



## Your Reputation

### Basics of Branding: Research – Strategy – Design - Implementation

**Overview:** Many people experience your brand in numerous ways: services, staff, community businesses, medical personnel, donors, case workers, the board, the press, etc. Each of these contacts molds the impression of the brand. Some of these impressions are obvious, like service results and one-on-one interactions. Other contacts such as communications with brochures, monthly newsletters or even thank-you letters may be subtler in their brand effects.

Your brand image creates expectations. It defines who you are, how you operate, and how you're different from other organizations. In essence, your brand image is a promise - a promise to be kept.

The customer experience can't be left to chance. It should be actively designed and controlled in a manner that enhances your brand image. It must consistently reinforce the brand identity across every contact or the value of the brand itself is at risk.

Here are five steps to building a strong brand and an optimized brand experience:

#### **1. Research today's truths**

You must survey where you are right now. Your brand promise is irrelevant if your customers and potential customers do not believe it. Therefore, your future branding must be supported by reasons to maintain or reasons to change your image. This will automatically add substance to the promise and define specific expectations. Are there speed bumps or negative challenges to overcome before proceeding? It is naive to forge ahead without all possible input no matter how difficult to hear. This survey will be different for every business and organization and must be customized.

#### **2. Identify customer touch points.**

Each individual step in your organization's operation contains a number of touch points as someone comes in contact with your brand. Your ultimate goal is to have each touch point reinforce and fulfill your "marketplace promise".

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Walk through your processes. How does every step injure or support the brand? This comprehensive trace of your marketing and servicing processes allows you to create a simple touch point map that defines your various customers' experiences with your brand.

### **3. Determine the most influential touch points.**

All touch points are not created equal. Some will naturally play a larger role in determining your organization's overall customer experience. For example, if your product is ice cream, taste is typically more important than package design. Both are touch points, but each has a different effect on our experiences as a whole.

To determine the touch points driving overall experience, your organization can use a wide array of techniques ranging from quantitative research to institutional knowledge. The methods you use will depend on the complexity of your processes and your existing knowledge base.

### **4. Design the optimal experience.**

Once we have completed the above three steps we should be able to design your optimal customer experience. Now remember, I'm using the word customer to represent all of those who come in contact with your business.

Determine how to express each 'reason-to-believe' at each key touch point. We may find a hierarchy of touch points for each customer type.

### **5. Align the organization to consistently deliver the optimal experience.**

A holistic approach to aligning your business to consistently deliver the optimal experience is essential. Identify the people, processes, and tools that drive each key touch point. The best plan goes south if there is someone in the organization who does not support our effort. Or worse, they talk against it.

The impact of behind-the-scenes employees are less obvious but no less important than the frontline contacts. Similarly, the impact of workflow processes and tools (i.e. technology systems) on the customer experience may be less intuitive but crucial to consistent delivery.

Identify which activities don't align with your envisioned customer experience. Determine how to address them so that these components can be brought into alignment.

## **The Final Word**

Every service you bring to market yields a customer experience. Is it the experience you intend? Does that experience fulfill the promise you've made to the marketplace?

By identifying the people, processes, and tools that drive customer experience, you can actively design and control your own unique, optimized experience. The brand promise you make to the marketplace will be kept day in and day out across every key customer touch point, building a strong brand.

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