



The Secret to Activating your Marketing Plan

Brand Strategy that takes your
Marketing from Good to Great

INTRODUCTION

We have never been as inundated by marketing as we are today. Marketing is everywhere and we are constantly exposed to campaigns, posts, advertisements...the whole gamut... across multiple channels. What all this marketing lacks these days is meaning. When it comes to marketing to customers today, it's not enough to win the sell. You've got to win their trust, admiration and loyalty too. From a buying perspective, we base our choices more on symbolic attributes. The degree of trust we feel towards a product, service or company, rather than the assessment of its features and benefits, will determine whether or not we will buy in.

Marketing with meaning is the antidote to opting out or the potion to opting in.

What we are really talking about here is brand. Your brand is the summation of how your customers perceive you as a company, product, or service. The basis of any great brand is strategy. Your brand strategy should therefore guide every detail in which you communicate and interact with your customers. Essentially, your brand strategy dictates your marketing strategy. It provides a clear purpose for why you are engaging customers and how you are doing so.

It sounds trite but let us take pause for a moment and really define brand and marketing. The fatality in the marketing profession today is that there is too much ambiguity between those two terms. First, there are multiple interpretations of branding, so what is branding?

Old school thought defines branding as a name, slogan, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these elements that identify products or services of a company. Quite frankly the assets mentioned above are only the visual or verbal manifestations reflective of the brand core but is not the brand or strategy in totality.

Let's put this thought into practice.

Let's think about your brand. Assess your entire customer experience- everything from your identity, website, social media, and content. How are you articulating the brand to prospects and current customers? How are internal stakeholders reinforcing the brand? Everything is brand. When you view it from this lens, brand plays a significant role not just to your marketing, but to your entire business.

Brand is the Catalyst for Growth

It is crucial to understand brand execution and its importance to a business's growth.

The distinction between branding and marketing is that **marketing promotes** and **branding reinforces**. Marketing can get you leads, but only **branding will help enhance your reputation and strengthen customer loyalty**.

Fundamentally, **branding provides consumers the knowledge and insight required to determine if they actually like your company, what you stand for, and if they'd like to do business with you**.



Building a Selling Brand

When discussing brand strategy, many business leaders associate strategy with analysis and execution with getting things done. Viewed from this perspective, strategies such as “being customer focused” and “becoming the global market leader” don’t contribute much to producing results. The act of building a brand is viewed as a luxury, not a necessity for their business.

On the contrary, strategy is all about making decisions. It is a purposeful set of decisions on where to play and how to win, to maximize long-term value. Strategy determines how to best allocate resources in order to achieve the stated objectives. Ultimately, it is the decision on which direction to pursue. And equally, a decision on which path to let go.

A powerful brand strategy is one that is deeply established in your business’ core values and cohere with your target market’s needs. Developing your brand building strategy requires aligning the core insight to your business’ strengths, while nullifying your competitors’ threats. So, for all business leaders, execution is producing results within the context of those strategic choices.

The Crux of the Matter

When a good strategy is well understood, it can be well executed. When your business is not executing well, take a look at your strategy. Improving your strategy and improving the understanding of it could make all the difference.

Businesses struggle to allocate capital for marketing campaigns to effectively compete with market contenders, so it’s even more critical to know who you are, what you offer and who you’re offering your product or service to in order to succeed in today’s marketplace.

You cannot be effective in your marketing plan without sound brand strategy.

Sound Brand Strategy Benefits

- Creates meaning
- Creates a messaging platform that clearly communicates value
- Creates powerful emotional connections
- Confirms your credibility
- Motivates the buyer to buy
- Creates User Loyalty

ASSESS

Before you begin in any direction,

Your brand is your business' most valuable asset, ranking right alongside your team culture. Are you leveraging on this most valuable asset, or are you leaving money on the table by not maintaining a healthy brand?

A healthy brand will attract your most profitable audiences, help you relate without out-spending competitors, keep audiences coming back and guide your business growth. A weak brand can reduce your marketing effects, be harder to garner attention, drain your resources and making you spend more with less impact.

Perform or have a professional organization audit and grade yourself in the following areas:

External Partners and Customers

This includes your distribution channel partners, independent sales reps, strategic supplier partners and — most importantly — your customers.

Internal Stakeholders

Gaining deep insight and understanding of how all stakeholders within your organization perceive the brand's value proposition and meaning is important because they're in direct contact with customers; and it's equally important for management and other groups within the organization to have a clear picture of what the brand stands for.

Competitors

It is constructive to compare your image, message and product or service scope within the competitive landscape. Take a deep, long look into their your competitors' initiatives, programs and value-added services. The key is not to benchmark, but to differentiate your brand.

Brand Positioning

What does your brand promise? Is this promise still important to customers? Does your brand matter to the high value customer that represents the brands future? Does it reflect a highly-valued competitive advantage?

Brand Identity

Do customers know what your brand stands for? Just how well is the essence or personality of your brand resonating.

Brand Equities

It's critical to gain quantifiable insight on important metrics like brand awareness, purchase behaviors, attitudes, values, market share, customer life value.

Brand Architecture

Brand architectures can get completely out of alignment over time. Take the time to reflect on how your brand is portrayed at the Master Brand level, and if it confuses or encourages clarity at the Product or Sub-Brand level. Also check that there is no confusion between the Corporate Brand or other attribute brands or branded features.

Communications/Messaging

While visual consistency is critical, go a bit deeper to discover what your brand is actually saying? What are the primary and secondary messaging platforms that guide consistent marketing communications? If you reviewed several touchpoints carefully, would they portray a consistent message?

Budgeting/Resource Allocation

Does your brand receive the resources it needs to grow and prosper? Do you know what you should be spending your resources on? Are there more effective methods and tactics that will yield the desired results in your marketing activities?

Next, assess the needs and wants of your customers and prospects.

Reevaluate or further identify your target customers, develop detailed personas of what specifically those customers may be looking for, and then craft a brand promise and create a messaging framework that helps trigger those connections to your brand. Branding is not only about getting your target market to select you over the competition but about getting your prospects to see you as the sole provider of a solution to their problem or need.

PLAN

Many are technically doing the right things, like launching a website and getting a logo and a slogan; they're just not doing it in the most effective way. To them, these things can seem like sheer window dressing in the midst of their business's daily demands and operations. The reality is that a loyal brand that connects intimately with its audience is the razor's edge that small businesses have in a world of impersonal global conglomerates.

A brand is your promise to your customers. Brand execution is how you deliver on that promise. Frankly, brand execution means making your brand actionable.

An actionable brand means it is not merely an idea or a concept; it has a tangible action plan. For that promise to be tangible, a brand has to be defined in clear terms that can be delivered across all marketing channels in direct, actionable steps.



CDS Profile Planner Tool

IMPLEMENT

This is Where It Gets GOOD, How?

First and foremost, define or even redefine the following:



Mission: a functional description of your business



Vision: a lofty goal for the company



Positioning Statement: a unique space in the market in which you intend to own and operate (your point of difference)

These initial components should then dictate how the brand is expressed. This will enable you to create your brand:

- **Personality:** characteristics or descriptors used to embody the brand, product, or service
- **Voice:** style of written communication reflective of the brand personality
- **Visual Expression:** visual elements (colors, imagery) reflective of the brand personality

GROW

This is Where It Gets BETTER

Did you know that brand drives conversion?

Yes, yes and yes. Good brand strategy can impact is conversions by contributing significantly to how a company can persuade potential consumers into purchasing their products or services.

How does brand help improve conversions?

Education

Educating potential customers on the value of your brand, and how your brand can solve their problems, will influence their buying decisions. This is typically done through content marketing campaigns designed to not only reach, but educate customers and move them through the sales funnel.

Differentiation

Clearly communicating brand attributes such as differentiation and value proposition can influence customers to buy from you over your competitor.

Perceived Value

The way potential consumers perceive your brand or how they think about your brand will have a huge impact on whether or not they do business with you. Brand identity work can help increase the perceived value of your company.



Brand Strategy Has An Even Greater Impact As You Grow:

Employee engagement

Your brand personality and ideology compose the blueprint to the company's work culture.

Customer engagement

Your brand cultivates a influential relationship with your target audience.

Consistency

The more consistent you are with your brand identity the more recognizable you will become across all marketing platforms.

CDS Solution:

We out-think your competition rather than out-spend them. By developing the strategic brand and marketing solutions that are optimum for your brand, we ensure that your internal culture is aligned with your external public reputation, and your verbal identity is aligned with your visual identity.

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