



Branded Imagination

A brand fairy tale...pinch me, am I dreaming?

By Suzanne Tulien, Principal, Co-Founder, The Brand Ascension Group

IMAGINE...

- Being served an entrée that actually looks better than the menu photo.
- A clerk responding to you with 'My pleasure!' instead of 'No worries' or 'No problem.'
- Getting the same 'WOW' service EVERY TIME you deal with that vendor.
- A sales representative who is familiar with the coupon you present and details of marketing campaign and is excited you are taking advantage of their offer.
- The grocery store clerk saying 'thank you for shopping with us' BEFORE you, the customer, says 'thank you' to the vendor for checking you out.
- A store clerk ignoring the phone ringing behind the desk, and giving you 100% attention as you check out.
- Getting a return phone call or email within 12 hours.
- A vendor you frequent knowing and calling you by name when you shop there, every time.

I know, I know, these imaginary thoughts seem pretty farfetched in this day and age, but I believe it can happen, really.... pinch me if you think I am still dreaming!

All of these ideal behaviors I dream about above don't seem too difficult to attain, or do they? Why is it so rare for businesses to actually BE what their marketing messages tout; consistently? I often wonder about the saying, "we are creatures of habit", when consistency is the one thing most businesses lack, and is a primary cause of customer loss. It seems so easy, and yet only a select few brands actually practice this type of ongoing consciousness in their everyday business lives and have truly made a habit of doing so. Unfortunately, too many businesses make inconsistency the habit!

David Barrows, from The Design Agency, UK, once quoted "40% of marketing dollars are wasted, due to ill-informed, demotivated staff undermining the promotional promise." For now, let's assume that were true and then consider the amount of money American small businesses spend on advertising every year at around \$30 billion. Now, based on this statistic, that's \$12 billion wasted annually!

Case in point: A friend of mine works in an inbound call center for a national satellite TV program provider. He told

continued...

How can you affectively market a brand you have not yet defined?



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NOW IS THE TIME TO WORK ON YOUR BUSINESS!

1. Are you tired of spending more and more on your marketing efforts with little return on your investment?
2. Do you see lost opportunities with employees who don't consistently create "Wow" experiences for your customers?
3. Are you plagued by price-sensitive customers?
4. Do you suffer from a shortage of customer referrals?

If you answered YES to any of these questions, this may be the most transformational program you will ever attend to define your unique competitive advantage for your business!

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me the other day that he received several calls from customers who had visited the company web site and spotted a special Father's Day offer. My friend and all the other call center employees were completely unaware of the offer and therefore presented the perception of ignorance to the customer. The customer is left frustrated and 'led on' by the promotional offer. What did this lack of awareness do to the overall perception of the brand? One customer at a time...all evening long, calls were coming in and customers were left frustrated....hmmm. It doesn't have to be this way!

What would it have taken for the managers to brief the employees of the new offer? A five minute briefing before the shift started? What transformations in perception would the customer have had if the representatives said "Thanks for calling in for our Father's Day promotional offer, let me explain how you can take advantage of this great special." Again, very small gestures that have huge consequences!

Consider this amazing statistic, "94% of our customers WANT to be loyal" (Zamba Solutions, 2002). Unfortunately, businesses continue to give them reasons NOT to! We all know, as consumers, we'd like to find a hairdresser, an auto repair guy and a banking institution that we could 'settle in with' long-term because we believe we are cared for, receive high value consistently and are acknowledged regularly as valued customers.

If you've been reading our articles regularly, then you know that EVERY business has a brand; good, bad, or indifferent. And as business owners, we have the power to control how our brand is defined, built, and experienced by our employees and customers. How many of you, reading this right now, have taken the critical time to actually define your brand's DNA? It's genetic code, your brand 'blueprint'?

We believe that most businesses lack consistency because there is no truly defined and articulated brand. How can you create consistent systems and processes, and unique culture and leadership behaviors and actions when there is no foundation as to what the brand stands for? How can you market a brand authentically that has not yet been defined? How can you walk your brand talk? This is where so many businesses are missing the boat, but could very easily aboard the next one as soon as today!

By making a decision and commitment to define your brand's DNA, you and your employee team opens a whole world of opportunities to be highly brand congruent and CONSISTENT in your actions and behaviors. This will also lead to discovering your true differentiators and leverage them so that you can stand apart from your competition and win customers for life.

In an annual survey on brands and branding by experts from top global brands, guess what was cited as the most critical aspect of successful branding? (The 2007 Brand Marketers Report by Interbrand).

1)	Marketing/Advertising	.8%
2)	Consistency	36%
3)	Product	3.5%
4)	Budget	4.3%
5)	Innovation	18%

Pay particular attention to the rating given to the aspect of Marketing/Advertising—less than 1%! This is exactly why we have a workshop and article entitled, 'STOP MARKETING (for now), START BRANDING!'

The brand defining and building process is not difficult. And it is not an initiative meant solely for the owner of the business. Everyone in your business represents the brand and should have some sort of ownership in the development and/or implementation process. Yes, the process. Branding is the process of defining and living the message/promise/essence of the organization. Building a brand is not a marketing campaign, or a logo creation or refresh. Building the brand is conscious, strategic, and deliberate effort in defining the perception you want your employees and customers to have of you – then controlling that perception by creating actions and behaviors that consistently and distinctively affirm and reaffirm that perception. Read that sentence again. If you glean anything from this article that is probably the most important sentence we have to deliver to you.

Being a business owner/entrepreneur is one of the most exciting privileges and opportunities we have here in the U.S. It should be a creative, exciting, challenging, and inspiring experience. We all know the definition of INSANITY: Doing the same thing expecting something different. Well, here is your chance to do SOMETHING DIFFERENT – and get different, amazing results! Commit to spending some time defining who you are as a brand and discover what stake your brand will put in the ground and claim.

Our 'IGNITE YOUR BUSINESS BRAND DNA' step-by-step, brand-defining methodology is now online, self-paced and available for those savvy business owners who are ready to do something different.

Now, imagine....

- ...that all your employees understand and can articulate your Brand Values.
- ...that everyone in your company finds ways every day to live and deliver your Brand Promise.
- ...that your brand's differentiators reduce customer price sensitivity.
- ...that your customers become your 'no-cost sales force' as ambassadors of your brand and tell their friends.
- ...that you and your employees are having fun inventing new ways to enhance your Brand Standards of Performance.
- ...that you and your employees recite your Brand Mantra daily to inspire and motivate 'on-brand' actions that represent your unique Brand DNA.
- ...that in any economic environment, your brand continues to thrive.
- ...that those vendors you patronize leave you with a 'wow' experience, every time.

On second thought, don't pinch me yet, I want to keep dreaming.



Suzanne Tulien is Principal and Co-Founder of the Brand Ascension Group, LLC. She is a brand perception expert consultant, award-winning graphic designer, a certified trainer and certified in Accelerated Learning Methodologies. She is co-pioneer of the Brand DNA methodology, the first ever step-by-step brand defining online process designed specifically for small to medium sized businesses. She is author of The 6 Myths of Small Business Branding, and co-author of Brand DNA. She regularly writes blogs and articles on the process of branding and has been published in eHotelier, BrandChannel.com, among others. www.BrandAscension.com, 719.265.1707.



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