

Two Keys to Brand Power

Developing Brand Identity and Brand Personality

Two of the key drivers to building brand strength are creating a *distinct* brand identity and developing a *unique* brand personality. Unfortunately, semantics often gets in the way of understanding how these two factors can influence brand power. *Brand identity*, for example, is often used in a limited, graphic-centric manner or used interchangeably with *brand image*. All too often, identity is seen as just the graphics, logos, colors, and symbols that generally make up corporate identity. Those elements are the *appearance* (which is very important) but not the *substance* of a brand, just as the clothes you wear are an important, even distinguishing, part of your identity, but not the substance of who you are as a person.

According to Jean-Noel Kapferer, author of *Strategic Brand Management*, identity precedes image: "An obsession with image tends to attach greater importance to appearance than to inner reality. But brand identity is a richer, more substantial concept to embrace." To help clarify how these concepts differ, Figure 1 presents a detailed comparison of brand image and brand identity:

Figure 1 Brand Image Versus Brand Identity

Brand Image	Brand Identity
Appearance	Substance
More on the receivers side	More on the senders side
Passive	Active
Reflects superficial qualities	Reflects enduring qualities
Backward looking	Forward looking
Tactical	Strategic
Associations already there	Associations aspired to

As the comparison illustrates, these two concepts are quite different. There's also a simple way to sum up and understand the essence of the two terms: image is how the marketplace perceives you; identity is who you really are. We recommend that companies focus on building brand identity as the driving brand-strategy component. Brand image is not to be diminished at all. It is, after all is said and done, how a company is perceived. But don't make the mistake of thinking your brand image is your identity. The challenge for brand strategists and champions is to align image and identity. That happens - and can

only happen - by careful, proactive management of your brand identity components. First, know what your image is in the marketplace today and how it is not aligned with what your brand really is or with the identity you desire. Then do what you can to try to fix it with the resources you have available.

Developing Brand Personality

Another key to building brand strength is developing a unique brand personality. Brand personality is generally understood as the distinguishing characteristics of the brand, what some call the *persona* of the brand. Just like people, all brands have a personality to some degree. In certain cases, its highly emotional and vibrant; in other cases, its understated or barely noticeable. Because brand personality is intangible and exists in an emotional realm, it is often underrated by marketers. That can be a significant oversight. A recognizable and well-defined brand personality is a key part of a successful brand's appeal. Often, it's what breaks the tie in the purchase-decision process when all the rational merits of two competitive products are deemed equal.

Personality is often used interchangeably with terms like brand tone, manner, or character. Generally, it's expressed in personal or character terms - trustworthy, energetic, assertive, unpretentious, arrogant, friendly, helpful, and so on. As brands become more familiar to customers, they tend to take on these human qualities and characteristics, for better or worse. In addition, personality will come through even if you don't intend for it to. Since it can be the best place to create some lasting differentiation, it pays to develop a well thought-out brand personality description as part of the brand-development strategy.

Brand-personality statements are often created to facilitate a part of advertising development. In such cases, the statement should reflect and support the overall brand personality. While advertising is frequently the most visible aspect, it's not the entirety of the brand's personality. Personality comes from many cues around the brand experience. Packaging, for example, that constantly changes or lacks a quality appearance sets certain, but unhelpful, expectations about the character of the brand. On the flip side, packaging can, and should, help communicate and support positive personality aspects of the brand. The level of responsiveness of customer service also affects brand personality to a significant degree. Ultimately, nearly every interaction with a customer or prospect shapes the brand personality.

Personalities can be very differentiating, especially at the corporate level. In today's marketplace, corporate-level brand attributes are becoming more and more important in the purchase process. In the International Data Group (IDG) Wave VI report, *Brands and the Buying Process*, research revealed how computer buyers rate various hardware and software companies on a variety of personality dimensions.

As shown in Figure 2, HP came across as confident, considerate, and human. Intel was seen as a visionary leader but lacking a softer side, with only a 2% rating on "Down to Earth/Friendly." Apple stood out, as expected, for its cool and hip attitude. IBM was perceived with a somewhat split personality, reflecting perceptions of both the

difficult times of the early 1990's and the company's recent resurgence. Compaq was

notable not by any one characteristic but by how low their overall personality profile registered. The traditional focus on product features gave the company strong associations with functional attributes but not much of a human side, something the company has been working on recently (e.g. "Has it changed your life yet?"). Microsoft, not surprisingly, dominated nearly all of the positive personality attributes for the software companies rated.

Figure 2 Rating of Corporate Brand Personality Profiles on Top Five Attributes

HP	Trustworthy (25%), Cares about what customers think (21%), Smart/Savvy (17%), Technology leadership (16%), Successful (16%)
Intel	Visionary (28%), Technology leadership (26%), Successful (24%), Innovative (20%), Smart/Savvy (20%)
Apple	Cool/Hip (37%), Innovative (27%), Down to earth/Friendly (27%), Visionary (24%), Cares about what customers think (16%)
IBM	Not as good as they used to be (37%), Trustworthy (27%), Technology leadership (27%), Smart/Savvy (22%), Successful (20%)
Compaq	Trustworthy (12%), Cares about what customers think (10%), Smart/savvy (10%), Successful (9%), Technology leadership (7%)
Microsoft	Successful (91%), Technology leadership (75%), Smart/Savvy (71%), Visionary (71%), Innovative (69%)
Novell	Down to earth/Friendly (23%), Cares about what customers think (23%), Trustworthy (20%), Not as good as they used to be (16%), Smart/Savvy (12%)

*Chart lists the percentage of respondents rating each company on the various attributes

One thing that's important, and perhaps unique to the technology industry is that certain aspects of corporate brand personality can come from the high-profile company founders. This presents interesting challenges for technology companies. The most obvious example is Bill Gates, who's "a brand himself," according to Greg Perlot, Microsoft's former director of advertising. In the customer's mind, Gates' strong image and presence also represents Microsoft. That was part of the reason Microsoft moved more aggressively to shape its overall corporate brand identity, beginning in 1994. Oracle is another example. As Zach Nelson, former Senior Vice President for Marketing, says: "Oracle-ness" has been defined

more by default than intent. And it's been embodied by Larry Ellison. It's been aggressive, sales-focused and competitive driven. Now, there's more of a customer focus coming through." Again, Oracle is taking proactive steps to manage its brand personality and identity, rather than accept the current image that exists in the hearts and minds of many customers and potential customers.

Here are some additional considerations for brand personality development:

- **Don't underestimate the importance of a likable personality.** Liking the brands and all that the brand represents, is an underrated part of the technology purchase process. As brand identity authority Lynn Upshaw says, "Likability is a key plank in the bridge that should be built between customer and brand. It's one of the most important lures any brand can offer." IBM is trying very hard to present a more human side to its brand personality (e.g. "Solutions for a small planet") - in part, to be seen as friendlier and more likable and thus counteract the arrogant image that was built up in the past.
- **Don't underrate brand personality.** Personalities in brands, just like in people, attract certain types of people. Trying to appeal to everybody should be avoided. Some of the more distinctive brand personalities succeed because they don't try to be all things to all people. Gateway is a good example of sticking to and leveraging a unique "cow-spotted" personality.
- **Don't be misled by research that appears to diminish the role of personality.** Most quantitative research will point out, and rightly so, that functional attributes are what really drive consideration and purchase. However, those left-brain attributes also happen to be the easiest to measure in a research setting. It's tough to get at the true importance of emotional, right-brain intangibles like personality in structured research. Yet, we know they make a difference. Qualitative research, however, can help companies better understand the personalities of brands and the roles they play.

Ultimately, understanding, developing, and managing brand identity and personality determine – to a large degree – whether your company achieves brand preference and loyalty and a sustainable competitive advantage, or merely succeeds at opportunistic sales (often at a discounted price), and struggles to retain customers and maintain profitability. So we urge companies to make sure – right from the start – that everything you do is done in the context of a well-defined brand-identity strategy that clear about who you are, who you aspire to be (i.e. are *becoming*) and how you stand out. As David Aaker, author of *Building Strong Brands*, says: "One way to be more efficient in marketing is just to do things right the first time around. It starts with getting the identity right. If you have a brand identity that works, you're just monumentally efficient."