
Why develop a brand?

Your business already has a brand, whether you like it or not.
Here are seven reasons to take charge of it.

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Whether you like it or not, your business already has a brand. Your brand is the way people in your target market think and feel about your business and its products or services, as they see them today.

Those thoughts and feelings have been shaped by many things:

- how they found your website
- what they think of your logo
- whether they could find the information they wanted when they looked for you online
- how they communicated with you, and what that experience was like for them
- how they felt when they received the products you sold them
- what other people said about you

... and much, much more. The strength of your brand (people's thoughts and feelings towards it) will be influenced by all of these things. Your job is to make sure the experience meets their expectations of the brand. That matters for a number of reasons.

1 **A brand creates emotional engagement that influences choice.**

We tend to make decisions based on emotion, then justify them with facts. Branding plays a big part in this. A strong, recognisable brand gives people a shortcut when they are thinking about buying. Instead of weighing up a number of options, the strong brand provides instant recognition and credibility, and the other choices come across as second-best.

Think about a parent buying running shoes for their child. It feels safe and easy to buy Nike or Adidas rather than a generic brand from Kmart, even though they are more expensive, especially if the shoes will be a status symbol for their child. In reality, both pairs would probably last as long and fit the same. But the parent feels better buying a brand that has been around for a long time, and that they have an emotional connection with for all sorts of reasons.

These intangibles make up the emotion of a brand. For a club or venue, they might include the people at the front desk, the person in the canteen, the location, the other people there, and the way people are greeted.

2 A brand gives confidence and reassurance, leading to loyalty.

Once people have experienced a brand and it has met (or exceeded) their expectations, they have confidence in buying another experience. They feel safe that the brand will perform to a certain level, and they are happy to tell others about it. If you deliver a consistent experience, people start to become loyal. Do it over a long time and they become raving fans: your best, unpaid sales team.

3 A brand lets you charge more.

The worst position to hold in a market is that of the cheapest provider. It means you have no real point of difference, and anyone can come along tomorrow and charge less. People will pay more for a product or service they trust and value, because they fear taking a chance on something they are not sure about. A strong brand conveys that trust, and holds a position of strength as a result.

4 A brand sets you apart from the pack.

Perhaps the single most difficult piece of thinking in business is this: "What makes me different from everyone else, and how do I prove it?" Once you have decided, a strong brand communicates that difference and sets you apart from your competitors.

You are probably offering similar tangible benefits to your competitors. Your brand, the emotional connection to your product, does the work of giving customers more: making them feel cool, clever or superior. Even better, it costs less to market to your target market, because people already know and understand who you are, so you don't have to explain every benefit to each new prospect.

5 A brand provides a platform for growth.

With a strong brand, expanding your business is easier. Recognition lets you move into new markets and new services. If you already have a successful business selling sporting gear, it's a lot easier to start a holiday camp program, run a coach-the-coaches seminar or sell branded t-shirts, because people already trust you to do things a certain way.

6 A brand attracts a clear and specific target market.

To succeed, you must be very clear about who you are targeting, and develop a brand and message to match. You can't be all things to all people. As well as writing down the kind of customers you want, write down who you don't want. When you are clear about who you are looking for, you will find them more easily, and they will be more engaged when you do.

7 A brand provides a foundation for communicating what you do.

When your business and brand are small, they are easy to control. As they grow, they get pulled in a lot of directions, particularly visually. People tweak the logo, a new brochure looks totally different from the last one, and the new staff uniforms are a different shade of blue from the old ones (which still get worn).

A brand provides what I call a visual language: the look and feel of everything from business cards to uniforms to signage. It is captured in a brand style guide, a document that sets out exactly how the brand should be seen and heard in every situation.

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Importance.**
Seek to be a person of Value.

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