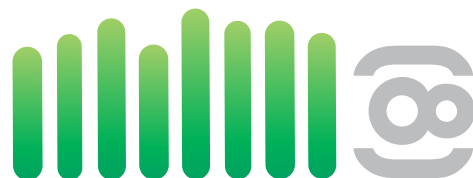


Branding.

What do you know, Joe?

Your Brand's Path to self-discovery. The 5 "Must Knows" for Brand Success.



Brand strategy. Conscious messaging. Intelligent design.



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While strolling along the aisles of the national marketplace, I pretend to be astounded by the myriad of products and brand choices presented to me, all fighting for my attention. I notice that "A" attracts me visually, "B's" jingle plays mercilessly in my head and the color theme of "C" seems to remind me of a vacation I took many years ago. So why do I select "D" instead of "A" "B" or "C"? What stimulates and motivates the act of making a purchase? From indecision to the knowing smile on my face, "D" becomes my choice and can be the start of a loyal relationship with that brand or product. (Every marketers dream!)

Defining reasons behind these brand preferences can be a complex task, nonetheless it is certain the common thread will always be the experiential process, often referred to as the "brand experience". However, this article is not intended to define the customers' experience, it is vital to identify how buying decisions are based on those interactions or "relationships". Relationships? Yes, relationships. You see, everything we experience in the world is in "relation" to ourselves. That relationship, how one thing fits into a singular perception is really the key to branding. There are really two sides to this relationship. The person having the relationship, and that to whom the relationship is formed. From the human perspective it's simple to define a relationship based on complex qualities of another person, like personality, core values, style, heritage, commonalities, likes, dislikes, etc. In most cases, the more you have in common, the stronger relationships you have. That's why you have strong bonds with some of your friends over the bonds or friendships you have with others.

Now if we look at this from the perspective of the business owner, brand manager and / or head of marketing, your task is really to create a human connection with a person (your target audience) to your brand. But since your brand isn't a person, you must add dimension to your brand, giving it depth to which your customer can have a meaningful relationship with. That's the complex nature of a relationship you need to create for your brand with your customer. However, a brand is NOT a person and if you think of a piece of cardboard, an inanimate object, one will have a difficult time having a relationship with that. In other words, focusing on the nature of the relationship with the intent of creating brand loyalty won't do you a hill of good unless you are clear and focused about what and who your brand is.

This article is written to help you, the business owner, create a powerful brand and provide the steps to define just "what you do" and "who you are" in order to facilitate your customers' relationship with your brand. No mistake, being clear and concise about these "5 brand must knows" are at the foundation of your success.



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1. Know your Personality.

Simply stated, different personality characteristics appeal to different audiences. On a subconscious level, people connect with brands that have likable personality traits, traits they can identify with, traits that they aspire to be. The first step in this process is to define your brand personality, which leads to increasing the overall brand engagement (and attachment,) in much the same way as people relate and connect to people. Simply put, much of the work in the area of brand personality is based on translating theories of human personality and similarly, identifying the dominant personality attributes and factors. For example, your customer may identify with a brand for its characteristics, for its functional benefits, social position, emotional outlook and its human like- traits. "See," Joe says, "'X' vehicles exude family-oriented values, while 'Y' radiates pretension and further 'Z' reflects the athletic and competitive qualities I recognize in myself." Eh hem.... So think of this, if the category 'X' symbolizes who you are, then you will be tempted to buy a brand that has the same aspirations. Likewise, consumer "Joe" would tend to buy a Porsche rather than a family car, if he feels it symbolizes who he is. An association is systematically set up in the consumer's mind. In this sense, every brand needs to be as unique as each of its consumer. However a word of warning, your personality **MUST BE AUTHENTIC**. As humans, we do have an inner sense about these things. Be warned, we **DO** reject brands that lack authenticity and those whose personality characteristics are not consistent.

2. Know what you do well.

Based on knowing what you do, the objective now is to maintain and promote the brand's uniqueness. Figure out what you do well and push it. Whatever qualities your product, brand possess, spotlight it, strengthen it, grow it. It will be the factor for differentiation and consequently will offer you the opportunity to carve out your niche. To be credible in the eyes of your audience, your argumentation of sale may emphasize your know-how, the passion that electrifies your work, the "love" message or the concern for the environment that drives your process. These features are what make your brand truly unique and distinctive. Doing what you do doesn't always set you apart. Knowing what you do well and focusing on that little kernel of truth can set your brand apart.

3. Know why you do what you do.

But wait! There's more. Knowing what you do well is not all of it, the next step requires digging deep into motivation, drive and look at purpose square in the eye. It lies somewhere behind the motivation to "make money" and reveals the core



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motivations that drive your business benefit your customers in some way by fulfilling a need (whether function or emotional). Many businesses overlook this step and think the only strategy necessary is the art of seduction, separating your customer from their cash. If you fall into this trap, you may overlook the true purpose of branding, which is really the art of creating relationships between people. Delivering a brand promise based on your business' passion or motivation and fulfilling your customers' needs IS the basis for such a relationship. Whew! Lot to uncover, lot to consider, we know... but armed with this knowledge, you are a step closer to facing the marketplace. (We promise)

4. Know your Competitors

Know your market, know your competition, whether they actually exist or not. To do this, simply take a look around you, examine your market, your business category and your specific vertical. Are there other players orbiting your stage? Chances are, you have a lot more competitors than you think. To determine if they are really a competitor, evaluate if they have similar offerings, similar products or similar services. For example, a dance studio may believe they compete exclusively with other dance studios. But if a potential modern dance student thinks of the free Lindy-Hop dance instruction offered by the local nightclub before the band starts, the dance studio owner must evaluate how the swing dance classes are being marketed. The wanna-be Dancers with the Stars you want as a new student may just choose spending their dance dollar and dance instruction time commitment elsewhere. In other words, that local nightclub IS considered a competitor, even though they sit in a totally different market segment. It would be in your best interest to learn more about what makes them successful and identify the specifics of their offerings that entice your potential audience. If you can manage to see things from your audience's perspective, you may just learn a lot. See if you can identify how your competitors satisfy their brand promise. Look at their marketing materials and promotional tools to try to get a sense of what you are missing. Then turn that knowledge inward to your brand and make adjustments. You may not be offering the night club atmosphere, but you can surely satisfy the promise of fun and fantasy too, provide the vehicle to allow your audience to dream of their feet dancing in harmony with a famous counter-part.



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5. Know your Target.

Knowing your target really means know the people you would like to sell to. Imagine yourself throwing a dinner party in your home for each and everyone of your customers. You know who they are, welcome them as a friend into your home and have a connection with each person. But that's impossible, you say! Well we know that, that's why we said, "imagine". In order to define those people (not demographics or metrics) you will need to segment the market as much as possible using 'psychographics' as your guide. This includes defining your audience through:

- * Lifestyle: conservative, exciting, trendy, economical
- * Social class: lower, middle, upper
- * Opinion: easily led or opinionated
- * Activities and interests: sports, physical fitness, shopping, books
- * Attitudes and beliefs: environmentalist, security conscious.

It's recommended that you do some research to find out just how they purchase. For example, uncover their buying habits, defining preference traits like seasonal, local, volume and promotional decisions. With all this information uncovered, you should have a picture emerging of your 'ideal' customer (or who you want it to be).

Follow these 5 "Must Knows" for Brand Success and you will have focused brand, which knows itself, knows its audience and make an authentic promise that create a lasting relationship. In your quest to uncover your brand, be inquisitive, harass and tickle. Get into it and get clear. In the end, you will have an authentic brand that will rise above the rest, be noticed by the right people and establish a relationship between your brand and your customer. Brand recognition is literally your brand, company or product, imprinted into the consciousness of your audience. Powerful process, keep it authentic!