

The New Imperative in Today's Economy: *8 Critical Brand DNA Questions to Answer*

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So many businesses are being tested with the uncertainty of these troubled times in our global economy. Some will falter or even go out of business; others will weather through the storm and become even stronger, smarter and more adaptive—consider the theory of ‘*Survival of the Fittest*’—(see Wikipedia.org for more info). Are you the latter? Are you ready to take control of your brand's destiny? YES or YES?

Every business, whether small, medium or large; start-up or well-established; B2B or B2C has a unique Brand DNA. Have you defined yours? Have you dug deep, just scratched the surface, or never thought about it? Well, then, **now is the time**—more than ever, to make sure you and your employees are crystal clear on who you are as a brand, what you stand for, and what you promise to deliver to your customers. **Now is the time**—more than ever, to define, build and evolve your brand from the inside out by aligning your leadership, culture, and processes with your unique Brand DNA to not only survive, but **thrive** in this and every economy.

Branding, let alone building a **Brand DNA**, is a concept that many companies struggle to understand because they believe Branding exists under the auspices of Marketing. Not so! Businesses typically look to marketing for the quick-fix immediate solution to a problem. Effective marketing may get your customers in the door but it doesn't and cannot keep them coming back for more, nor does it transform them into loyal, brand champions. What compels your customers to come back for more is your brand's ability to deliver a consistent, distinctive and relevant experience for all stakeholders.

To create the desired brand experience, you must first define the specifics of your brand then articulate it to your employees so that they are crystal clear on it:

- A. Communicate!
- B. Communicate!
- C. Communicate!

We invite you to take the next 15 minutes to work ON your brand and answer the following eight questions. These questions are designed to help you glean some insight into your distinctive Brand DNA. **Now is the time**, as it is imperative to succeed and thrive in this troubled global economy.

1. What **perception** does **your brand** want to “**own**” in the **minds** of your **market** (employees and customers)?
 - Have you asked this question? Do you know how you want to be perceived?
 - Successful brands like Disney (fun, magical family entertainment), FedEx (on-time *overnight delivery*), Ritz Carlton (*refined ambience*), Volvo (*safety*), Google (*innovation*), and Southwest Airlines (*low-cost and humor*) all own a perception in the minds of their market. These companies have created processes, behavioral expectations and rituals that enable their employees to deliver on their brand—to build the desired perception.
 - You don’t have to be on the list of the most valuable and prominent global brands to take control of the perception you want to create and hold in your market space.

2. What is the distinctive **style** of your brand?
 - In other words, how would you describe your brand’s **personality**?
 - Are you hip and confident? Bold and eclectic? Or customer-centric and transparent?
 - Think about how you could **package your style** into a distinctive brand experience on a multi-sensory, physical, emotional, intellectual and even spiritual level for your employees and customers.
 - The Google culture has embraced a distinctive style (*spontaneously creative*). One way they emulate and foster their style is by hanging hundreds of feet of white boards throughout their campus offices in Northern California. Their employees jot down creative concepts, visual ideas and brainstorm on these boards to collaborate and share information. Frequently, ideas get chosen for further exploration.

3. What are the core **values** of your brand that guide your behaviors and business practices?
 - Values are **guiding principles** that form the basis of what is important to us. They give meaning to the intentions behind our brand and business practices.
 - In *Built to Last*, by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, their research showed that strong brands have enduring values and they don’t waver from them.
 - We’ve seen the negative effects of brands that don’t live by their values—their brand image is severely tarnished and in some cases we have seen the annihilation of a business (*examples: Enron and Arthur Andersen*). Think of the hundreds of thousands of people affected by these companies not living up to their values?
 - Strong brands continuously refer to their values to drive their actions.
 - In a global study of 365 companies by Booz Allen Hamilton & Aspen Institute, respondents reported that a company’s core values are most critical in two strategic business areas—*reputation and relationships*.

4. What are your unique **differentiators** that help create and leverage brand advantage?
 - What are the things that make you stand out and **set you apart** from all others in your industry category/market space?
 - Consider your point of difference in the products, services, solutions you provide your customers. Consider your proprietary intellectual capital such as your trade secrets or unique processes, awards or unique service delivery.

- Here's a great example—Build-A-Bear Workshop®. They reinvented the concept of toy manufacturing in a mall-based store. Their differentiators are in the retail experience they create with heavily themed and colorful stores that tantalize all the senses. Store associates (Master Bear Builders®) share in the experience of the guest at each phase of the bear-making process. Build-a-Bear's brand differentiation is in the experience it delivers to guests through their creativity, processes, product and personalized interaction.
- A great quote by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, authors of *The Experience Economy*, "*In the **absence** of a distinctive brand experience, **price** becomes the **default** in your customer's purchase decision.*" Build-a-Bear brand's stores report an **average income** of **double** the typical retail outlet.

5. What **standards** of performance excellence will you adhere to across your brand scorecard: *employees, customers, processes, and financial?*

- Companies that have clearly defined **standards of performance** significantly increase their ability to manage and deliver on their business goals and strategies. Channeling employee behaviors, having established standards for service delivery, implementing processes that are followed without fail along with clear financial practices—guides everyone within the company to support the Brand DNA.
- Consider Ritz Carlton Hotels. They have their '*Gold Standards*' that set the guidelines for what they will deliver to their guests and what they pledge to their employees. These standards are a way of life and are reflective of their values and operating philosophy in action.

6. How will your brand **reinforce** who you are and the desired perception you want to create in the minds of your employees and customers?

- Implement a recognition program that **reaffirms behaviors** consistent with your values and the desired brand experience you want to deliver. Get your employees involved in developing the program and ensure everyone has the opportunity to recognize one another.
- Ritz Carlton's motto or Brand Mantra is famously known as, "*We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen*". It has become a collective internal perception continually reinforced among all its employees and expressed consistently in how they interact with guests.

7. Does your brand have a **strong point of view**?

- Do you clearly stand for **something different** or **special**? What is it?
- Brands like Harley Davidson have a strong point of view. They continuously deliver the experience of *freedom* to its avid cyclists of kindred spirits across the world. They have created a customer community called 'HOG'—*Harley Owners Group* that is unlike any other in the world. The company sponsors rallies, road tours, festivals and other celebrations.
- The power of their Harley Davidson's brand symbol is expressed consistently in all their product lines, including maintaining the look and feel of their motorcycles while competitors have succumbed to design trends over the years. It's no wonder they maintain a strong loyal base of customers. They are an authentic brand attracting and sustaining customers who

share their values and experience of freedom. The brand has literally become a ritual to its customers.

8. What is your **BRAND PROMISE** to your employees and customers?

- What is a Brand Promise? It's a **clearly articulated, succinct declaration** of the promise you commit to deliver at every employee and customer touch point. It's reflected in every action and interaction. It is reflected in your processes and service delivery. It drives company decisions and the brand experience you desire to create.
- Brands with clearly articulated brand promises can better reinforce a culture that is inspired, passionate and energized. The Brand Promise becomes the guiding light for all employees and stops arguments.

I invite you to consider these questions carefully. What are the attributes of your unique Brand DNA? What is your Brand Promise? Take the time to define your [Brand DNA](#), be true to what you stand for, consistent in how you deliver and thrive in these uncertain economic times. Visit www.BrandAscension.com for more information on the Brand DNA.