.
- My brand message is consistent across all venues
- My brand's graphic identity is included in everything that originates in and leaves my company.
- My brand is apparent in my company's physical environment.
- My brand is built into all employee training and recruitment programs.
- I have a set of graphic standards for my brand
- My brand's graphic identity stands out from the competition
- I review my top three competitors' brands at least once a year.
- My tagline reflects my brand and is current and effective
- One of my Web addresses reflects my brand name or message.

B2B brand building is especially important to sales. Clients get their first sense of the organization during the first sales call and later the proposal. By selling the brand, you create a self-perpetuating cycle. The brand will help make the sale and each sale will reinforce the brand.

About the Author

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