

Understanding Branding

The challenge to understanding branding is more a function of getting past the misunderstandings that surround this fundamental of sound marketing. There are so many opinions out there about what branding is, and what it does, that it has eroded the true meaning. This is, of course, comically ironic because branding is, at its core, all about what something stands for and what it means.

In recent years branding has become a hot issue and, as with every hot issue, the “gurus” have started been struggling to distinguish their ideas. One might even say they were creating their own brands. Nonetheless, what has resulted is a blurring of what branding is and its value to the overall marketing effort.

This article will discuss what branding is, but more importantly, it will discuss what branding is not. The “gurus” have introduced a number of ideas about branding that need to be repudiated. Understanding branding means erasing all the misconceptions and off-base theories that have been pushed in the name of self promotion.

Clarifying Branding

There is a misunderstanding that branding is a marketing strategy. This is a distorted view. Branding is one of the core objectives of marketing. It is a fundamental of marketing. Branding is the culmination of all your marketing efforts and it is deployed to project and communicate everything a company stands for. Branding is the soul of a company. Any other explanation fails to capture the centrality and importance of the concept and how to properly execute it.

What Branding Is NOT

The confusion surrounding branding is partially because it is somewhat of an abstract concept that can easily be played down in favor of – or as part of – general marketing. Still, there are some explanations and definitions of branding that have been offered that are just plain wrong, either because they minimize its importance or misrepresent its purpose. Some of the more unfortunate mistakes are:

1. Branding is NOT an ongoing process – the theory has been set forth that once certain building blocks of a branding campaign have been put in motion there is little to no need to engage in any ongoing branding tactics. This is horribly incorrect, as branding is as much in need of ongoing nurturing and adjustment as the very marketing campaign that defines its parameters.
2. Branding is NOT about symbols and graphics only – the idea that branding begins and ends with a good logo or a strong branding element (like the Nike “swoosh”) is incorrect. Sure these are important tools in executing effective branding, but it is not branding. They are instruments used to symbolize what the brand is. The meaning behind the symbols needs to come from the company itself.
3. Branding is NOT the same as a company’s selling proposition – some “gurus” have tried to combine the notion of branding with a company’s unique selling proposition. This, in and of itself, is ample reason to avoid the musings of self proclaimed experts. A

unique selling proposition is a statement of benefit, the advantages it delivers to its customers. Branding is a much broader concept. Branding is the soul of the company, the reason it exists, and the principles and purpose it stands for. These are NOT the same thing.

So, What is Branding?

In the broadest sense, branding is everything your company does because every action is a manifestation of communication, and every communication says something about a company, and that message – over time – becomes how the company is perceived by its consumers. So delivery of service, quality, price, performance...are all aspects of your branding.

Branding & Marketing

Implementing your branding campaign and your marketing campaign are not contradictory or competing endeavors. The branding is embedded in the marketing as the messages conveyed through the marketing effort are designed to be consistent with and reinforcing of the branding objectives. Good marketing creates and sustains a brand as it creates awareness and generates interest in a company and its products.

Brands are constructed and sustained because they have the support of the entire company, and each function of the company is executed with the promise of the brand in mind. In order to succeed in branding your company or products you must instill a commonality of purpose within your organization, driving loyalty, pride and purpose in every department and every individual. Branding is important. It's important to execute, and even more important to understand.