

Developing Your Brand Strategy: Who Are You?

Think of your brand as your personality. Are you fun? Are you smart? Are you attractive? Are you unique? Do people like to be around you or do you turn them off? The first step to building your brand is deciding what kind of personality you want to portray to the community.

Unfortunately, you can't always control a customer's perception of you. You may think you are attractive, smart, and nice, but it doesn't matter if the customer disagrees. The good news is that you can actively influence your customer's perspective through a focused, consistent brand strategy.

As John Jantsch, author of *Duct Tape Marketing*, states, "It is extremely important to make sure that your customers know, like, and trust you." Customers crave familiarity and they're more apt to do business with a company they like. First impressions are hard to change. Don't get off on the wrong foot!

As a small business, you have a competitive advantage because you can personalize your service and really get to know your customers. You may have already established good relationships with existing customers, but now it is time to make new friends. And remember, customers are not the only people affected by your brand. Your vendors, lenders, neighbors, employees, etc all have the power to positively or negatively influence public perception. If you have struggled with some customers, employees, or vendors in the past, now is the time to turn over a new leaf. This is a new beginning for you!

The key to building a successful brand is consistency. Large companies thrive because they are reliable and dependable. Customers know what to expect and they take comfort in that stability. Every employee greets the customer in the same way, each marketing piece has the same messaging, and the product is always the same. If your customers never know what they are going to get when they walk through your door, they may not come back. Your entire team needs to focus on providing a consistently great customer experience every time.

How can you tell if your customer's perception of you is in line with the image you are trying to portray? First, determine one word that sums up your entire business. Doing this allows you to focus your messaging and helps to clarify your identity. This is what you WANT to be. This is what you CAN be. This is what you are promising you WILL be. There is no point choosing a personality that you don't fully embrace. Your customers will recognize if you are not living up to your messaging. Once you have identified your word, build your brand and persona around that one idea. After a period of time, ask your customers to name one word to describe you. Did they pick the same word?

Obviously, if you are not actively living your brand and consistently promoting it, your customer will not have the perception of you that you want him to have. Vow to improve your branding today.