

## **Growing your brand in tune with your business**

Rather like great leaders, great brands tend to be born rather than made. The qualities that will make your brand strong and successful are there right at its conception, whether innate and yet to be exploited, or loud, proud and plain for all to see. But change is also a natural feature of business. Every company is subject to market forces and the shifts of the commercial environment. Making sure your brand is going to be strong enough to withstand those shifts is not always straightforward, but knowing exactly what your brand is about, and how that reflects your business will help enormously. So, the starting point when thinking about how you might take your brand to the next level should be a careful assessment of its qualities. Put simply, have you got something sufficiently robust to make the grade? Is your brand well conceived?

One problem for many businesses comes from making those judgments (or not). Close proximity to something can cloud objectivity and make the above questions tricky to answer. With this in mind, we've outlined three stages to help you. These should go some way to ensuring that your brand is up to the task in hand, keeping pace with your growing business and, crucially, making sure that you don't lose sight of what you set out to achieve when you set up shop in the first place. Follow them, and you should have all you need to chart your course to a successful, strong brand with the longevity to match your business.

### **First off, know who you are**

If you think back to the original inspiration for your business, there's a good chance that it involved spotting something wrong in the world out there; something that was missing; something you want to change. We're all in business, as they say, to make money but do you have a higher level goal that guides what you are trying to do? So focus on that for a moment, and think about how you set about righting that wrong. This is your company's mission – the reason it exists at all, in fact. And if you haven't worked this out already then you'll need to as the company and your brand starts to grow up. So it's important to keep in mind exactly how you are going about making things better.

Aside from this mission, your company will also have a set of values you hold dear. Ask yourself, what is important to my business? Think about this at a functional level, in terms of things such as your product or service – what is it about what you create or the way you go about your business that is crucially important to you? Then think about it from a more emotional standpoint – how do you want to be perceived in the market? Do you want to be seen as caring, or perhaps forward-thinking or trendy? These are qualities that set you apart from your competitors and mark out the personality of your brand. If you get them right then you won't need to change them. They become part of your success. They're what you stand for.

## **Second, know where you want to go**

Like most things in life, it's important to know where you want to end up. Setting yourself clear goals and end points is a crucial part of a successful business, and this applies to your brand too. Think carefully about your destination and how you intend to get there, and then place this at the core of everything you do. But don't keep it to yourself. It's important to make this goal known to all in the organisation, so make sure everyone internally buys into this idea and understands it fully. Having everyone singing from the same hymn sheet is a vital part of creating a consistent brand. And your brand isn't just a logo or an ad. It's the way you, your company and your people behave and go about things. And the smallest part can let down the whole – as anyone who has had a bad experience with, say, a call centre, will tell you.

It is also vitally important to understand your customers, as well as what motivates them. When you're charting the course of your business, you need to be sure that your customers want to go there too. If that isn't the case, you will need to devise ways of attracting new customers along the way, as this will become critical to your growth plans. There is no point in becoming something that will become irrelevant to your core customer base, so tread carefully here.

Keeping a close track of how your business is evolving is also an important task. If your brand and your business are growing apart then they will cease to function as an effective whole, so review your mission and your values – the things you stand for - as you move along your chosen path. If you are deviating too far from what you set out to do, then you need to either set yourself back on track, or evolve your brand in a way that makes sense to the new realities of your business.

## **Third, identify any areas of 'flex'**

As your brand evolves and changes, you will be confronted by the need to make certain choices. Deciding which aspects of your brand should stay and which should be jettisoned to make way for new qualities isn't easy, so you need to make sure you get it right.

It is well worth taking steps to identify the aspects of your business that you are prepared to shape and evolve as early as possible in the lifecycle of your company. Are you likely to want to change your distribution channels, or perhaps your method or place of manufacture? Will you consider diversification into new markets or product sectors? Are you likely to pursue different kinds of customers? These are the kinds of question you need to be asking yourself, and if the answer to any of them is 'yes', then you will also need to think carefully about the aspects of your business that are absolutely sacred. In every successful brand there are certain core physical and emotional attributes that are indivisible from the overall picture, so it

is important to recognise those early on and guard them carefully. It is these that will give your brand its unique personality and its strength.

Above all, you must know the inherent strengths of your business and the qualities worth preserving, as these are of pivotal importance to the vitality of your brand. Growth and change should not be about sacrificing the things that define who and what you are. The aspects of your business that define its personality are the very essence of your brand, so protect them, care for them, and only look to change them if it makes absolute sense.

### **Measuring all of this**

Of course, underlying all of these three key points is a need to measure what you're doing, in order to see what works and what doesn't. This means setting some effective metrics in place. If you're going from 'A' to 'C', and you want to know about 'B', then metrics will be a big help.

As your business grows, the thoughts I've outlined here will help you keep track of the way it is changing and evolving. What your brand says about your business needs to reflect reality, otherwise its promise will be let down by the customer experience. Essentially, your brand is a manifestation of your business and all that goes with it, from the products or services it offers, through to the ways in which you go about doing what you do, and the people that do it. Make sure that the two not only match up, but will also remain compatible in the long term, and you should find yourself with a brand of real strength, integrity and vitality.