



Market Knowledge

Mistaken Identity: Does Your Brand Reflect the Real You?

When you think about companies like AT&T, UPS, and Target, you get an instant mental picture of each company's corporate branding. Each has a distinctive logo, color scheme and advertising slogan that is powerful and memorable.

For your company, do each of your brand elements reflect the real you? Does your logo convey your company's professionalism, quality and strength, or does it position you as a small-time operator? Do you have a consistent color scheme and graphic identity that is carried across everything from your business card to your vehicle graphics?

Many contractors have outgrown their company's initial identity. Their first logo was selected from clip art in a copy shop or hand-drawn by a friend of the family. Often these early designs are cluttered, frumpy or dated. Sometimes you see a company name in simple all-capital block letters, with no warmth or eye-appeal. Other companies lack a consistent color scheme or jump between different meaningless slogans, never finding anything that resonates with potential customers.

When it's time for an image makeover, be more systematic in your approach to shaping your brand elements. Consider your audience. What are the key characteristics of your customer base? How do they currently view your company? What impression do you want to create for customers that are seeing your brand for the first time? How do you want to position your company versus other providers of the same services?

For example, different colors and graphical elements can work better for one contractor than another. If your business is focused on artisan residential landscapes, brand elements that evoke handmade craftsmanship and warm, friendly service can be winners. Conversely, when competing for large commercial maintenance contracts, the stability of a solid professional logotype and sleek corporate appearance can win a smaller company a place on the bidders list.

Here's a selection of some things that I review with clients during a branding and design review:

Clarity: Potential customers need to quickly grasp the company's name, type of business and area of specialization. Sometimes even the company name needs to be reviewed or enhanced. Fresno-based Steelescapes recognized the need to add a leaf graphic into its logo to eliminate customer confusion with providers of metal fabricating.

Memorability: Short names, clean typefaces and a simple graphic device can aid in recall. Frills, cartoon graphics and superfluous slogans detract. Brands like Google, Target and Nike have a clean, matter-of-fact style.



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Usage: Your logo will be used on your business card and on the side of your service vans, so make sure that it looks good in both sizes. It will also be used in color or black and white, so try it both ways before you commit. Verify that it will be easy and inexpensive to silkscreen or embroider the logo onto employee uniforms.

Continuity: Although there is value in creating buzz around a brand through razzle-dazzle tactics and trendy colors, be careful not to stray from the essence of your values and message. Just because it's edgy and creative doesn't mean that it's right for you or your senior-citizen clients. Select brand elements that will still resonate with customers 10 years from now.

Corporate identities really do matter. If your brand looks good, your company will too.

About the Author:

Jeff Carowitz is a leading expert on marketing for the green industry. As a consultant with Strategic Force, he works with manufacturers, wholesale distributors and contractors in developing marketing programs for profitable business growth.