

CEI

Women's

Business Center

Branding 101

"Your brand is the single most important investment you can make in your business." - Steve Forbes

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In today's modern marketplace, branding is more important than ever before. The business world is noisy, distracting, digital, crowded and complex with endless choices in every category right at our fingertips.

We're bombarded with thousands of messages each day. It's no wonder our attention spans are decreasing to only 8 seconds. (Goldfish, meanwhile, are believed to have an attention span of 9 seconds!) We're living in an age of information overload, and it's making it harder and harder for businesses to get noticed.

In this new economy, how can business owners turn heads and STAND OUT?

Branding is the answer.

Branding is a powerful element every business needs to be sustainable and thrive. It's the way we share our story, form a meaningful connection with our audience, and convert lookers into buyers.



Image: pexels.com

What exactly *is* branding?

Image: pexels.com



In the simplest terms, your brand is your audience's impression of you — your reputation. It's how the consumer perceives you in their mind. I like to think of branding as an invitation that you extend to your clients. You share with them who you are, what you stand for, and the change you want to make in the world, and they respond by becoming customers.

Please don't get confused and think that your products and services, your fancy logo, and your website *are* your brand. They are instead *expressions* of your brand. Your brand is so much bigger than fonts, colors and logos.

Your brand represents your vision and the shift you want to bring to the world. It encompasses your unique story and set of values. It represents a lifestyle that people want to interact with and be part of. A modern brand needs to have depth, soul and meaning. It has to matter, inspire and create a sense of belonging. It needs to connect with people and improve their lives.

Think about the brand greats like Target, Nike, Starbucks, Mercedes, even Marie Forleo and Oprah. They all have a story and message that is clear, memorable and impactful.

They create a community of raving fans who love the experience and are happy to shout it out to everyone and anyone. Some have even created movements (like Toms Shoes "Buy One Give One" campaign) that are bigger than the products and services in their business. **How can you be just as compelling?**

Whether you're a newbie business owner, or you already have an established brand, branding starts with doing the behind-the-scenes work that will lead you to clarity.

You must set aside time to answer some big questions about who you are and what your story stands for. You're gonna have to dive deep and discover your unique point of difference and commit to understanding your audience inside and out. Powerful brands are not created in a one-size-fits-all template and are definitely not built overnight.



Image: pexels.com

Why is branding so important?

Here are four positive ways developing a brand will help build a successful business:

- 1) Increase Awareness.** When you develop a strong brand for your business, you make a good first impression, and you are remembered for that message. A strong brand makes you bigger than the products and services you offer. Your brand builds a reputation.
- 2) Build Trust.** When you're consistent with your message and stay true to your own brand story, your audience will understand what to expect from you. This predictability builds loyalty and longevity.
- 3) Increase Perceived Value** Simply put, strong brands can charge more! If you have a business with a strong story or specialization, you're able to price higher than competitors who have a generic message.
- 4) Stand Out.** Our marketplace has no borders thanks to the online world. We are now competing on a global scale with so many competitors fighting for the same client. It's important to define your brand story and identify your unique positioning so you can stand head and shoulders above the rest. Branding will help prevent your business from being seen as a commodity and copy-cat.



Taking Control of Your Brand

To begin the process of taking control
of your brand, ask yourself the following
4 key questions...

What are you trying to do?

Your brand is built on your value system and has a powerful sense of purpose. Ask the big questions to get clear on your WHY.

What is your mission?

Why do you really want to do this type of work?

What are your philosophies and our values?

Where do you want to be in 5 years?

What problem are you solving?

People are always searching for solutions to their problems and hang-ups. Think about what specific problems your business solves for your clients and how working with you makes their lives easier. Use these themes in your messaging and content to make sure your audience fully understands the value of working with you.

What transformation and result are you creating to improve and change the life of your customer?

Who are you serving?

Your brand starts with your ideal client — who you serve and who you get results for. When you know who your ideal client is, you can define your brand quickly. Think about their pain points and desires and speak to those things in your messaging.

What keeps your clients up at night?

What are their dreams?

What have they tried before that didn't work for them?

What are their limiting beliefs?

How do you do it differently?

Stop the comparison game. Instead of looking around at what others are doing well, look within to tell your own authentic story. Think hard about how you are different.

Could it be your niche, your process, your deliverables, your personality?

If you need to, go ahead and interview past clients, poll your audience, ask your network to find your point of difference— then focus on the things people love and recommend you for!



Branding Blunders

While you develop your brand foundation, beware of these common 3 branding blunders that can lead your business down the wrong path.

#1 Cookie Cutter Branding

When new entrepreneurs rush into business without really thinking through and developing the foundation of their brand, they often end up imitating someone else's brand. Instead of figuring out what sets them apart, they copy the competition. To grow our businesses and attract clients, we must show others who we are and how we are *different*, not how we are the same.

The cure for cookie cutter, copycat syndrome is to define your brand story. Start by asking yourself:

Who am I? What do I stand for? Who do I serve? How am I different?

The answers to these questions will help you share your brand according to your unique and authentic story.

#2 Boring, Bland Branding

Business owners offer everything under the sun to their clients, trying to please and work with everyone. If a potential client asks for a service they didn't plan on providing, they say yes anyway.

If you find yourself performing all sorts of random services that don't fit your niche, it's time to stop trying to be everything to everyone. Your brand can end up looking just like that junk drawer — disorganized and without a clear purpose.

Instead of trying to do it all, become a specialist and offer a specific service to a niche target.

Ditch the generic brand by editing your offerings and make them simple for your clients to understand. Stop serving everyone. Instead, narrow in on your ideal client. Cut out things that don't belong to your core business idea.

#3 Invisible Branding

Hiding behind a logo, website, products or services is a common error business owners make. These business owners suffer from fear of visibility.

When a business owner is in hiding, they end up with a no-name brand that people don't trust and can't build an ongoing relationship with. They lose business and leave money on the table every time.

The solution? **Instead of hiding behind the mask, find the courage to be visible.** People do business with people, so you have to show up. It's not only essential in today's marketplace, but it's your responsibility as a business owner to connect with your audience.

What's your brand story?

It's time to get a handle on your brand story and go beyond the logo. Develop a clear and distinct brand story, so your business is not a commodity, a clone, or a copycat with no soul or story.



Sure, building a brand that is consistent and compelling takes work, but the benefits are immeasurable. The more time you invest in your message, develop your niche, and become the face of your business, the quicker you will create a memorable, magnetic and money-making brand.



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