

## Branding Take Two – The Mechanics of Applied Branding

Last month I tried to define the importance of branding and to present some of its basic advantages. This article will present some insight on the “nuts & bolts” on how it’s actually accomplished.

For those readers with an interest in branding that goes beyond curiosity, for those readers who would like some practical tips on how to get started, I present “Dave’s Top Ten List”, ten major steps to effective brand management.

**1. The Company** - understand your company history and its products. Establish management’s objectives, their view of the market and their commitment to branding. To succeed, your branding program must have their understanding and support – and must serve company objectives.

**2. The Competition** - audit the marketing communications of major competitors to determine the range of “values” that drive the category, how competitors “position” themselves, what positions are claimed, and how solidly are the competitors embedded. Determine which “unclaimed” position best suits your company. Only one company can own an idea in each market, so be sure you’re distinctive. Also make sure your share-of-voice (SOV) marcom spending levels are in line with share-of-market (SOM) objectives.

**3. The Customer** – engage in market research based on the above two steps and try to gauge awareness from key customers and prospects. Learn what “brand values” are most important to them and determine how you and your competitors are rated on these values.

**4. Develop Brand Strategy** -- from above steps (the three C’s of Company, Competition and Customer) develop recommended brand positioning that is achievable, differentiating, compelling, likable - and long term.

**5. Gain Buy-In** -- sell brand positioning across your company, vertically to top management and laterally to all departments that have outside public contact. Avoiding “turf” issues of internal politics is key issue here. Gain allies and commitment.

**6. Develop Integrated Communications Plan** -- leverage brand strategy through integration across all marcom creative, among the departments that produce them, along with your outside agencies. Also, look to extend brand strategy into non-marcom departments (customer service, tech support), as well as applications on the Internet.

**7. Execute Creatively** -- firm control is needed by the company to assure adherence to brand. Try not to let your management become the creative director, especially if you have good talent at your agency. You should also address the frequently asked question - “do I brand or do I sell product?” Answer: “yes”, to both!

**8. Build in Continuity** -- incorporate consistency in media scheduling, adequacy of spending levels -- SOV vs. SOM -- and extend brand messages across products and across campaigns. Don’t just plan a launch campaign for 2-3 months and then “go dark” for the balance of the year.

**9. Measure Performance** -- obtain feedback by setting up a response analysis system for individual media, as well as a tracking system to measure effectiveness of marketing investments where they are best tested -- in the market.

**10. Continuously Evaluate and Improve** -- by learning from measurement systems, be strong enough to make changes as needed, yet have the faith and courage to be patient and let your marketing programs build your brand. Along the way, senior management and certain "vocal" peers may need coaching on patience. An important tool is to have objective metrics that measure the performance of your branding program in creating awareness and attitude shift.

Remember: brands happen, with or without you. It is up to you to be pro-active in shaping the identity and strength of your brand image.

Combined with last month's contribution, I have tried to convey the strategic importance and the tactics of incorporating a real branding strategy. The idea was to present the benefits of branding for businesses of all sizes. Now is the time for each of you to deploy the strategy based on your capabilities and specific market needs. Good luck!!!