

8 Steps to BRAND BUILDING

THE FOUNDATION OF REAL GROWTH

BRAND BUILDING

Align Brand to Vision

Be Specific

Be Consistent

Be Different

Make Your Brand Statement

Communicate At All Levels

Learn To Network

Be Honest

The exercise of brand building is one that aids and accelerates the sale of your company's product or service. Learn the ways to strengthen your brand by letting people know what is it that you do best, communicating that effectively, networking well and connecting with all your customers.

Operational issues take up most of the time of small and medium entrepreneurs. Most of their days are spent grappling with fundamental issues that trouble their workplace, such as timely deliveries, product or service quality, people issues, supply chain management, cost control and most importantly, selling their product or service. Most often, brand building is one of the last concerns.

The truth is that when SMEs overlook branding, they overlook their growth potential, too. To grow from an SME to a large enterprise, it is important to win the trust of more and more customers, especially those who drive the ticket sale. And that doesn't come from focusing on selling. The brand needs to support the selling process.

The challenge for SMEs is in creating a brand that works with the sales cycle and powers an expansion rather than a restriction. Brand building is the concern of the entrepreneur and this must be his or her priority from Day One.

ALIGN BRAND TO VISION

A brand statement draws on the differentiator and the entire thought process, attitude and philosophy of doing business. Building a brand is aligning the product to your vision. In this sense, setting a vision for your business is an integral part of the entire branding exercise. Sometimes we feel a vision statement is only for the large organisations to show. But it is far from the truth. Rather, large organisations run the risk of having blurred visions. As a business, you must know what you want to achieve and where you want to be in the short term, medium term and long term. It is the vision that helps you and your employees know whether your day-to-day decisions are being taken in the right direction. Once you believe in your vision and have your entire team believing in it too, the path to achieving it will become simpler. The challenge is to break down the vision into value points that can be made part of your day-to-day functioning.

BE SPECIFIC

To begin with, you need to know and understand your product as clearly as possible. Not just SMEs, but sometimes very large organisations, including MNCs, regularly mess up with their product definitions. For example, just by saying you are an IT company is not good enough for your customers. Microsoft and Apple are not known as IT companies – Microsoft creates software and Apple makes PCs. Today Microsoft, and in a bigger way Apple, have both moved into consumer electronics, but here their new brands are leading the way.

The lesson is that you have to be specific. For example, are you into product development or product engineering services, application development, software product company, IT consulting company, IT setup and support company? Bringing clarity to what you do best is not just

important for your focus, but also does wonders to your customer's perception of you and allows your employees to bring out the best in them.

BE CONSISTENT

In most of the attempts by an SME to build a strong and valuable brand, what is missing is consistency. There is often a lack of engagement with the brand seen in the stakeholders at all levels. As a result, all this different communication touch points end up diluting the brand. Worse, an inconsistent brand image will hurt the credibility of your enterprise and raise questions on its level of professionalism.

A consistent approach to branding can prove to be an important factor responsible for the way you are perceived as a brand of significant importance and repute in the industry. Entrepreneurs need to take their brand seriously.

BE DIFFERENT

Once your product definition is clear to you, you need to build differentiators. It is the differentiator that will help you define your brand clearly so that your customers know you from others selling the same or similar products or service. The need to be different is not enough, you need to be remarkable. There must be something in your product or service that will cause customers to choose you over the many options available to them. It is the identification of this quality that will help you create a brand statement.

MAKE YOUR BRAND STATEMENT

Once the product and brand definition is done, we need to focus on communication. Being a small and medium enterprise doesn't give us the licence or the liberty to appear casual. On the other hand, it becomes even more necessary for you to present yourself in the correct light. Begin with a professional and relevant brand logo, business card, website, proposal, quotation, company profile, presentation, uniform. It is worth spending some money on this as your customers, employees and vendors get to see that you have the heart and vision to become bigger than you currently are. Contrary to popular belief, creating a brand identity and the related brand collaterals is not a purely creative process. Your brand identity must make business sense for your business and requires the effort of a brand consultant and an identity designer working together for you. But these are still the basics. To present yourself in a branded way, you need to also work on training your team on how to communicate and present the brand correctly.

COMMUNICATE AT ALL LEVELS

The purpose of brand communication is to tell your customers about the performance of your product or service. The customer is only interested in the value they derive from your product. Focus your communication collaterals, such as your website and brochure, on what you will do best, and not why you are better than others. The other important thing to remember while expressing your business

is, don't keep harping about how you are small and young. Smaller companies like to say all the time: "Hey, we are a start-up and we are a bunch of young people who have joined hands to serve you". Stop saying this so often! Honestly, these are big put-offs for your customer as they will doubt your capability to deliver even if your credentials are impeccable. You surely don't need to and must not lie about your company's experience and size, but don't go shouting about it from the rooftops.


Don't kill your chances in the first go itself.

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LEARN TO NETWORK

While you will follow the conventional ways to reach out to your target audience by participating in trade shows, through Internet marketing or by advertising, do not forget the golden principle of brand building that plays the most important role in transforming SMEs into large enterprises – network, network and network! The best way to grow and become bigger is by throwing yourself open into the market. SMEs tend to get into their shell and focus only on selling and executing orders. By doing so, you will surely grow in double digits. To scale up significantly, you must move out and meet new people. You never know, your new contacts might make you aware of a new market, a new location, a new product, a new customer, which is relevant to you, and could pave the way for your next big push.

BE HONEST

This may sound naïve, but actually being honest is the most important thing for your journey to become a branded enterprise. Never boast and promise more than you can deliver. It is the biggest pitfall of the branding exercise and one that hurts the most in the long term as you try to grow faster. 



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