

# Brands & Strategies

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## Four Questions for Better Branding.

By Richard D'Amico

I was asked to attend a marketing staff meeting at an friend's company –the subject , branding. Great, I thought, I always love to see branding in action-- maybe I'll even contribute.

So, I get to the meeting. Take my place at the table with the company's senior execs and am ready to hear all about their brand and where its going.

Down go the lights, on comes the projector with the usual Power Point display and a up steps the newest member of their marketing department ---you know the rest.

The introductory speech about moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the need to appeal to the younger generation and on and on. Then it started—"Introducing our new name"—in some ultra modern type style, "our new logo"—as a multicolor splatter is revealed, "and the new look for the company"—as a series of signs, stationary and other stuff clicks on the screen.

None of it has anything to do with their brand. Oh, its the symbology of their brand alright, --all those neat little communication devices that name a product or service to customers and prospects.

But they only attempt to represent the brand, and depend that the values and promises of the brand are known—they do not set the values of the brand. They belong to the brand; just as your name identifies and belongs to you—but your name doesn't create your personality any more that a logo creates a brand.

What does help to build and strengthen your brand is creating a sound brand marketing strategy, which can be summed up by answering four simple questions:

1. Exactly what am I selling?
2. Who is going to buy it?
3. Why will they buy mine?
4. How can I reach them?

The key is that *you* really can 't logically develop the answers—not without help, that is.

Your customer (or prospect) is the one who you will have to turn to—they actually will define the core values or essence of your product or brand for you -- their perception is the brand's reality.

And, the reality they perceive should be a corporate asset, not a liability that a company has to spend a fortune to correct.

Marketers trying to sum up their brand's essence on their own, frequently fall victim to the temptation to define their brand as they wish it to be, rather than what it is actually perceived to be, by those actually paying for their products or service-- their customers. This leads to misdirected marketing -- wasted time, wasted money and lost opportunity.

How do you verify that the brand you own is what you think it is? And, what are you really promising to deliver to customers and prospects in your marketing communications?

Start by keeping things simple. Identify those core values that define your brand in the minds of your customers by talking to them; ask them to point out those characteristics and values that *they* perceive the brand to possess. Then have them define their emotional connection to your brand and explain what separates it from its main competitors.

The result of this exploratory should give you a clear understanding of your customer's reasons for choosing your brand above all others in terms of the benefits it provides—the problem it solves or need it fulfills.

You should also be able to determine who your customers are, in terms that allow you to target them with your brand messages. This does not necessarily mean a simple demographic profile—age, gender, income, etc., but can be a values based classification that can include interests, activities, lifestyles or other means for identifying the groups that contain your most profitable customers.

Now you can begin to develop your brand's marketing strategy by getting back to our four key questions:

1. Exactly what am I selling?
2. Who is going to buy it?
3. Why will they buy mine?
4. How can I reach them?

Oh, it sounds easy, but don't jump to conclusions. Your brand strategy, benefit statements, key prospect targeting and a competitive positioning have to be simple and straightforward (or they won't work). It's just that getting there is a lot of work.

But once you do, you can start to develop your advertising and media programs with some confidence that you are saying the things that really matter to those who may buy your product.

So where do you start?

With your product. Make sure you have a complete understanding of what it is, how it is used and how it compares to all other products that are similar, or do the same things your product does.

Then go find out why people buy the kind of products you make—there are lots of reasons, but only a few will dominate everyone's list.

Next ask your customers why they buy your brand instead of other choices they may have. And, while you're at it try and identify those characteristics that make your customers a special group—not just age, sex or household income.

Try to explore other lifestyle habits and preferences that may make them a special (and reachable), market segment.

Finally try to communicate with customers and prospects in terms that they understand—they buy your product above all others for a reason—identify that reason, make it a promise and make sure you deliver on it.