



## Brand new year, brand new you...

by Debra Blundell.

At the start of a brand new year, our thoughts often turn to self-image. Quitting smoking and losing weight are high on many people's lists - if only for the first week of January. But what about our business' image? Why not make this brand new year time for an image overhaul for your brand?

Your brand, after all, is your most valuable asset. It's more than a label or a logo. It's the unique combination of attributes that intuitively tells the public what you, your company and its products and services are all about. This mysterious mixture of tangible and intangible assets, including name, colour, language, logo, behaviour, smell and service (to list but a few) works subtly on the mind of anyone encountering your company. It offers them a promise and creates an impression of value. And it plays an absolutely crucial part in helping people decide whether they want what you are offering, whether they believe all your promises will be fulfilled and, ultimately, whether they buy from you or your competitor.

Powerful stuff. No wonder brand management, the strategic day-to-day and long-term shepherding and nurturing of your brand across the organisation, has become such big business. Some of the biggest brands in the world, including Coca-Cola, Apple and Nike, dedicate enormous resources to building and managing their brands, often with spectacular success.

But branding isn't just for the big guys. Smaller organisations can benefit just as much from taking their branding seriously. Sadly, the question often asked by directors of SME's is can they afford to spend time and money on branding? What they should be asking is, can they afford not to?

It's easy to think that, without the advertising budget of a Coca-Cola or the sponsorship budget of a Nike, you can make little worthwhile progress towards establishing a successful brand. But that attitude has been proved wrong many times by little companies that have taken branding to heart and grown big reputations. Take purveyor of smoothies and fruit shakes, innocent. The concept of innocence (its brand essence) runs through everything it does, from its natural ingredients, to using recycled packaging, to its child-like labels and cow-splashed vans. Without the aid of a top agency or million pound budget, the people at innocent have turned a small business into one of the best-loved and fastest-growing brands in the UK.

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The secret is in recognising what you've got and using it. Your brand already exists, and it's all around you. It's in your people, their expertise, what your products are and how they perform, your name, your logo and your customer service. Every company stands for something and, if you're not telling your customers what you stand for, they probably won't have the confidence to buy from you.

Building a brand for a small business needn't cost the earth. It isn't about expensive advertising campaigns. Even something as simple as examining how staff answer the phone can make a big difference to the way customers perceive you. It's not money you need to put into it, but time and effort. Brands aren't built overnight. This won't be a one-off project with an end date. It's an on-going part of everything you do for as long as your company or product exists. But the rewards do build over time, so make sure this is one New Year's resolution you stick to.

## Small things you can do to make a big difference

- Is your product or service right? You can't build a great brand around a flawed product. If your offering is right, building the brand is much easier.
- Find a central proposition and then apply it to everything you do. What are you all about? Honesty? Fun? Innovation? Caring? Value?
- Read books on branding. Case studies are a rich source of ideas you can use yourself.
- Look at other firms and brands you admire and use their branding for inspiration (but don't just copy - all brands are different and what works for one won't necessarily work for another).
- Commission a brand audit. It doesn't cost as much as you might think and it's a great way of pinpointing where the strengths and weaknesses of your brand lie. Use this information as the basis of your new strategy.

- Is your image up to date? Your visual identity is probably the first aspect of your brand that customers see. If yours is dated or out of step with your brand promise, customers may not look any further. This is one area where independent expertise can be money well spent. Plus, a fresh new identity is a great starting point for getting staff behind your on-going branding drive.
- Are you being consistent? Branding isn't about a single aspect of your communication with the world. Look at every aspect of your operation, both internally and externally. Does your office environment say as much about your company as your brochure or website? Does the company culture match the promise you make to customers? Your brand needs to run through your firm like 'Blackpool' through a stick of rock.
- Focus on your customers. Word of mouth is the cheapest and most effective form of advertising, so make sure you're communicating your brand messages to customers at every 'touchpoint' (i.e. whenever and wherever they come into contact with you). Fill your website with helpful information. Find clever ways of incorporating your brand message into letterheads or have stickers printed with your logo and tagline to go on envelopes or packages.

If you would like us to consider the performance of your brand communications and share our observations for free, please contact Gilles Guilbert at [gg@indigocreative.co.uk](mailto:gg@indigocreative.co.uk)