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Ask SCORE

WHY A STRONG BUSINESS BRAND MATTERS AND HOW TO BUILD ONE

Building a strong brand is critical to a business' success. But, it's not an easy thing to do, especially as you're launching. Here is why building a strong brand matters and how you can get started.

If you do a google search for "what is a brand," you will find endless opinions from countless marketers and other professionals trying to nail down the definition.

The truth is, a brand is an elusive, visceral concept, not a tangible asset. Its value is measured through the emotional connections that exist between businesses and their customers, not with hard numbers plotted on a spreadsheet. And, this is precisely why building a strong business brand can be one of the most challenging tasks for a small business owner.

Strong business brands are not built overnight. Your company's brand is represented by more than your logo or tagline. It is the culmination of your interactions with your customers, your business' core beliefs, how you present your company and yourself to the world — and every other aspect of how you do business.

If you do not proactively build the strong business brand you want, the market will build it for you. Marty Neumeier, Director of CEO Branding at Liquid Agency in Silicon Valley, is a speaker, author, designer and one of the most well-respected authorities on branding. Through all of his work helping companies like Google and Apple build their brands, he distills his explanation of a brand into the simplest of terms. He is quoted as saying, "Your brand isn't what you say it is. It's what *they* say it is."

To build a strong brand, you must create opportunities for your audience to connect with you in engaging ways that allow them to understand your company's purpose and believe in the value you bring to their lives. Their perception of your brand is its reality.

It is critical to understand the importance of branding your business properly. But, how do you build the type of brand that connects with customers and creates loyalty? Start by asking yourself these four questions.

1. What is your business' purpose? What problem does it solve?
2. What is the first thing you want your customers to think of when they see your product or service?
3. If your customer were to tell a friend about your business, what would you want them to say?
4. What do you want your company to be known for?

Your answers to these questions should begin to give you some clarity into what makes your business special and why cus-

tomers would want to connect with your brand and purchase from your business. This understanding will form the foundation of your branding strategy.

Once you have your branding strategy established, it is time to think through how you will showcase your brand to the world. Your brand should be unique, easily recognizable and easy to understand. You will next need to develop clear messaging and design elements, including a logo. With everything you do and create, consistency is key.

Once your brand strategy, messaging and design elements are set, you are ready to share your brand with the world through a number of channels. Your brand should be clearly communicated in everything your customers and partners see, such as your:

- Website
- Blog and Social Content
- Advertisements
- Brochures
- Promotional Materials
- Business Cards
- Signage
- Trade Show Displays
- Internal Signage and Documents
- And Anything Else Representing Your Company

Building a brand takes time and consistent effort. Especially in the beginning, your brand will evolve as you and your business do. It is okay to tweak messages and make improvements along the way. Then, once you have your brand strategy in place and you know your message is resonating with your customers, stick with it. A strong brand is built through consistency.

Building a strong brand is critical to a business' success. But, it's not an easy task. Developing your business' brand is the perfect time to bring in the support of a SCORE mentor. A SCORE mentor has experience building strong brands and has access to the best resources to help you along the way.

Since 1964, SCORE "Mentors to America's Small Business" has helped more than 10 million aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners through mentoring and business workshops. More than 11,000 volunteer business mentors in over 320 chapters serve their communities through entrepreneur education dedicated to the formation, growth and success of small businesses. For more information about starting or operating a small business, contact SCORE TriCounty. You can call 610.327.2673, email tricity@scorevolunteer.org or visit the website at www.tricity.score.org.

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