

BRANDING



THE ONLY THING YOU CAN TRULY BRAND IS A COW.

BY BLOGGING CONCENTRATED

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1971



1987



1992



2011

The Myth of Branding

The term branding is thrown around by marketers all the time. Seems like there's someone at every conference talking about branding. But for the most part, one crucial piece of information is left out. . . . the only thing you can truly brand is a cow (and that just seems mean).

Branding is the reflection of your marketing and messaging efforts your audience encounters. Your story, logo, customer service, tone in your blog posts and engagement with your community all combine to create your unique and identifiable brand. These are the things your readers and customers come in contact with every time they visit your site, your social media properties and you.

Your brand is how they feel about you
despite or because of your messaging.

No matter how hard you try, your brand is ultimately in the hands of your audience. So it's important to know who you are, what you stand for and what you bring to the market. You are the lone author of your story, which in turn, is your brand. If you can't communicate it, how are they ever going to know?



You Have a Brand Whether You Know it Or Not

Ever meet a guy who's good with tech stuff? You know. . . that guy in the office you call when your computer has a glitch. Not the guy in the IT department, the other one. The one you're always so impressed with that he knows so much. He's been branded by the office staff as the "go-to tech guy."

But I'll bet you \$100 he doesn't have a logo, or wear "tech guy" colors. He doesn't depend on flashy colors or logos or strategic targeted marketing that states "this is my brand" but rather his attention to detail, knowledge of the techie side of stuff and willingness to assist have created a brand that is stronger than any written statement.

Your Company Story

Your company has a brand already as well. If it's new, your company is the brand you've already established with the people around you plus some new level of business acumen. To make your audience feel what you want them to feel about your company's value, you're going to need to understand your own story.

There's a reason we exist for the marketplace. And for many of us there is a story that has led to this outcome. Often times in the course of creating our brand we look at the exterior - the outside of the story - and think that that encompasses our brand. We forget often that it's the deeper story that really helps to define the brand.

For instance, a cathedral, while having a foundation and walls and windows, looks very different on the outside than a McDonalds. That's because the deeper story - the why they exist - is diametrically different. Understanding the why of who you are and who your company is will shape your external brand details with much more clarity.

Sometimes that story is as simple as "I wanted to share my recipes" or "People charge too much for this stuff" or "I just want to help people with what I've learned". These statements are the start to your story, but we want you to push a bit deeper and determine the reasons behind those statements.

At Blogging Concentrated we want you to figure this out by creating a statement that reads like this:

I believe _____ and that's why I write the blog I do.

To make that clearer think about these belief statements we've seen from other bloggers:

I believe food can taste great without costing a lot of money and that's why I blog at myfoodblog.com.

I believe democrats are wrong all the time and that's why I attack them constantly on my blog at democratsareevil.com.

I believe it is hard to spend money while you're building a blog, that's why I give all the tips I do on beginningablog.com

If you can figure that out, then you should be able to write your brand story. Who are the people you're trying to reach with this message? When you know who you are working to reach, it will help with the building blocks of your brand. Just like a cathedral doesn't need a potato fryer in it's plan you'll discover what elements are critical to your overall voice, design and messaging.

Take time to think through your why statements. Why do you invest time behind your computer everyday? What impact are you trying to leave? How are you changing lives? Making things easier? Those statements will clarify your brand identity and thus help to create a culture that is identifiable with the content and information that you produce. Our job is to simplify it and make it as clear as possible what we want them to think about us. The clearer the focus the more powerful the message. Then we use the different aspects of branding to help illuminate the story.

The brand is the collective thought of your audience (including people who've not even encountered you before).

Elements of Branding

In telling our story and creating the image we want our audience to embrace we have a variety of elements at our disposal.

Font * Logo * Colors * Typography * Photography
Illustrations * Icons * Slogan * Voice * Services
Newsletter * Navigation Bar Items * Products
About Me Page * Tweets . . . and more

Each of these elements impacts how the audience feels about us. If you don't know who you are or what value you bring to the market, your elements will not embody your story at each level.

The Font Impression

Font is not something all bloggers think about beyond the logo. But font is critical as it is often the first thing that your audience encounters.

JOHNSON FUNERAL HOME

*Johnson High
Performance
Motorcycles*

As you can see above, what could the story behind “Johnson Funeral Home” really be? Are they a funeral home for Harley lovers? Grunge Bands? Stunt Doubles?

And the High Performance Motorcycles? Are they for retired high school music teachers?

Does your font and design speak to your story?

The first impression of a font really sets the tone for your audience's response. Would you take seriously a funeral home who has decided to use a sketch font in red? Probably not. The font, although a very small and simple seeming thing, has great power in the overall impact that your brand, your site, makes. And it can make a difference between reading more and closing out the page.

For more about fonts and the power that they have in creating a brand and powerful content please check out our [Typography Ebook](#). You could also watch the excellent documentary “Helvetica” (on Netflix) to learn more about the depth, history and power that a font has in creating a brand.

Gap's Gap

Think about the GAP. Several years ago GAP decided that they were going to “update” their logo and thus changed their font from the traditional GAP logo that we all grew up with.

Well, within weeks GAP realized that changing the font actually changed the overall impression of the brand because the new font was seen as juvenile and not as timeless as the traditional GAP font.



The Color or Tone

We all know that Green is the color of money and earthy things. Orange is exciting. Purple is regal. White is Clean. Black is upscale or mysterious.

Colors create feel.

What feeling do you want to invoke on your site? In your business? Make a pallet of colors that give the feeling you want to convey. With Blogging Concentrated we've chosen an orange/black/grey combination and have recently decided we need one more color. . . like sky blue to add an element of whimsy.

We feel like the orange/black/grey is a bit too stoic and think a color will change that. Whether we actually change people's minds about us or not is yet to be seen, but we do want them to know that our company is far from stoic.

The Under thought Navigation Bar

When someone comes to your site, the nav bar is the thing that often sticks out the most. Your audience can determine what value you add to their world immediately when they see that.

If your site is called “CreativeWritingLovers.com” . . . the name may tell you something but think of these two nav bars and how they would affect your impression of the site. Which site would mean something to you? Which site would you tell others about? Either the nav bar speaks to your or it doesn't, but in both cases it helps you form an opinion of the site.

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- [Story Mash](#)
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Neither nav bar is wrong or bad. . . just appeals to a different person. What do you need in yours to appeal to your target market? What do you need to help bolster your “brand”? It is they who will champion your company. It is they who hold your brand in the palm of their hand.

#LittleThingsMatter

Think about Southwest Airlines. Part of their brand is being different than all the other airlines - so different that they've really done a 180 turn from what other traditional airlines have done. Since they've chosen a very colloquial messaging theme, they use the napkins, employee demeanor and even the side of the plane to spread their message.

While bags fly free is a differentiating statement, it exists because the brand is interested in making sure you feel like they care about your money.

Their clothing choices are typically shirts and a polo versus skirts and button downs. They are allowed to be sarcastic and joking via the intercom when they make announcements. Even the words on the bags of peanuts handed out contribute to the overall culture of their brand.



Don't forget all the little details of creating a brand that speaks about you. Oftentimes it is the little things - those items listed above - that have the greatest impact on the stickiness of your brand.

Functional Branding



Think about Weather.com? Without going there can you recall the colors, typography, logo? What about the brand story? My guess is that you can't.

Because weather.com's entire brand is based on the site functionality. Can you imagine using the site if they didn't let you search by zip code? What if they didn't offer a 3, 5 and 10 day forecast? Would it be the reliable source of weather information that we both use?

In fact, what is your impression of that company? Because that is their brand. How have they created that reputation in your mind?

It only takes one misstep

Now, think about the world-class marketing machine we know as FedEx. They have all the “branding” elements you'd expect. But what if they do everything right, but one thing? You surely recall the purple and orange colors, the arrow logo, the trucks and probably even the slogan:



What if they don't actually get their packages to your doorstep “Absolutely, positively overnight”? What happens to the brand in the minds of the customers?

Isn't that the kind of thing Jimmy Fallon makes fun of? Wouldn't the brand become “Absolutely, positively sometime”?

No matter what FedEx does, if they can't deliver packages on time the finely crafted logo won't matter.

Kitchen Nightmares

One of the best parts about the show “Kitchen Nightmares” is learning about the disconnect from what restaurateurs believe and what they do. On many, many of the shows the owner desires to bring great, original food to a community that didn’t have it prior.

But in the course of running their business they took shortcuts like freezing food ahead of time, buying frozen fish filets, or using pre-made dressings. Their story lost all its value when they lost their way.

Take a look at your content? Does it promise on your story? Are you taking shortcuts writing Sponsored posts that don't bolster and improve your brand? Are you writing about blogging tips on a recipe site?

Can your audience champion your dreams or not?

Are you really rebranding?

Many bloggers decide at some point to rebrand. . . but only 1 in 100 actually mean it. Most who are looking to rebrand are really just upgrading their design but aren't really rebranding

A new site name, new logo, or even new topics on your site are not actually rebranding because the goal isn't typically to change the minds of consumers what you are. Going back to the FedEx example can you see yourself changing your feeling about FedEx if they switch to Teal and Purple instead of Orange? No. In the end they will still be the company that sends your documents overnight.

A few decide to really rebrand when they actually change from a deal site, for example, to a lifestyle site. When that happens their audience looking for deals will no longer come for that purpose, so the quest becomes finding a new audience and being a new service for the old audience.

While you're likely hoping your audience doesn't revolt with the new design, consider approaching the task from a different viewpoint. Remember to keep in mind the principle of serving your audience while you work through that redesign. And, as a side note, make sure that you design your site to be monetarily wise and not just pretty as well.

Here are some things to think through if you're just redesigning versus rebranding.

Determine what is your brand in the eyes of the consumer. Can you articulate that brand to a sponsor if needed? Is that image different than the image you want them to have? Then use your designer to help reinforce what they already love and what you want them to love. When you're not rebranding . . . you really have an opportunity to make your audience even happier.

And perhaps add the elements that will make them love you even more. Think through all the places that they talk about - are there little phrases that have become part of your brand's culture? Add them in. John Lee Dumas, host of Entrepreneur on Fire, calls his listeners "The Fire Nation" every time. Because of that - those universal theme elements are woven throughout his site and social media platforms. Your brand isn't just limited to design but is also powerful in the words that you use throughout your site.

Examples of Great Branding

The only place you should look when you are looking for great examples of good branding, is within yourself. What brands do you like? Your hair dresser? Your oil change place? Barnes & Nobles?

In fact there is no other place because only you know what companies have left you with a good feeling.

Some folks will show you websites with a cool logo, matching social icons, and coordinated social media pages. But that's just the surface.

Ever hear someone rave about Zappo's customer service? That's not something you can see in a logo. But having people rave about you is the hallmark of good branding.

The only real reason we want to see examples is because we want to emulate a path that looks good. But you already have the examples in your head. Emulate the companies you love. The ones that have made you feel special, made you smarter.

Or. . . focus on your audience and just be awesome every chance you get.

Measuring your brand

Big companies do a lot of brand measurement from year to year. Leave this activity to the big companies because it is virtually impossible to turn that into money. For bloggers this is time and expense that has little ROI.

Big companies do this one way, impression surveys. They get 500 to 1,000 people to answer some questions about their feelings toward the company and then they have a basepoint from which to begin. Not only do they then understand how the audience feels but usually learn things they didn't know. The problem with surveys is they take a long time between first and last survey to really learn something because it often takes a while to change people's minds.

Bloggers can do this a bit easier and much quicker.

The site search button is a wonderful tool to help uncover what value your audience believes you have. When someone arrives at your site then types something into the search box on your site, they type things they are hoping you have, expecting you'll have or know you have.



This is a good measurement of what utility your audience feels your site delivers.

This is part of your brand. When they don't find that information, that moment is stored in their brain as part of what your company is. Imagine for a moment going to weather.com and searching for your zip code only to find they just have state information. It helps for an impression of the value.

People searching for things you don't care about are no issue, but when they're searching for topics within your niche and aren't finding them – that's problematic for your brand. And a great task to put on the to-do list.

Some people think keywords are a measure, but they would be wrong. When people search for things on Google and arrive on your site, the keywords they looked for having nothing to do with your company. It was just a search.

And the only way they'd ever find your site using keyword searches is if you actually speak to the subject. More than anything, keywords are only a reflection of the words you have on your site. And a good number of times, those words were just there as color - not as a main focus.

Pages viewed is a good way to find out what's being read on your site, but not a good brand indicator. Since many people arrive only to realize what they landed on is not what they wanted to read, pages viewed is not the best indicator.

However. . .

There is a way to look at your pages viewed and glean information. First export all your most viewed pages to a spreadsheet. Delete everything but the name of the page. Then in a column next to each page name, list how most of the traffic gets to that page (ie Pinterest, FB, Google Search, etc. . .)

If you don't know how exactly, leave that blank.

When you're done you should have a ton of viewed pages with blanks next to them. These are the pages on your site that your readers navigate to on their own, via "tag links", via "related post plugins", via the nav bar etc. These are the pages they chose to go to after they were on your site. That information is gold and tells you a lot about what your audience really wants.

And since they found it on your site, it's an indication of what value you offered them.

A final way to really measure what your brand is from your audience's perspective is to practice listening and observing. Your readers' comments, likes, tweets, shares and messages give a powerful glimpse into the mindset of those who visit your site. Pay attention to the phrasing that they use as those little words give you a deeper impression of what they expect when they visit your site and what they love.

So now that you've gotten a taste of the difference between branding and brands what do you do next? Go through this

book one more time and then analyze your mission for your company.

- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What do you want others to say about your brand if they wrote it?
- What would your Wikipedia page say?

We think the best way to remember the difference between a brand and branding is to remember that a brand is like a noun - an inactive word describing something whereas branding, in some ways, is like a verb. An active, moving, and dynamic entity that depends not only on the environment you've created but also your audience's response. You may have a logo, just like the GAP or Southwest or Starbucks but the logo isn't the brand. The brand, just like we've worked through, is the deeper vein of identity that is evident in all facets of what one does.

That is branding.