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Signs Your Brand Stinks

A Whitepaper From How-to-Branding.com

“**W**hat do I need a brand strategy for?” It’s a query I hear often, right along with the whining, “The results of our latest marketing campaign stink!”

It wouldn’t be a stretch to say that *all* businesses and organizations would like to see a better return on their marketing and communications investment. Yet very few businesses see the direct connection from a solid and focused brand strategy and improved marketing results.

But what if every dollar you spent on marketing and communicating your company’s offerings would return *more* than one dollar each time you engaged in a marketing activity or event? Wouldn’t you be much more active in marketing your products or services? Of course.

Most companies’ marketing efforts are neither efficient nor effective. That’s because they don’t have a strategic basis on which to find a foothold. In other words, their advertising and other marketplace communications are not based on a solid brand strategy—a strategy that will illuminate the “one thing” that makes their offerings better or different or more relevant or more authentic than the competition.

You’re probably familiar with department store magnate John Wanamaker’s legendary saying: “Fifty

percent of my advertising is wasted; I just don’t know which fifty percent.” If that statement weren’t so accurate, we might laugh a little harder.

The fact is, the Advertising Research Foundation reports that, while the number is actually closer to 20 percent—but with some estimates as high as 80 percent—**businesses waste between \$30 and \$50 billion each year on ineffective marketing.**

And the primary cause of all those dollars being flushed down the toilet? Marketing and communications efforts that are not based on a solid foundation of brand strategy.

In other words, *brands that stink.*

Accountable marketing—marketing with a return on investment—starts with a fundamental understanding of your brand. Without it, you’ll have no road map to guide your marketing and communications efforts.

Does your brand stink?

Is your business leaking marketing dollars? Is your business lacking a unified brand strategy? Here are 9 signs that your brand probably stinks.



1. Can you explain to someone—in fifteen seconds or less—what your brand essence is? In other words, what's the one thing that differentiates your business from the competition? If not, your brand probably stinks.

Stop trying to out-shout the competition with larger ads, hyperbole, and a bigger marketing budget. According to Al Ries and Jack Trout in their book, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*, “The best approach to take in our overcommunicated society is the oversimplified message. You have to sharpen your message to cut into the mind.”

That's the basis of the unique selling proposition (USP) or your brand essence.

Your essence should not be confused with your slogan or tagline (although some organizations use them interchangeably). Here are some of my favorites...

Nike: Authentic Athletic Performance

Disney: Fun Family Entertainment

Starbucks: Rewarding Everyday Moments

As a business leader, you must make a promise to the consumer that says, “Buy this product and you will get this specific benefit.” And this unique proposition must be just that: *unique*. One that the competition either cannot, or does not, offer. And this proposition must be so strong that it can move your target audience to action.

Once you've identified your brand essence—the most powerful USP for your product—integrate it into all your marketing and communications efforts. Your one-thing essence should become the primary message used to sell your business.

2. Does your management team and front-line employees (those with customer contact) have a solid understanding of your businesses' strengths? Do they know your essence or unique selling proposition? If not, your brand probably stinks.

Your staff is critical to building a strong brand that will cut through the clutter. They are your brand ambassadors. They are the voice and tone of your business. They are your best advocates and your most loyal evangelists.

Your staff should be engaged, bought-in, involved, and communicated to continuously. Your brand should drive behaviors, expectations, and performance. And if you do it right, you'll be rewarded with improved employee satisfaction, less turnover, and more productivity.

But the biggest dividends will be paid with a brand promise that resonates *outside* the walls of your business and shouts loudly and clearly to your customers and prospects with one-voice consistency.

For example, using the Starbucks example mentioned above, “Starbucks: Rewarding Everyday Moments,”



their essence informs employees and baristas how to act towards customers. It becomes a mantra—an internal rallying cry—that empowers staff and sends brand signals deep into the marketplace.

3. Does your business have vision and mission statements? Does your management team and front-line employees know and embrace your vision and mission? If not, your brand probably stinks.

Vision and Mission statements help defining why your business exists and creates a foundation for all your marketing and communications to build on.

A Vision is a description of the business, as you want it to be—the future you wish to create. In dictionary terms it is, “a mental image produced by the imagination.” It involves seeing the optimal future for the business, and vividly describing this vision. The description might include HOW things will be WHERE, WHOM with, WHAT you’ll be doing and HOW you’ll feel.

Here’s the vision for Coca-Cola:

To achieve sustainable growth, we have established a vision with clear goals.

Profit: Maximizing return to shareowners while being mindful of our overall responsibilities.

People: Being a great place to work where people are inspired to be the best they can be.

Portfolio: Bringing to the world a portfolio of beverage brands that anticipate and satisfy peoples;

desires and needs.

Partners: Nurturing a winning network of partners and building mutual loyalty.

Planet: Being a responsible global citizen that makes a difference.

A Mission is the “special assignment” being undertaken by your business. One of my favorites is the Google mission statement:

“Google’s mission is to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.”

If you don’t have Vision and Mission statements—and share them often with your staff—you probably have a business built on sand rather than a foundation of solid rock.

4. Does your business have objectives that align with your company’s strengths, values, passions, and vision? If not, your brand probably stinks.

Look, I’ll cut to the chase here: many businesses have goals and objectives. Most alert organizations have a business strategy. But quite often the business strategy is not aligned with the brand strategy. That stinks!

Here’s why: In a society where people have less time and shorter attention spans, your business must have a succinct, compelling, and unique brand. By having a fanatical focus, alignment, and linkage



reinforcing your brand reputation in everything you do (and eliminating those things which dilute this reputation), customers and prospects who are looking for *your* unique attribute are more likely to engage with *you*.

So your brand isn't just a component of the big picture, rather it IS the big picture. There's a maxim that states: "The brand is the strategy." So for your company's leadership (maybe that's you!), it's important to understand that the brand will be the touchstone on which everything else you do and say should relate and reflect.

When your brand strategy platform is aligned with your business objectives, you can speak across multiple channels with one-voice consistency. Over time, this will impress your unique value to the marketplace—those who can and will consider buying your products or services—and you will see growth. It's about having a strategy that your entire organization can get behind, believe in, and live through every customer and prospect touchpoint.

5. Does your business currently have a tagline or a slogan that is memorable, original, and communicates your brand's differentiating factor? If not, your brand probably stinks.

Do businesses need a tagline? No, it's not critical to success. Many businesses have grown and prospered without a slogan.

But taglines *can* strengthen and reinforce your brand essence, help describe what you do (beyond your name), and cement your company's name or mission in the minds of your prospects and customers. In fact, a well-crafted tagline has the power to more clearly describe your business, support your value proposition, and help differentiate you from your competition.

Here are five types of taglines. Note how each helps prospects and customers link your name to your brand message. Taglines can translate your positioning statement into a marketing statement meant to serve as a customer magnet.

- ▶ Try short and simple ("Drivers wanted" VW)
- ▶ Think jingle ("Winston tastes good like a cigarette should" Winston)
- ▶ Differentiate the brand ("Everywhere you want to be" Visa)
- ▶ Universal sentiment ("I'm lovin' it" McDonalds)
- ▶ Play with words ("So advanced, it's simple" Panasonic)

If your business already has a tagline, see if it passes this "stink" test:

- ▶ Is it memorable?
- ▶ Is it original and does it make a confident statement?
- ▶ Is it easy to say?
- ▶ Does it allow your prospects to recall your name?
- ▶ Does it communicate your brand essence or



- position?
- ▶ Will it help your business achieve its mission?

6. Can your customers and prospects navigate their way through your company with comfort and ease? Is it easy for them to understand your offerings and make a purchase? If not, your brand probably stinks.

If your prospects and customers scratch their heads when they think of your business because your offerings and product lines are confusing and difficult to “find” or remember, you could be suffering from a classic brand architecture problem.

Don't confuse brand realm, or “architecture” with your corporate structure. It's a system—like a family tree—that helps your prospects and customers navigate easily within your company and make the right choices.

Determining your brand realm is a systematic way of organizing the identity of the different products, messages, or elements of an organization so that people both within and outside of the business understand how its clients or customers are being served.

It gives structure to—and communicates the relationships between—your company including its divisions, business units, joint ventures, as well as its products and services, all with the objective of

adding value to the brand.

Virgin, Richard Branson's far-reaching and diverse organization houses some 40 brands—from music to airlines. British Airways has one brand. There is no right or wrong structure. It's a matter of how you want your customers to see and interact with your business.

Consider the needs and interests of external audiences rather than internal ones. If your customers and prospects are confused about how your business is structured—from a brand perspective—consider revising or simplifying your brand architecture.

7. Does your business have a recognizable personality? Do your marketing and communications efforts portray this personality appropriately? If not, your brand probably stinks.

Is your business serious, competent, daring, adventurous, fun, rebellious, or intelligent? Is your brand sophisticated, outdoorsy, or reliable? Knowing your brand's personality—and how that persona resonates with your prospects and customers—will help you define and direct your marketing and communications efforts. And when that personality is conveyed consistently across your products, services, logo, tagline, packaging, and communications, your marketing will be “on strategy” and therefore, more effective.



A mistake many businesses make is to express what can only be described as schizophrenia across various marketing and communications channels. A brochure might be serious in tone...while a direct mail piece might try a sophisticated approach...while the company logo expresses a conservative, corporate feel. These multiple personalities can cause a prospect—or even a customer—to run screaming to the competition.

A crystal clear example of well-aligned brand personality is Emma. You should meet her. Check out www.MyEmma.com to see some of the simple ways that their fun and expressive brand is extended in the voice and tone of all their communications.

8. Does your business “live the brand” every day? Are you enriching your company’s brand with every customer interaction? If not, your brand probably stinks.

“Your brand is NOT your logo,” I gently explained to a client. “It’s everything you do from how you act, to what offerings you provide, to what you say when you’re on the phone with a customer or prospect. You have to back your new brand with appropriate changes within your organization that will show your constituents alignment between your brand promise and your actions.”

Ironically—or should I say fortuitously—I then took a trip to Florida to meet with that nonprofit organization’s board to discuss their branding

project. I was staying at a hotel that I’ve been to six times before, an AmeriSuites that was feeling its age. The rooms were ratty and the service was suffering.

As I pulled into the hotel parking lot, I noticed a large crane putting the finishing touches on a new sign out front: the hotel had transformed into a Hyatt Place. Aside from the new logo gracing the outside of the building, the property looked familiar and while I was impressed and intrigued by the contemporary logo out front, I wasn’t sure what to expect when I stepped through the revolving door.

I was greeted by the friendly, smiling faces of the staff, who explained that just yesterday the AmeriSuites had cut over into the new Hyatt Place. The lobby, while still undergoing some construction, was warm, stylish, and innovative. The staff was helpful and seemed genuinely happy that I had arrived. They processed my check-in in less than a minute and thoughtfully handed me a package that had been shipped there for me. Still, I was familiar enough with the hotel to reserve judgment until I saw the rooms. I expected the same dull, rundown experience.

The brand promise of the new Hyatt Place is that guests would find themselves surrounded by comfort, options, technology, and taste.

And that’s exactly what I found when I swung open the door of my room. While the room was the same size as in the AmeriSuites days, it had been redesigned to open up the floor plan. Everything was



new from the carpeting to the signature Hyatt Grand Bed. A 42-inch flat panel, high-definition TV was an unexpected surprise, and the free Wi-Fi and the complementary breakfast, while expected, were still welcomed. The other touches—granite countertops, high-end plumbing fixtures, and more—were inviting and stylish.

You get the point, I'm sure. If the logo out front was all that had changed, the Hyatt Place brand promise would have fallen flat. You can't "trick" your stakeholders by showing them a new corporate identity and leave it at that.

If you're going through a change or refreshing your brand, take the actions necessary to follow through on your promise. Continuity happens when the conversion of your brand is aligned with the conduct of your brand.

9. Does your business know who your real customers are? Do you have a targetable core market that can and will respond to your offers and does your target audience see your business as relevant and authentic? If not, your brand probably stinks.

Your core customers are the lovers of your business and what it offers. They are not everyone who will come in contact with your brand.

In their book on leveraging creativity, *Juicing the Orange*, Pat Fallon and Fred Senn discuss the

strategy of one of their clients, United Airlines, as it struggled to find a way to differentiate itself among the other legacy air carriers and the start-up, no-frills airlines that were chipping away at its market share. They decided to focus on the core market of frequent business travelers. These folks made up only 9 percent of United's travelers, but they represented 46 percent of United's revenue.

Their thought was that if they could appeal to the frequent business travelers, leisure travelers would follow.

So focusing on your core market may not be about finding the *biggest* group of people who can and will patronize your business, rather, it's about finding the *best* group of people. For United, focusing on the core market of frequent business travelers was their chosen strategy.

Remember when Las Vegas tried to become a family vacation destination? Talk about missing the core market. When the Sin City aligned itself with the audience it really served (in its infamous "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" campaign) they began seeing visitor growth.

Orlando understands that it's all about families. Their latest campaign, featuring the tagline, "Orlando makes me smile," captures everything that Orlando is about in a simple way that everyone can relate to. Targeted directly toward families, one print ad says, "Family time. It's one of Orlando's most popular attractions."



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How-to-Branding.com is the ONLY step-by-step, do-it-yourself affordable branding resource. The tools and techniques available online are similar to those used by big companies and they'll allow YOU take control of the branding process.

Why is branding important? Branding creates a preference for your products or services so you can increase revenues for your business. Every businesses—large or small—can and should benefit from branding's best practices, but they often don't take advantage of even the basic branding toolbox because the theories, the language, and the principles seem out of reach. And the cost to retain a branding expert or brand strategy agency can be sky-high.

That's why today, branding typically lives in the boardrooms of large corporations, consumer-driven multinationals, and arrogant ad agencies—the purview of highfaluting marketing gurus and pretentious practitioners and consultants.

How-to-Branding.com can help: we bring branding best practices from the boardroom to the lunchroom—and show YOU how to do it yourself. That's what affordable branding is all about. After all, no one knows your brand better than you.

Because the truth is, branding is for ALL businesses, large or small, consumer or business-centric. Without a solid and established brand strategy—a strategy that resonates throughout your company and radiates out to your customers and prospects—your marketing and communications efforts will fail.

How-to-Branding.com will help you and your business discover its true brand, determine the ideal way in which customers and prospects perceive your business, and show you how your brand can add value to your company, your employees, and your customers. All without breaking the bank.

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See you there, stinky!

