



*A strong brand identity
is crucial to any
business's future.*

*Here's how to
make yours – and
your client's – a
powerhouse.*

By Jennifer Vishnevsky

CREATE A POWERFUL BRAND IDENTITY

Think about how many brands you can identify immediately: the Facebook logo, the Twitter bird, the Coca-Cola can, the blue box that silently shouts Tiffany and Christian Louboutin shoes with the eye-catching red soles. Does your brand have the same instant recognition? Savvy distributors and business experts weigh in.

Across the Board

Olivia Scott is knee-deep in helping several clients relaunch their brands this year. And the owner of Promotional Partners, Inc. (*asi/397983*) taps into her own experience as well.

When she initially started her company with her husband, their logo was a cartoonish, paintbrush-like character holding a palette of colors. “We tried to use it to illustrate what we did,” she says. But by the end of her fifth year in business, she decided it wasn’t working.

Along the way, Scott learned that the logo didn’t fit well into square imprint areas. They also wanted something cleaner, so they kept elements of the original logo and streamlined it. The result is a more sophisticated version that incorporates the art element, but as a series of colored dots in an arch shape and intertwined with the company name.

“We sent out a package to current clients to let them know that we were still growing and changing,” she says. They chose an eco-friendly box and included growth-related items, like seed paper and a mug that looked like a planter.

The company has since helped rebrand law firms, recruiters, colleges and companies that have merged. Scott helps clients understand that there are promotional products that can amplify their new message. “It really helps when they understand that there can be a reason and a purpose behind the products selected,” she says. For instance, you could suggest products in

the shape of the new logo. And for one college that held a big kickoff event, she recommended using a type of rock because a rock was used as part of the imagery in their marketing campaign. Once Scott saw their collateral materials, she used an oval shape with their branding to reflect the shape of the rock found in other collateral print materials/images.

Some clients don’t think about the big picture. Luckily, that’s where creative consultation comes in. “I’ve received brand manuals from groups that haven’t thought about elements like the color they’ve chosen, which doesn’t work well with everything,” she says. It’s important to show your clients you are the branding expert.

Also, don’t forget about internal branding. If clients are going through a rebrand, they will also need items for their own offices. Here, you have the opportunity to provide signage, desk items, padfolios, tech pieces and more.

→ PUT YOUR STAMP ON IT: *How’s a logo working for a brand? Is it outdated? It’s important to regularly reevaluate the message and image it portrays and if need be, change it.*

Reach for the Skies

Sally Back, owner of Backhome Creations (*asi/470233*), an authorized dealer for Kaeser & Blair, has had booming success thanks to a local college’s rebranding campaign.

She had been working with Bowling Green Technical College for 13 years, and when it changed its name to Southcentral Kentucky Community & Technical College (SKYCTC), the college needed her help getting the message out. “One of the reasons they changed the name and rebranded was because they have so many different campuses that were associated with Bowling Green Technical, but some of them were in other cities,” she says. “The new name encompasses the other cities and has everybody feeling like they are part of a team.”

The new brand also created new excitement. “Because SKYCTC is their acronym, we’ve incorporated the sky in items,” she says. “Their slogan is ‘Higher Education Begins Here,’ so we’ve also used the same type of items there.” Back has sold umbrellas that have sky images across the under panels for board members. There is a disc golf course on one campus, so she’s also sold Frisbees so that students can play between classes. “We’re just blanketing the area with promotional products that have the new information,” she says. “Travel mugs, styluses and cups are all really big right now.”

Another creative rebranding element popped up for SKYCTC’s adult education program. Because they offer many multicultural and language programs, SKYCTC developed a T-shirt that had a cloud on the front with “hello” written in English and then “hello” written in 29 other languages on the shirt. “That is one of my favorites because we’re reaching out to a new population,” Back says.

The rebranding efforts have also extended her reach throughout the college. She has picked up five new departments and business isn’t slowing down. Back has sold about \$20,000 worth of products in the past few months alone, and at larger volumes. “Everybody had to get new tablecloths for events,” she says. “We produced 1,000 backpacks, as well as tote bags for events. In addition, the college was picked as one of the best places to work, so we did T-shirts and there was a rerun on those. Right now we’re working on alumni stickers to get the new logo out, as well as lapel pins and pennants to distribute in the community.”



→ **PUT YOUR STAMP ON IT:** *Does your client’s new brand come with a catchy acronym? Use a play on words and related imprints on products.*

Social Storytelling

As brands continue to evaluate their budgets, now is the perfect time to introduce new ideas for engaging customers.

One branding concept that is growing in popularity is social storytelling through digital video. Barry Poltermann, CEO of About Face Media, has worked with *Fortune* 500 brands in retail, banking, government and consumer products.

“What interests me is video content that generates user-initiated views, as opposed to pre-roll, auto-play or other interruptive techniques,” says Poltermann. “In particular, I like storytelling videos that bring a brand to life in a genuine manner.”

Storytelling videos, valuable information (to the consumer) and interesting characters get consumers to give a brand attention. Companies

SHOW YOUR TRUE COLORS

Studies have shown that a product’s color influences 60% to 80% of a customer’s purchasing decision. Color is also the first thing a consumer will notice about your logo. So what color is your business?

BLUE

It’s arguably one of the most popular choices for a brand color, as it puts people at ease (think about the ocean and blue skies, *ahhh*). Blue also expresses authority, trust, intelligence and wisdom.

RED

It actually increases your heart rate, so it’s no surprise that red is a passionate and visceral color. Red expresses action, desire and power.

PURPLE

If you’re trying to be mysterious and rich, go for this popular hue. Purple also seems to exude royalty and elegance. This is a great color for showing creativity.

BLACK

Companies use this color if they want to appear prestigious, valuable and sophisticated. Like the dress, it’s a classic.

GREEN

You don’t have to be an environmental company to go green. This color says calmness, serenity, health and wealth.

We Recommend:



This unique flash drive is a handy solution for clients in an office setting, as it clips onto paper. This drive provides maximum branding with a dome logo that helps a brand stand out. You can also include info about the brand on the drive. From Sourcery Solutions LLC, asi/88252, 800-533-1955.



Make sure your brand is on the go with this stainless-steel travel mug. Mug features a flip-top, locking lid and double-wall construction with a plastic liner. From Leed’s, asi/66887, 866-533-3724.



Load up information onto this USB pen flash drive so that clients have access to information on the go. Writing instruments receive a lot of impressions, so use this slim and sophisticated Utica pen with a hidden multifunction 256MB USB. From iClick, Inc., asi/62124, 800-456-9177.



Multifunctional promotional products are always welcome. Rotating desk set features a built-in flag dispenser, notepad holder, paper clip compartment and a removable stapler. The unit also has a large branding area on the stapler. From Sunscope, asi/90075, 800-432-4274.



The Trekker traveler umbrella has an arc measuring 58” and features a metal shaft with a faux wooden handle. Umbrella can be customized with your new logo (or your client’s) to be handed out at conventions or trade shows. From Crown Products, asi/47700, 800-367-2769.

are realizing that even if they get customers to click on their video within social channels, they aren't retaining or engaging customers with their marketing message by using traditional corporate video techniques.

"When you produce a storytelling video and see that it is watched 60%-70% through to the end on average, and then compare that to your TV commercial and see that only 20% of the viewers are still watching after 10 seconds, you start to question the value of that content," says Poltermann. "The more people measure what actually gets watched, and how long it is watched, and how often it is shared, the more videos will focus on storytelling."

→ **PUT YOUR STAMP ON IT:** *Bring your brand to life with videos and characters that show your company's personality and tell the story of what you can do for clients.*

Inside and Out

Not only do marketers at Image Source (*asi/230121*) promote and help strengthen client brands, they have walked the walk.

Starting out as a small distributorship, a second distributor company was formed to meet an existing need in the marketplace. But after some time, the company recognized that merging the two operations under an evolved brand identity made more sense. Image Source has since grown into a multimillion-dollar firm.

Here's how they did it. Image Source hosts an annual Fall Showcase end-user event. When the time was right to integrate Image Source and Branded Solutions by Edgar Martinez (BSbEM), the second distributor company, the announcement was made at the 2010 event. In conjunction with the in-person announcement at the Fall Showcase, the new Image Source brand was introduced publicly through a series of industry and business media press releases to help share the story.

For the next year, the team worked on a 12-month brand transition focused on the BSbEM customer base to migrate them as seamlessly as possible into the Image Source client portfolio.

Some key Image Source personnel also took on leadership positions with Northwest Promotional Marketing Association, giving the company a great deal of visibility and some influence on the direction of its regional association.

"The Image Source team has always believed that its supplier partners are a major key to the company's success, so serving with them on the NWPMA board and continuing to host weekly organized supplier meetings in the office has become part of the company's DNA," says Jeff

BRANDING BLUEPRINT

After developing their own successful brand messaging plan, the Image Group contributed these tips for distributors and suppliers:

Before you can promote a brand, it's imperative to have a clear understanding of your brand's DNA. What makes your company unique among competitors? This can be far more difficult than most people realize. Establish clear points of differentiation.

Next, what's your market position? Before you can promote yourself and your company, you need to know what your clients think is your greatest value. Is it size, experience, partnership, creativity, service, price or something else entirely? Set preconceptions aside and ask your buyers what they think. When promoting a client's brand, help them survey their clients to uncover these results. What's the competitive landscape and what are they doing (or perhaps not doing) that gives their specific approach a chance to flourish?

After the DNA and positioning blueprint is in place, ask: "Does this map to the company's brand identity?" Your brand identity is much deeper than your logo and collateral, but this is the visual interpretation of who you are. Check your alignment.

Put a strategic plan on paper. Your marketing plan is a component of this – but not the only component. Present it to your team, or better yet, involve them in the process. Present it as a group, discuss and get buy-in. Benchmark against the plan at least quarterly. Again, check your alignment. Start at a macro level (company annual sales goals, margin goal, budget, etc.) and work your way to a more granular level: top clients, top prospects, etc., each with measurable goals attached.

Build a marketing plan that includes strategies and tactics. Start with establishing a budget and break out your budget numbers in each category, such as corporate identity, collateral, self-promos, events and e-mail campaigns. Develop a marketing calendar and stick to it. This is very important, especially when planning e-mail campaigns. There's a fine line between too few touches and too many. Your clients may not directly tell you where this line is, so watch your delivery rate, open rate, click-through rate and opt-outs closely, as this will give you a good gauge.

Be creative, but be consistent and stick to your positioning. Map the design, messaging strategy, items/categories you promote and any calls to action back to your company DNA.

Holt, vice president of marketing for Image Source. The team also began attending high-level executive events such as the ASI Power Summit and select supplier roundtables to help further establish themselves as industry thought leaders.

The distributor has taken its success in promoting its own brand and parlayed that into lucrative client contracts. They share this story: With millions of weekly television viewers, the Discovery Channel's *Deadliest Catch* has made the crab fishermen of the Bering Sea celebrities in households across America. Captain Keith Colburn is one of the show's stars and also owner and operator of the *Wizard*, a massive black crabbing vessel. His brand is immediately recognizable and memorable.

"When looking at his initial merchandise, however, none of the items came close to capitalizing on his unique brand," says Holt. "Instead, these items focused on a wizard character that was divergent from the look of not only the boat, but also of Captain Keith's brand persona."

After a brand and merchandise review session, it was agreed a back-to-basics approach was needed to realign the merchandise and apparel. The new design would focus on the core of the brand he represents – that big black boat

and the striking red and white word *Wizard*.

Image Source redesigned and produced the merchandise that would connect with Captain Keith's fans, and a B2C e-commerce site allowed the items to be available for sale 24/7.

For an online store such as CrabWizardGear to be successful, promotion is key. "Captain Keith does his part by tweeting the store's opening and specials and posting on his personal Facebook page," says Holt. "Additionally, he often brings a small mobile merchandise store along with him on select personal appearances so he can sell on-site."

The result has been an effective lineup of merchandise and apparel that captures the brand essence of one of the Bering Sea's most successful crab boats and a tangible link to his *Deadliest Catch* fans.

→ **PUT YOUR STAMP ON IT:** *Expand your brand by joining groups and attending networking functions that will showcase your expertise; be sure that products, logos and images used to promote a brand are aligned with its image and instantly connect fans with the brand.* ↙

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