



**CUSTOM
ADVERTISING
PRODUCTS**

Branding Your Business

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Branding your business is what you do everyday, whether or not you realize it.

Your brand is reflected in the appearance of your store, your trucks, your advertising, your marketing materials, your appearance and all of your employees.

Mostly, your brand image exists in the minds of your customers. Your brand isn't tangible. You can't touch it, smell it or see it.

Don't confuse brand recognition with brand image. Brand recognition means that potential customers know your name. Brand image, on the other hand, is the association potential customers have of your name. Throwing a poorly conceived image out to the marketplace that doesn't connect to your customers won't work. Neither will being seen for the sake of being seen.

Wal-Mart is a great example of a company that is currently suffering from a poor brand image. Everyone knows their name but, because they've received some bad press, their image has suffered. For many customers, every time they see the Wal-Mart name, they get a negative image of the company. How'd you like to be where Wal-Mart is today? Forty cents of every dollar they spend for advertising is reminding some people not to shop at their store. Right now Wal-Mart is desperately trying to change their "image" (brand image) with the public.

What does your brand say to your customers?

Picking the Right Brand Image

Custom Advertising Products is a promotional products company that works with companies to present a professional brand image to their potential customers. Believe us when we say, we've seen the good, the bad, and the ugly when it comes to taking care of brand image.



In our experience, there are 4 necessary steps to branding:

1. Determine what image prospects want from you: High Trust, Dependability, High Tech, High Service, etc., and reflect that in your logo.
2. Create a clear, consistent brand image and message around that logo.
3. Reflect that image in every aspect of your business, in every employee, at every event your business participates, and in all your sales and marketing materials.
4. Deliver on the promises inherent in your image and message.

Determining Your Image

A good brand image should reflect the qualities that the users of your product or service value. The end product in this case, is your logo and tag line. The challenge many small business owners face is taking time away from business operations to discover what your customers really value and developing their image around these values.

Many businesses fail, however, because business owners fail to establish a dialogue with their customers.



Although we risk oversimplification, there are 3 general parameters that should be considered in brand image. We call them the 3 T's:

High Trust
High Touch
High Tech

The 3 T's are present in all businesses but have a different priority, depending on the business.

Some of the business types that might need to convey High Trust as their priority value would be financial consultants, insurance agents, house cleaners, landscapers, heating and air conditioning repairmen, elder care providers and in-home pet sitters to name a few. High Trust logo's would be solid, familiar shapes that associate with trust in a customer's mind.

A business with a High Touch priority might be advertising agencies, PR firms, publishers, hotels/motels, coffee shops, personal shoppers, consultants, and many retail stores. These images should have a friendly and open connotation.

High Tech is where the really abstract images work well. Obviously, businesses that could use these images would be web designers, IT firms, Internet provider firms, and athletic apparel (think Nike Swoosh).

Creating a Message

The message is your 3-10 word tag line. This generally requires a lot of work. A tag line that works well should summarize your business. An example of a good tag line is a local printer who uses *"If you can think it, we can ink it"*, as his tag line. It's a great summary statement of his business and is easy to remember.

Getting the Message Out.

Getting the message out is where we come in. Everything you do should include the tag line: business cards, stationary, hats, shirts, signage, brochures etc.

High quality embroidery of your logo and tag line on your employees daily or trade show wear is an effective and relatively inexpensive way to promote your brand. Requiring standard logo laden attire for employees accomplishes 3 things:

1. It assures that your employees attire reflects the image you want to present
2. It's nearly free advertising
3. It clearly identifies who your employees represent (essential for businesses require calls to customers homes)

Custom Advertising Products is a promotional products company so you'd expect us to believe this but let's explore the concept a little deeper.

An old business adage goes something like this, *"You only get one chance to form a first impression."* You can spend thousands of dollars establishing a brand, only to have it destroyed in a matter of seconds by a sloppily attired employee. Employees are often the interface between your business

and the customer. Their appearance (and your own) is crucial to your long-term success as a business owner.

Brand image is about your customer's experience with your product or service and it's important that this experience contribute to future purchase decisions and referrals. If you're like the rest of us, you spend a significant amount of time networking. We recommend that you use some of that time to get feedback on your message and brand image.



Deliver on Your Promise

Make sure you deliver what you promise.
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We can't help repeating ourselves. If you can't deliver on the promise you make through your brand image – change it.

You absolutely must be able to deliver the goods.

It's incredibly easy to develop a disconnect with customer expectations and your delivery of the product or service to meet their expectations. If it makes you feel better, Uberbranders such as Nike have disconnected from their customers and suffered as a result. Most of us who run small businesses can't afford to make these kinds of mistakes.

Overcoming an existing negative in a customer's mind is not an easy thing to do. Ask Wal-Mart. It's much easier not to go there in the first place. Continue to take time to talk to your customers to understand their goals are in-line with your product or service.

One last word of caution: In our business, we find that we will invariably hear that price is the biggest deciding factor in making a purchase decision. Customers are conditioned to respond with price. Yet most studies will confirm that price only becomes the deciding factor when the consumer sees no clear benefit or experience from the product or service. In fact, when purchasing agents are asked, price is number six on their list of priorities when evaluating a vendor. Don't let your branding strategy become a monologue.

About the Author: Ralph Jannelli is the president of Custom Advertising Products, a promotional products company. Ralph and his team are experts in helping businesses brand their products and services through the use of promotional products. As a small business owner himself, Ralph understands the challenges facing small business owners in focusing their brand image to meet customer expectations.

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