



## Creating a Powerful Brand

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In today's crowded and often virtual marketplace, the playing field is competitive. How does one attract customers? How do you stand out from the crowd? A consistent and compelling identity and website and materials are key, but only if they are working to build your brand.

What is a brand?

Marty Neumeier in his book *The Brand Gap* defines it best. A brand is a person's gut feeling about a product, service or company. It's not just a logo or a company's advertising, it's not just a creative tagline. Those things are controlled by the company. The word "reputation" or "essence" comes closest to defining a brand.

And why is this important? We are inundated with information. Advertising is everywhere. More, better, faster, cheaper. . . fill in the blank. Companies make all kinds of claims, which may be completely valid, but in order for the customer to bite, you need to take a different and differentiated approach.

Today people are looking for brands that stand out from the crowd. The best brands for real people help bring order out of all the marketing clutter. Think about it. Magazines, sidewalks, bus cards, Volkswagon's as moving advertisements, banner ads on your internet browser page, even Google search pages have become

overwhelming and often meaningless as savvy businesses have learned "the tricks of the trade."

So how do you break free? A great business plan is your first step. A narrowly defined market is the next. "What? Narrow market, you say? But I want to get the greatest market share that I can." Casting a wide net may catch some fish, but it can also bring up lots of junk from the bottom of the lake.

Here are six steps in beginning to create a powerful brand.

### 1. Define your market position as narrowly as possible.

Know your organization and what you do best. Do your research. Think strategically. Decide what your company can do better OR faster OR (fill in the blank), but do not try to do it all. Once you decide what you do and who you want to do it for, make sure you know why it matters.

### 2. Dare to be different. . .

in your name (see our article on how to name your business), in your focus, in your logo, in your website, in your approach. Remember, you are looking to create a customer user experience that will be positive, unique, remembered and talked about. Doing the same old, same old won't cut it.

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**3. Get the team on board.**

Spread the word internally. Get the entire company behind your strategic efforts. Believe in what you do and be helpful to your customer. Define your elevator speech and make sure everyone in the company knows it, believes it, lives it and breathes it. Your brand essence starts internally.

**4. Foster innovation.**

If your staff is good at #3, they will be thinking of ideas to strengthen the company's brand and position. Check any of the featured companies in *Inc.*, *Fast Company* and other leading business publications, the brands with the highest innovation consistently show higher profit margins.

**5. Test your brand messaging.**

Now that you've defined your niche, know your customer and have set yourself apart, how is that conveyed to your satisfied and potential customers? Try it out. Test. Try again.

**6. Reap the rewards.**

It's as simple as that.

And, when you're ready to take your company's brand to the next level, it's okay to get a little help. Call in the experts; sometimes an objective opinion may be all you need.