



“Branding” Means More
Than a Pair of Arches

Let's be honest: "Brand" may be the most overused term in marketing. When you ask people about brands, they answer with the logos they recognize, the taglines they remember, and the websites they visit.

And while all of these elements are important, they're just that—elements—not a complete, resonant brand identity.

Branding—real branding—is not just your products or services; it's the continued connection between you, your customers, and your products through created value, loyalty, expectation, and value proposition.

If your brand wants to grow, you need to become something that someone can get behind. And for that, you need to have strategic pillars to stand on; that's what makes a true brand.

Why branding is so important

A true brand is a consistent message of who you are. It's your business' identity, and should be the same across all channels and platforms, whether it's Facebook, Twitter, your website, or even a business card.

And it's not just about a logo (after all, a logo isn't the only thing that people relate to that keeps them coming back, time after time). It's the overall representation of your most authentic self—your secret sauce—that makes you distinct from other sellers.

And today, nowhere is your branding more visible (and more scrutinized) than online. Which is why it's odd so many businesses get it wrong. Especially considering: [73% of people in the U.S.](#) say a bad website negatively impacts their opinion of a brand.

It's a balance of being many things to many people, while simultaneously staying true to your company's vision, values, and beliefs. A delicate balance, to be sure. But one that can be achieved via thoughtful strategy and foresight.

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Messaging strategy

You may have an ideal brand in place, but ultimately, your audience has final say over what your brand means to them—and you don't get to control it. Instead of trying to, your strategy should be to deliver an authentic and consistent experience that meets their needs. Keep the following three things in mind:

People don't just trust advertisements.

Instead, people prefer to receive recommendations from friends or family, from industry leaders, or even from strangers who share their opinions online. This allows them to research a product or service before buying and stay in control their own sales process.

This is why authentic, resonant messaging is key. In your industry, there may or may not be a strong "primary" brand. But when you put two companies up against each other, the one that represents something valuable will have an easier time reaching, engaging, closing, and retaining customers. And those customers will tell their closest friends, family, and Facebook followers all about that brand they love that stands for something bigger.

Go where your market is and appeal to their emotions.

Today, there are hundreds of different channels, serving smaller, but more targeted groups. Many people no longer read print media, and some are opting out of cable TV. Because people are choosing new places to interact with content, you must be visible *where* they're interacting, in addition to when they're interacting. This means keeping your values and benefits front and center within these limited windows.

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Determine which benefits are most important to each of your customer segments. Identify which benefits are emotional—the most powerful brand strategies tap into emotions, even among business buyers.

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That's how your brand needs to be conveyed across the board.



Maintain a culture of brand ambassadors.

Your brand strategy brings your competitive positioning to life, and works to position you as a certain “something” in the mind of your prospects and customers.

It’s simple. Satisfied customers become repeat customers. And, repeat customers are in a great position to become brand ambassadors, flying your flag through all their channels, in product reviews, social media discussions, and more.

Smart companies train their employees about their brand standards and personality—how to treat people, converse with them, and support them—so everybody works to create a unified experience with the outside audience.

CEOs and owners who’ve embraced these concepts are still ahead of the game. If you don’t have a plan in place today for at least a few of them, you’re at risk of losing customers to your competitors and becoming irrelevant—regardless of how good your product is.

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Content and tone

In order to maintain brand identity, you need to produce content that reflects your ideals, whether you're teaching, selling, or serving another master purpose. Think of your brand as a person with a distinct personality. Describe him or her, then convey these traits in everything you do and create. Here are three things that will help:

1 Write a story about your brand.

Use this story as your positioning statement throughout your company materials. Don't just tell people that you sell relevant products, tell them WHY you sell these products, and that you're passionate about the work you do. Remember, [90% of global online consumers](#) want to do business with brands that share their beliefs.

2 Make sure your brand "lives" within your company.

Determine how your employees will interact with prospects and customers to convey your brand's personality. Every message counts, from web copy, to social media, to direct email outreach. Your brand ideal needs to live in every message you convey.

3 Always provide content that enhances your brand.

As your brand continues to grow and you gain a following, you run a greater risk of losing the connection with your core audience—the people you've worked hardest to engage through your website. Make sure your customers can always find value in your brand beyond the goods or services you offer.

Embrace testing

The best way to improve brand development is through testing. We know this. But there will be times when your brand is tested by testy people. When your brand integrity is challenged, don't go back to any drawing boards. Your brand represents the foundation of what your company believes, and shouldn't waver or shift whenever someone or something offers up resistance.

In other words, don't be overly concerned about the odd piece of negativity—you will never please all of the people, all of the time—deal with it head on.

Look to your business first.

Did your service, product, or experience not live up to expectations? If the failure comes from your side of the equation, embrace the opportunity to open a dialogue. Follow up to find the root cause of the negative interaction. Contrary to many heavy-handed web "experts," you do have a second chance to win over detractors.

Remember to not be dismissive or flippant. Most initial negative comments/reviews come from a simple honest opinion. Don't pass on this opportunity—use it to educate and/or review internal processes.

Now, on to the testing YOU control.

The best branding and design will be the one that causes the most people to take an action, come back to the site more often, or simply engage your brand in desired ways. On the surface this may seem outside of your control, but it isn't.

Through the use of testing, you can gain greater insight into customer preferences and what your brand means to them. This translates into optimization opportunities for your website and landing page design, and improved conversion rates.

To do this, try to think like scientists. It's impossible to predict human reactions with a high level of accuracy, so good marketers define their hypotheses, test them on a small scale, collect data to measure results, and refine depending on results.

By analyzing all data—from live user testing to focus group feedback—brands can find new brand growth opportunities, identify strengths and weaknesses in brand associations, and keep tabs on those brand identities you've worked so hard to establish.

Putting it all together

A brand isn't something you can throw together all at once if you're just finding your feet in your field. You need to be able to first find your direction, and then test the changes you make to your brand as you grow. Because as you make adjustments, you seek feedback, implement iterative changes, and determine the aspects of your brand that are truly resonating.

Name

Think about your keywords and what describes you. Then about what drives people to Google you. When they find you online, do they immediately know what you do? Don't try too hard, either. Chances are, you already have a perfect name in mind for what you do and how you want to portray your brand.

Design

A visually attractive website is crucial to building a strong brand. It is the first impression people may have of your brand, and if it's not a positive experience, it could be their last. In fact, [76% of U.S. consumers](#) interact with brands or products before arriving at the store.

It needs to be intuitive, which means the UX needs to be universally accessible and foster further exploration. This means it should also reflect your brand identity. Smith-Barney's website is formal, traditionally structured, and less flashy than Nike's website.

Additionally, have your team honestly assess the following questions:

- Does the site load slowly?
- Are there too many ads?
- Are the color schemes hard to look at?
- Are there images where there's supposed to be images?
- When you get to the end of a content piece, do you want to click to another?
- Is the site's theme customized enough so that it stands out from all other companies using a similar layout?

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Symbol/Icon/Logo

The best brands are able to be recognized by a single image. Think of Nike, think of Apple, think of Coca-Cola. Whether the symbol is a logo or a logotype, it needs to become a widely implemented pillar of your brand.

Universal integration of branding is especially important because it allows you to carry a brand through all marketing. This includes print, web, social media, email, and any other communication channel.

Repetition is very important to helping commit a brand to somebody's memory so it's important to honor your brand throughout what you do.

Colors and Fonts

Your brand colors are vital to conveying tone and values. People have emotional responses to particular colors, shades, and tints. Your brand colors need to reflect your brand emotion—you don't want to send mixed messages such as using a racy fire engine red if you provide relaxing spa getaways.

Your identity should be legible, recognizable, and memorable, and it should also be applied consistently across all media—for example, its color and positioning on a page or

screen should be consistent across all your marketing material, and the secondary typefaces and imagery styles you use should also have a uniform look.

Landing Pages

(You've got one of those for SEO, right?) A landing page is not a place to stray from your company's branding. An optimized landing page creates a seamless transition to conversion by optimizing the look, feel, and CTAs of the parent website, email, or social entry point.

Keeping brand consistency builds trust in those already familiar with your company, ensuring that they are in the right place, and provides an introduction to new visitors. If ignored, inconsistency between click points and landing pages creates anxiety on the part of visitors, making them less likely to convert.

Slogan/Tagline

Let's have a look at some famous brand slogans:

- "Just do it."
- "Life's good."
- "I'm lovin' it."

The three companies above are Nike, LG and McDonald's. (Not that you really needed to be told that, we're sure!)



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They're all very easily recognized slogans. These companies were able to hone their brand to just a few words, which we all recognize, whether they're said in or out of context.

Notice that none of the above slogans explicitly state what the company does or provides. Instead, these companies chose branding that is more about the association with the company's core value propositions, which helps you remember the slogan. (For example, ours is [Inspire Action.](#))

Conclusion

At the heart of a great brand is a first-class product or service, and every company wants to be a customer's first choice. Building and managing a brand can play a large part in making this happen, because if you want to strengthen and manage the perception(s) of your business, then a strong brand is mandatory.

If you want to learn more about how Lucid Fusion can help your brand become the first (or only) choice in your market, [contact us](#) today.

