

## CHAPTER ONE

# WHAT IS BRANDING, ANYWAY?

*"[Branding is] a 15-second elevator pitch that every employee in the organization can not only get and articulate, but can talk about their role in bringing that to life."*

—SCOTT M. DAVIS, MANAGING PARTNER, PROPHET CHICAGO

**T**here is no concept as vital, as discussed, as mentioned, as of the moment in the world of marketing and advertising today as *Branding*. Everyone uses the word in every conversation, there are countless self-proclaimed experts on the subject, executives want it, account managers plan it, strategies are formulated, money is spent, advertising is done. But the fact is, very few people actually know what the word *Branding* really means in this context.

Is it really important to put the concept into words? Everyone seems to understand *Branding*, even if they're not always able to communicate their understanding in eloquent terms. They "get" *Branding*, even if they can't define it as accurately as Webster's dictionary. So, why bother to codify something that seems so pervasive?

First of all, most people who "get" *Branding* as a concept don't really understand what it means to create a brand and build it into a dominant market position. The majority of businesspeople do not have a strong working definition of *Branding*, and therefore can't determine what is and is not a successful brand. Some confuse a brand with a product, which can be a devastating mistake with terrible consequences.

Before defining *Branding*, it's important to define what it is *not*. *Branding* is not simply a matter of creating the name for a company or a product

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and repeating it ad nauseam to the public until it becomes a household word. There have been plenty of brand names that have come and gone in what amounts to the blink of an eye—and advertising and marketing executives who have come and gone just as quickly, who can attest to that truth.

Branding is not just taking the name of a successful product and slapping it on the box of a new product to “expand the brand.” Diversification is only possible when so much goodwill and trust have been established with the consuming public that the name will be followed wherever it goes. And even then, the product must deliver what it promises, or the brand name itself will be diminished, not enhanced. That is the polar opposite of what a Branding campaign sets out to do, yet it happens on an alarmingly regular basis.

Branding is not an advertising campaign, a marketing slogan, or a logo. It doesn't have to apply to a product, a company, or a title. Michael Jordan is a brand. Coca-Cola is a brand. Bill Clinton is a brand, and so are George W. Bush, Martha Stewart, and Julia Roberts. But this book is not a brand, because it doesn't meet the necessary criteria. And that's not simply because the title is too long; it's because one product doesn't equal a brand. An author can be a brand, but a title can't, because it is only one product being sold. An author creates many products, while the title of one book is just that: the title of *one book*.

Some legitimate questions can be raised about whether or not Branding is a fad. Until now, it has seemed that Branding is something that can only be done by huge corporations with budgets at the very least in the millions of dollars. But that's not true. Given the proper information, anyone trying to make an impression on consumers can create—or *become*—a brand. It's not impossibly complicated, it's not something only a select few people “in the know” can do, and it doesn't have to be prohibitively expensive. That means smaller companies will be competing on the Branding level, but it also means that even larger companies are going to have to do more work to maintain their existing brands and especially to launch new ones.

There are many techniques and concepts that go into every Branding campaign that can be used by anyone at all. It's important, for example, for a brand to be consistent, and that is true of the Walt Disney Company and

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the drugstore down the street. It's important to tell the truth, and that is as much the case for Microsoft as it is for a local supplier of jams and preserves.

"There are so many parity products out there that the only way to differentiate yourself from the others is to create an aura, an image, around your brand. Consumers need a road map; they need to find a way to get from their need to a product purchase that's simple, easy, not full of a lot of noise, and most brands get lost somewhere between the shelf and the consumer mindset."

—Karen Benezra, editor of *Brandweek*

In 1998, Jennifer Lopez was an actress. By 2000, "J. Lo" had become a brand. The difference came with brilliant handling, good career choices, and a very revealing dress, as part of a calculated and well-planned campaign that was designed to accomplish exactly the result it produced. Through careful use of public relations in a Branding campaign, Lopez managed to make the leap from interesting personality to brand in a remarkably short period of time. And it was by no means either an accident or a phenomenon. It was the result of a very well-calculated series of events.

Because Lopez was aiming at a multifaceted career—acting and music, as well as any pursuits she might still have up her sleeve—the campaign was intended to brand her personality with the public, rather than simply her range of performance. A brand promise—that this would be an exciting, unpredictable personality—was made. So the timing of a strong album at the same time Lopez had a movie debuting, and especially the appearance in the astonishing dress at the Grammy awards, was aimed at conveying a daring, sexy personality not unlike Madonna's, and doing it in a rush of publicity, all at once.

It worked brilliantly.

## A TRUE WORKING DEFINITION OF BRANDING

Branding is a complex process, but its goal is simple: It is the creation and development of a specific identity for a company, product, commodity, group, or person. It is carefully designed to present qualities that its creators

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believe will be attractive to the public, and it is meant to be developed and perpetuated for the long haul. An ad campaign launches a product. Branding, when it's done right, creates an institution. Branding brings about so many benefits it reminds me of the saying, "You can count the number of seeds in an apple, but you can't count the number of apples in a seed."

"[Branding has] always been a critical subject, and has everything to do with instant recognition in a very instantaneous society. The ability to establish your name quickly and have your customer respond to that quickly is the name of the game."

—Mark Lacter, editor of *LA Business Journal*

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the concept of Branding is to explore the new car market. Everyone knows instinctively the difference between a Chevrolet and a BMW. And it's not just a matter of price: Consumers who are asked about cars will describe a Chevy as reliable and comfortable, while a BMW will be described as exciting, luxurious, and brilliantly engineered. We know the personality of a BMW or a Chevy (or for that matter, a Volkswagen, Ford, Kia, or Hyundai) without necessarily being able to articulate it. We make presumptions about a person who gets out of a car in the parking lot based on what kind of car it may be. And even though some of these identities may have gotten a little diluted over the years (Is there much of a difference between a Chevy person and a Pontiac person?), they are awfully hard to shake. We know what the nameplate on the back of the car means.

There's a difference between Coca-Cola and Pepsi. There's a difference between CBS and Fox. There's a difference between *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*. All of these are successful brand names, and they each have a distinctive personality, which may defy definition, but is easily understood by the public at large.

Examine the decades-long competition between Coca-Cola and Pepsi: On the surface, these two companies' products seem interchangeable. But more effort and money have gone into creating differences between the personalities of the brands than into differences in the products themselves.

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In the seventies, when the word *generation* was being used in any number of contexts, Pepsi commandeered the young adult segment of the population and dubbed them “the Pepsi Generation,” in an attempt to make Coca-Cola seem old and staid. In the 1980s, Coca-Cola executed what was perhaps the most celebrated marketing mistake in history, discontinuing production on its core product, the most recognizable brand name in the world, in favor of a more Pepsi-like formula it dubbed New Coke. This Grand Canyon-size blunder eventually worked in the company’s favor when consumers revolted with startling vehemence and Coca-Cola quickly announced it would bring back its revered product, now under the name Coca-Cola Classic. Sales rebounded, and more media attention was lavished on the Cola Wars. The campaign also managed to underline the loyalty and affection so many consumers had for original Coca-Cola—which might very well have been the goal of the company to begin with. Coca-Cola eventually dropped the word *Classic* from its name, and remains the most widely recognized brand in the world to the present. Try finding a can of New Coke today.

You can change your product, but if you tamper with a beloved brand, the public will kill you. A successful brand, however, is a joy to behold. It conveys its strong personality proudly. It is consistent. It is confident without being cocky. It is friendly without fawning. It never wavers, doesn’t put a foot in the wrong place, and assumes the public will accept it but never takes its place for granted. A successful brand seems to chug along effortlessly, when in fact it is the product of exhaustive research, dedication, backbreaking work, and inexplicable inspiration. It is, to paraphrase Thomas Edison, “10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration.” What is remarkable is the way the exhausting work is hidden, with all the gears and wheels behind the curtain, so that the brand seems to emerge on its own with no telltale signs that this isn’t the brand’s personality but actually the product of endless market research projects. In Branding, as in magic, the effect is lost if the effort is visible.

A *brand* is an end result. *Branding* is the process by which a brand comes to be. A brand is many, many things, but it is never an accident.

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### THE THREE COMPONENTS OF BRANDING

If Branding is the creation and development of a personality—an identity—for a product or company, it is the result of work by a number of different professionals, all aiming at the same goal. While the roles of advertising and marketing have been well documented, the third prong within the Branding process, public relations, has largely been overlooked. For the most part, Branding professionals fall into three categories:

1. *Advertising.* It's a wonderful thing to create a unique, user-friendly brand that the public is sure to embrace. However, if the public doesn't find out about the brand—and much of the public will find out through advertising—all that effort, time, and money will go to waste. The look and attitude of the advertising also help define the brand in the public's mind.
2. *Marketing.* In devising the personality of the brand and determining how it will be presented to the public, marketing, which is usually done in-house and through consultants, helps to create the entity that the brand will become. It's a fine thing to own the recipe for Oreo cookies, but if you decided to sell the recipe and not the cookies, you would be making a very large marketing mistake. Marketing is not just selling; it is knowing what to sell and how to sell it as part of a larger plan.
3. *Public relations.* If advertising is the juggernaut of public attention, public relations is the stealth bomber. PR generates publicity for the brand, helps solidify the public's opinion of the brand, and defines the brand—all without being perceived by the public.

Advertising is obvious, marketing is invisible, but public relations is the most difficult of all things to be: subtle. It is also arguably the most valuable, indispensable part of the Branding process. Without public relations, it would be impossible to create a truly world-class brand, no matter what the budget or how exciting the product. Public relations is absolutely essential to Branding.

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For a new brand to be successful, all three of the Branding components must be firing on all cylinders. They must be working in tandem, but they also have to succeed individually.

### **Advertising**

In today's business climate, even the most secure brands need to advertise. As it sells its billions and billions of hamburgers, McDonald's doesn't cut back on its ads; it increases them. Nike is well known for spending millions on celebrity endorsements for advertising. Its ads are legendary, and its "swoosh" logo is known the world over without a word being said.

A good advertising account executive will be involved in the birth of a brand, even if others have already decided on a good portion of the brand identity. How to present that identity—to introduce the public to the personality of the product—is advertising's job, in conjunction with public relations.

The look of a television or print ad is as important as the message being delivered in print or dialogue. Quick edits, bright colors, extreme close-ups, and changing landscapes may appeal more to younger viewers, and will convey a different personality than golden sunsets, slow camera pans, and traditional storytelling.

Sound, too, will change with the kind of brand being developed. Loud music might be fine for a soft drink ad, but won't work for a feminine hygiene product. If the product is meant to appeal to young, urban-based men, it's probably a bad idea to use music from *Swan Lake* to make your point. If the product is intended to have a sassy, feminine attitude, Sheryl Crow will more likely achieve the goal than Barry Manilow.

But advertising isn't just about creating TV commercials. As Marshall McLuhan noted decades ago, "The medium is the message." The programs during which the ad can be seen will make a statement about the personality of the product, as will the choice of publications in which print ads will run. If your product is supposed to be irreverent, young, up-to-date, and unconventional, ad buyers will probably be more successful in *Rolling Stone* than in *U.S. News and World Report*. Remember, each media outlet has as clearly defined a personality as its advertisers. In fact, the

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advertising often helps define the media outlet's personality, and vice versa. CBS has, whether correctly or not, been identified as the "older network" for a number of years, and savvy advertisers will probably be very careful about aiming youth-oriented ads at viewers of that network. More specifically, the ads will be purchased with a very careful eye on which programs appeal to the target audience.

Account executives get involved earlier on with the concept of the ad campaign itself. When a brand is new, it's important the target audience be able to identify the brand, and identify *with* the brand, very quickly. So after it's decided what kind of brand identity is being introduced, and the target audience to which the brand is being marketed, advertising creative executives begin deciding what message to convey and how to convey it. As Grace Ascolese of Ascolese Associates says, if you were advertising a new soft drink, "You can argue about taste, but in order to get tried, you have to come up with a personality" for your product.

Consider the TV ads for Mentos, the breath mints aimed at teenagers and young adults. While viewers over 30 might consider the ads annoying and obnoxious, the commercials identify the product's identity well, and they are perfectly aimed at the target audience. In each of these ads, which are filmed without dialogue, a young person is presented with some obstacle (a traffic jam, parents returning home too early), and, popping a Mento, concocts a cheeky solution to the problem while a bouncy jingle informs us a few times over that Mentos are "fresh and full of life."

Now, from a storytelling standpoint, that doesn't make a great deal of sense. Mints don't actually help you solve your problems, unless your problem is a mouth that reeks of garlic. In fact, even in the commercial, the mint doesn't solve the problem. But in presenting the kind of person the ad celebrates, having the target audience identify with that person (through the rudimentary story being told), and then having the character enjoy the product, a number of messages are being conveyed. First, if you want to be like this person, you should try these mints. Second, this is a cool kind of person to be. Third, isn't it fun to be young and irreverent? These mints are young and irreverent. If you want to be seen this way, you'd better have the mints with you at all times. All this, and not a line of dialogue has been spoken.

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Advertising doesn't create the identity, but it does choose how to present the identity, and it certainly helps define the identity of the product, and, by extension, its users. With a clever choice like that made for the Mentos ads, it expresses the advertiser's message very well. But ads can't do the job alone. And they can't determine what the image should be. That part of the process is accomplished through marketing.

### **Marketing**

Before there can be a brand, there has to be a product. The bridge between product and recognizable brand is marketing.

It is sometimes difficult for people outside the business to understand marketing, because they confuse it with advertising. The two are totally different processes. Their goals are not the same, and their methods are not in the least similar. They are performed by separate groups of specialists, and can often be at odds with one another until a compromise or alternative solution can be reached that satisfies both disciplines.

If advertising is the way the public usually discovers a product, marketing determines what it will discover. If the look and sound of advertising are important, the decisions made by marketing executives will determine the tone of the ads. In other words, marketing takes a product and assigns it a personality. Based on the target audience for the product, marketing will determine which traits that segment of the population is likely to find appealing, and will do its best to ascribe them to the product being marketed.

For example, when Apple Computer was experiencing some sales difficulties a number of years ago, and cofounder Steve Jobs returned to guide the company, the iMac computer was the first product to be released by the "new" company. The personality of the product was going to be very important: It had to remind loyal Apple users why they liked the computer to begin with, and to convince new users to try something that required a large outlay of money and was going to look different from anything they'd seen before. In fact, the future of the entire company was going to hinge on acceptance of iMac, and if it was seen as too much like IBM-based PCs, it would be rejected by the loyal Apple following. If it came

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across as too different or too strange, the product would fail to expand Apple's market share—which was dwindling at the time—and the company would be in very dire straits indeed.

What the company did was to analyze the strong points of Apple and the iMac. It marketed the iMac as something new, something fun, and something that younger users who were just beginning on the Internet could appreciate.

Marketing executives made sure the iMac was presented as a young, innovative, smart, and easy way to enter the online world, something that American consumers were just beginning to do in large numbers at the time. TV ads emphasized the look of the computer and the ease with which it could be installed and connected to the Internet.

So, before the product came out, there was already great anticipation. But once the iMac—which was considered a wildly revolutionary design at its inception—was unveiled, the focus was all on the product. It helped that the iMac *looked* different: Its colorful, all-in-one bulbous design was certainly a change from the beige boxes that had dominated the computer industry for years.

Certainly, the iMac turned the fortunes of Apple Computer around. Apple increased its market share and sold millions of iMacs, and a company that appeared to be on the brink of extinction not long before was assured a solid foothold, if not a dominant position, in the home computer market.

The iMac campaign worked because the personality assigned to the product was appealing to enough consumers who could afford to buy it. It worked because the advertising choices were made correctly. It worked because the product could actually deliver the innovation and ease it promised. But mostly, the iMac campaign was successful with consumers because the marketing executives involved had correctly defined its target demographic, had been careful to identify the characteristics that market would find attractive, and had successfully conveyed that personality through the product to the public. People believed that the iMac was innovative and exciting because the marketing choices made were the correct ones.

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If the computer hadn't worked well, if it hadn't delivered on its promises, no marketing campaign would have been able to achieve the success of the iMac. But by the same token, if the marketing campaign hadn't been thoughtfully worked out and executed, the product could have been superior to all others on the market and it still would have been swallowed up by the competition. Remember Betamax? Sony's original video recording system was considered by most experts and many consumers to be the superior format in terms of performance, but it was quickly eliminated from the market because Panasonic and other companies managed to position VHS as a more user-friendly, longer-lasting (the cassettes were bigger, and held more tape) product. Quality was no longer the issue, and Betamax is now a half-forgotten curiosity.

Marketing doesn't determine what a product will be or how high its quality will be. It does determine how the product is perceived by the public, and it is best done when working from strength—in other words, a strong product can be more easily marketed—but that doesn't mean every great product will market itself. Nor does it mean that every successfully marketed product is the best in the field.

What marketing does is to determine the proper audience for a product, and then deliver to that audience what it wants. The target demographic can be as narrow as 15-year-old boys living in the suburbs, or it can be literally anybody. That will depend on the product. But once the demographic is identified, marketing professionals analyze it, make sure the characteristics of that demographic are compatible with the product, and then emphasize the strengths of the product. The strengths of the product here are very specific: They are the strengths that will best convey the personality the demographic wants to see in itself.

For example, if Philips had tried to market its flat-screen TV to an audience over 65, which traditionally is not warm to change, it might not have been successful, no matter how innovative the product may have been. Instead, the company aimed its ads at people in their twenties and thirties, emphasized the newness and difference of the product, and had a great success.

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Some of this type of success is due to market research, which is a branch of marketing. Through focus groups, surveys, and other tools, market research helps determine what people want. Marketing is more the art of taking what already exists and making it more attractive to the public through positioning and Branding techniques.

It is a natural and easy mistake to confuse marketing with advertising. (Advertising is what happens when marketing has already been done.) And marketing is not public relations, the discipline we are about to examine. Public relations also works with what marketing professionals have already done, but does different, less obvious things with it.

### **Public Relations**

“A lot of clients don’t understand the difference between Branding, PR, advertising and marketing,” says Rob Frankel, author of *Revenge of Brand X*. “Personally, I prefer PR to advertising. I like PR because a lot of my Branding program is based on third-party endorsement. It’s way more credible and fast-acting than when you pay for ads.”

People often confuse public relations with publicity, and it’s easy to see why. Public relations is actually the craft of attracting publicity, and not publicity itself. That statement is not simply a trick of semantics; it makes an important distinction that will determine pivotal, essential components of a Branding campaign.

Public relations is not advertising; advertising is what you pay for, public relations is what you pray for. It does not consist of devising or purchasing ads that you see on television, hear on radio, or read in newspapers and magazines. What is said about you is more valuable than what you say about yourself. PR is not marketing, since public relations does not decide on the message to be conveyed or the personality of the product being marketed. Public relations does not create the product or its identity. Its role in Branding is considerably more subtle.

What public relations does is to attract attention, preferably from news media, since the media will eventually tell many more people than the PR person could reach individually. PR people are adept at finding the news

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in a story and making sure it is packaged properly and aimed at the correct media to best exploit the information and generate the most publicity.

Public relations is possibly the most organic, central part of Branding, one that will help make the campaign successful or doom it to failure. Once marketing executives decide on a perfect identity for the product, and once the advertising executives have packaged a message to deliver directly to the public, public relations professionals are responsible for the messages the public gets through indirect channels—that is, through the news media they consider more credible than anything they see between acts of a television show.

One problem, however, is that some businesses are leery of the press overall, and don't realize the boost that PR can provide. "Most companies have a fear, not just of the *Wall Street Journal*, but of all major publications. I aim to get my clients to realize that when I can get other people writing about them (hopefully in a favorable light), thinking about them, talking about them, and using them as an example in a conference or speech, that is called free publicity, and that is brand building," says Scott M. Davis, author of *Brand Asset Management*.

The job of public relations is to combine what marketing and advertising do, and then use the information in different ways. Marketing determines the personality, or *brand identity*, being publicized. Public relations professionals are given that information and are asked to find the proper news media to carry the message. For example, in the case of the iMac, Apple made sure (quite often by donation) that school systems around the country had iMac computers as soon as they were available. This helped familiarize very young computer users—possibly those who had never used a computer before—with Apple's product first. This brilliant public relations move demonstrated that Apple had strong interests in education and a history of helping children. These are not bad messages to give a consumer.

The move into schools also made sure that iMacs were perceived as unusual and innovative. This reinforced the famous print ad campaigns that showed no computer, but rather photographs of innovative thinkers (Albert

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Einstein, Martin Luther King, John Lennon) with the slogan “Think Different” and the Apple logo. The ads were meant to precede the iMac to the market with the message that Apple was the “different” computer company. But it managed to be different while identifying itself with comfortable, interesting personalities, and therefore did not come across as threatening or strange. This brand identity appealed to traditional Apple customers by identifying them with forward-thinking geniuses, and also tweaked the interest of new users, who wanted to see themselves in that light.

Brand identity is the most vital part of the Branding concept. With the wrong identity, even a perfect product can fail to become a brand. With the proper identity, one that has been crafted carefully and thoughtfully, a product can launch a brand and eventually become what every Branding practitioner hopes for—a household word.

Public relations doesn't create the brand identity, but it helps to present and define the identity in ways that are not so blatant that the consumer is on the defensive before the message is communicated.

Local newspapers, radio programs, and television news programs are the beginning of the PR person's quest, which will eventually lead to national TV shows like *Dateline* and *60 Minutes*, as well as more chatty, but perhaps more user-friendly, outlets like *Oprah* and *Today*. The most widely read publications in the country and the world, such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *Parade* are all targets on the public relations dashboard.

But before news of the new product, service, or personality can reach the media, the public relations professional has to analyze the brand identity. The characteristics built in by marketing executives will help guide the message. Sassy younger women read different magazines than successful middle-aged men. The audience for Conan O'Brien is not the same as that for Regis Philbin.

And at the core of the public relations activity comes the question of news. Public relations professionals don't create news stories; they find the newsworthy aspect or unique selling proposition of a company's story and try to attract attention to that. In other words, PR is the art of telling the

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truth in the most positive light possible, like wearing your best suit for a job interview.

In order to understand the role of public relations in Branding, first we have to understand how public relations works. It's a business unlike any other, and its rules are very specific. Public relations can help create a brand, establish it, promote it, develop it, and keep it healthy, all without being detected by the general public. It is as central a component of Branding as any other, and its importance is immeasurable.

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