

The Ultimate Guide to Branding in 2021

If you run a business, there's never been a better time to stand out from the crowd. Still, to make sure you're at the forefront of your industry, you'll need to learn how to take a brand from concept through to execution. This guide provides the latest information you need to get your company noticed and create an identity that lasts.

Branding - Getting Started

Your brand is the single most important investment you can make in your business.

- Steve Forbes

If there is one thing you could do to bump your business up in 2021, then that should be branding!

Your brand is your business's most valuable asset — it's what drives your return on investment and keeps people coming back for more.

Branding is often a misunderstood and overanalyzed aspect of business, but it doesn't have to be.

This is what you'll discover today - after you read this (practical) branding guide, you will have the important knowledge at your fingertips on how to create a brand that sticks. Very quickly, and easily too.

Follow this guide, and you'll probably never go wrong with building a brand in 2021 - let's get started!

What is branding?

In a nutshell: branding is everything that communicates the value proposition of your company, product, or service to the target market.

It is the subtle message you want your logo to convey, the one-off experience of your product or service, and ultimately how you position your company in every aspect of marketing.

Let's be clear:

Branding has a goal – to create a lasting impression in the hearts of customers and clients. In turn, they identify your product, service or company as a symbol of quality and value.

Which brings us to...

Why Is Branding Important For Your Business?

You've read the articles, you've checked out the infographics, but do you really understand the importance of branding?

A lot of people think it's just about slapping a logo on your business card and making sure your website looks pretty.

Well, there's a bit more to it than that.

The competition in the market today is fierce. The difference between products and offers is getting smaller. In order to be able to compete, something else is required as a sales argument since what determines whether your market converts or not is no longer only in the offer but also in the brand.

That's where branding comes in; it helps shape the perception of a business, service or product.

Here is the point:

People love brands. They choose brands over products and stay loyal to them. As a result, it is not enough to just make a good product these days. People want to love the products they buy. So, you need to build a brand that people will love.

Furthermore, creating a lovable brand makes it easier for staff to do a good job for the company because they share a common sense of pride they take in the brand. Another advantage is that strong brands also create value by attracting the best talents – skilled labor out there.

It can be said that a strong brand increases revenue, through lowering buyer's remorse and creating more repeat customers. It also makes marketing more effective because a strong brand, for example, provides more media exposure and word-of-mouth recommendations.

All these benefits have served the big brands well. And they have also been instrumental to successes of bootstrapping startups as with brick and mortar stores. Branding can also be a goldmine for you too. You only know how to do it right – jump to the next section to discover how.

How to get started with your branding efforts in 2021

Do you have a powerful brand or are you following the crowd?

Let's face it, if you're not working on your brand's strength and uniqueness, then you're leaving money on the table.

Whether you're currently looking to create a brand from scratch, or refine your existing brand, the following is how to do it right and avoid branding mistakes that can knock your business out of the running for new customers.

1. Define your brand identity

The basis for building a strong, successful brand irrespective of size, location or mode of operation is by knowing your own identity.

This should be your first step.

And like building a physical property, branding must begin with good foundation work. No taglines or logos make sense unless they are based on an analysis of reality.

A good start is to answer these questions:

- What exactly is the company's purpose?
- What is your company/ brand particularly good at?
- What makes your company/ brand different from the competition (USP, Unique Selling Proposition)?
- What is the value proposition of your company/ brand to the customer?
- Which personality should your company/ brand exude?
- What guides the conduct of your company (core values)?
- What is the core idea of your company/ brand (positioning) in one sentence?

You will agree that every company should be able to answer these questions at once – but unfortunately, in practice the reality is different.

To help you out, here is a tip:

It is always good to have everything gathered. Dedicate a considerable amount of time and resources and brainstorm. Ensure you answer each question as honestly as possible.

Still some more on what you can do:

Equally important is the company itself – how did it come about? You should weave this in your brand story.

For example: A fashion enthusiast that started a brand because they got fed up with the poor quality of cheap knock-offs and expensive mark-ups of popular brands.

Also, the founder or company history can be good to use in branding and

marketing.

Pro Tip: Hire a good copywriter to blow your audience away. Storytelling plays an important role in the structure of many of the biggest brands. Just think of Nike, Coca-Cola, and Apple, to name a few.

2. Research your market and competition

The market - Who needs your product or service?

The basis of every promising brand development is the detailed knowledge of the target audience.

You probably already have a rough idea of which target groups may want to buy your products. But do you know everything that you need to know about them? Whether you work with consumer or B2B customers, it is important to know:

- How do they live?
- What do they spend money on?
- How do they find out about new products?
- Who influences purchasing decisions about products like yours (in the family, in the company, from outside)?
- What trends or societal trends are affecting them right now?

These questions would guide you in unearthing insights into your market. There are more - so, keep an open mind and avoid basing your decisions on stereotypes or emotions.

Agreed, this is not as straightforward as answering questions regarding your company, product or services.

So, what is your best bet?

Leverage audience intelligence gathering tools. These tools would help you get a better understanding of your target market. Examples include:

1. Brand Monitoring Tools

Brand monitoring tools like the [Brand Monitor](#) are extremely versatile and have proven to come in handy time and time again.

As a target audience information gathering tool, all you have to do is input keywords related to your brand and audience.

The tool would notify you whenever these keywords are used to register domain names online as well as provide other updates such as when existing domains are dropped or modified. From this, you would be able to see firsthand how domain names containing your branded terms are making an appearance or disappearing on the market.

The advantage with brand monitoring tools is that you don't even need to have a website, social media accounts or any asset whatsoever to start monitoring the Web.

2. Social Media Analytics

These are only useful if you have Social Media assets (as you should if you are serious about branding).

Most social media platforms provide marketers and brand owners with tools to help them learn about their audience.

Here is how to use Facebook for example:

- Log on to Facebook, then, go to your business page
- "More" drop-down menu > click on "Insights."
- Finally, click on "People" to view the basic demographic information of people engaging with your brand on Facebook.

Demographic information like age, location provides valuable insight into the type of group that resonates with your brand. Don't be surprised if the information you gather is way off your expectations.

3. Website Analytics

Website analytics is another tool you can use to gather information regarding your audience for free.

Google Analytics is a prime example.

To discover the demographics of your website visitors, go to the “Audience” tab > “Demographics.”

Additionally, you can also discover what interests your visitors via the “Interests” tab. Whether it is food, shopping, technology etc.

Why is this important?

Knowing what interests your audience is golden. All you have to do is position your brand to take advantage of these interests.

For example, if you provide cleaning services in your local area, and Google analytics revealed that the majority of your audiences are technophiles who are into gadgets, you can create a shop to sell (branded) home improvement gadgets thus consolidating your brand.

4. Surveys

Surveys are a more direct approach to collecting information about your market. We strongly recommend this alongside the previously mentioned tools.

You don't have to blow your budget targeting the entire population. Just conduct surveys of customers that are of high value.

With regular surveys, you would be always on trend and better prepared to serve your market because they are directly telling you about their preferences - this is valuable.

5. Others: CRM tools, advertising platforms look-alike tools and so on

Look at your competitors

Who exactly are your competitors?

Companies that do the same thing as you.

Or, perhaps, other products that compete with yours? For example, manufacturers of cameras today also compete with mobile phone brands.

Below are some questions you should answer:

- What do they do?
- Do they offer equivalent products or are there large variations in quality and range?
- What does the industry structure look like?
- Are there large companies or many small ones?

3. Create a Brand Identity that sings and soars

Now the fun begins!

At this stage you use what you learned from your research in the previous sections, and turn it into an “image” for your brand.

A cardinal error of many businesses is trying to convey too much. Given today’s information overload, this can only lead to poor outcomes.

So, you must clearly formulate your business idea, positioning, mission and vision.

A business idea answers the questions: ‘What’, ‘for whom’ and ‘how’? While a ‘mission’ is your purpose on a more abstract level and a ‘vision’ provides a direction for the future. Lastly, ‘positioning’ places the brand in relation to the surrounding market.

All these should be communicated clearly without ambiguity. And in a way that sets you apart.

Let’s get into more detail:

- Define your product and your offer. This answers the question 'What?'
- Define your target group and how you will deliver your product to them. This answers the questions: 'For whom? And How?'
- What is the brand's mission? Examples could be: "To make energy accessible to all through cheaper and cleaner renewable energy sources."
- What is your vision for your brand? A vision is a concrete picture of the future of a brand. For example: "To become the #1 source for household fuel all over the world."

Make yourself as different as possible from your competition

One of the main functions of branding is to make your brand stand out from the competition.

Your customers should be able to separate you from the crowd. The basic requirement is uniqueness (USP) in both visual representation and positioning in your personality.

Key elements to keep in mind:

- Name: The official name for your business. It should be as unique as possible.

Tip: Before you settle for a name, ensure you check its availability across the internet. This would help you avoid trademark infringements and other marketing bottlenecks down the road.

- Slogan: Short, snappy, and memorable does it.
- Logo: Your logo is a graphic element with a primary goal to help distinguish your brand from others. No matter what you choose, people should be able to identify your brand through your logo without scratching their heads. From experience, the most successful logos are simple e.g. Nike, Adidas, Louis Vuitton etc.

- Brand Design: This includes all forms of visual representation of a brand. Color schemes, styling, and so on. The key here is consistency and visual appeal.

Note the following:

- Make the brand name simple and memorable. Short and single word names are highly recommended.
- By integrating the brand name, you achieve brand logo and brand design, as well as better learning and memory results.
- Slogans should express the positioning of the brand and should be long-term.
- Brand identity also involves how employees conduct themselves.

4. Make quality speak for you

It is important to reiterate this point: branding cannot compensate for a bad product or service.

This might sound like a no-brainer. A quality product or service speaks for itself, earns public trust, and attracts praises.

In an age where consumers are more aware and real-time communication is easy, marketing and gimmicks won't take you far – at least not when you are trying to build a lasting brand.

So, no matter what you do, don't let money down the drain by delivering poor quality products or services.

5. Build an army of employees that would defend your brand

What has branding got to do with employee motivation? A whole lot, even more than you can imagine.

Employees are a decisive factor and excellent communicator for successful brand

building.

What should you aim for here?

High-level employee motivation.

And one way to achieve this is through communication.

Here is how:

When employees are well informed, they feel they are being taken seriously, and can understand decisions and thus actively support them. And only then do they become important communicators who have a positive impact on the outside world because they identify with their company.

Emails, newsletters, group chat are some of the ways you can ensure everyone is carried along. Start this today if you haven't yet, and you'll be amazed at the immediate result and benefits it brings to your brand down the road.

Another important strategy is ensuring [workplace health and safety](#). A safe workplace would allow staff to put in their best.

Finally, ensure competitive pay and incentives. It all adds up to creating a brand your employees are proud of. And they would use any opportunity to defend or paint your company, product, or services in good light out there. Consider them your army of ambassadors.

6. Keep in touch with your target audience

Only if your brand is known to your target group will you be able to benefit from it. So, communicate your strengths and make your offer to the right recipients as precisely as possible.

Many different tools are available for you to achieve this.

Online ads in particular are extremely effective. This stems from the fact that the target group can be easily accessed.

You should stay in constant contact with your fans and customers via blogging or

social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Another channel that you can use is the newsletter. You can keep your customers up to date by email, introduce new products or services and deliver updates. Other options: chat, a hotline or videos on YouTube or other video sharing sites.

Feedback and User generated content

If you can make your customers identify with you and your brand, you can be sure of new regular customers.

You can achieve this most effectively if you give them the opportunity to contribute to the further development of the brand and the products.

Ask for feedback regularly and take criticism seriously. They offer you a chance to improve. In addition, a customer whose criticism is heard and respected will feel valued and respond positively.

Allow two-way communication. Instead of just sending, you should be open to what your audience has to say.

7. Protect and Grow Your Brand

If your business is like most, you want to expand your brand. This can be done by setting up a brand monitoring tool and using it to find out what people are saying about your business on social media and elsewhere on the Web.

This way, you will know what others think of you and your brand – and will be able to use this information to the benefit of your brand.

You see; websites can be built by anybody using the resources online and there is nothing wrong with that.

However, you have no control over what others say about you if they are talking and writing about your brand or business. That is why brand monitoring is so important.

If you're unfamiliar with brand monitoring, it is a process of collecting information about the [reputation of your brand online](#).

Taking part in these discussions online is a great way to connect with customers, prospects and partners and keep them informed about what you're doing.

In creating a powerful brand for your business, it's important to have control over your reputation and understand how people react to the messages you share. This helps you grow as a company and be more successful.

It boils down to this:

If you're not monitoring your brand, your competition will. In fact, chances are your competitors are already doing that. How else would you know when a customer is unhappy or the sales are going to go down? Branded conversations happen all over the web and if you don't join in, you're giving away a key advantage to any competitor who knows how to stay in the game.

Putting it all together

Branding is the single most important and strategic component of any company. It is designed to create a positive emotional connection with your target market. It is the way to differentiate yourself from your competition. And it is the glue that brings all of your marketing activities together into one cohesive unit.