



SCRT Technical Bulletin

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The Importance of Branding Your Business

You might think that branding is for the big guys. Sure, it's fine for P&G and Microsoft, but not for you.

Stop and consider this: No matter the business or market—no matter how big or small—there's one immutable truth: you already have a brand. You created your brand the moment you started your business.

Your brand is a reflection of everything you do: the way you talk about your business, the e-mails you send to prospects and customers, the website you've struggled to put up, the content you create, the tweets you post, the collateral that's floating around, and the business cards you hand out.

The list is endless.

So, whether you've spent any time thinking about it or not, your brand is on display. It's organic and it's defining itself in your absence. But it doesn't mean it's out of your control. Not if you act now.

Here are three reasons why you should care about building your brand, even if you've only just opened up your company bank account (or maybe even if you haven't):

1. You're being compared with other companies that have thought about their brand:

You're out there in the marketplace every day. You know who you're up against. Companies that have been around the block a few times. They're better funded and probably have a better infrastructure in place. Oh, and, guess what? They spend money on their brand. They've got an agency on retainer, their collateral all matches, their website is gorgeous and loaded with content written in the same style, and their customers have a consistent experience from initial contact to post-sale service.

Maybe you're up against another startup like yours. Maybe they haven't thought much about their brand. That's an even better opportunity. Beat them to the punch.

OK, so maybe you don't have much to invest right now. You can't put an agency on retainer. But, then, you don't have to. In fact, it doesn't take much to be consistent and reflect the true nature of your brand. Maybe the big guys can hire Don Draper's grandson to iron out their brand. But you can easily find a small branding firm or a couple of freelancers (say a designer and a writer) who can help you button up your brand.

Talk to colleagues. See if they know people. Have a look around OPEN Forum. I'm sure you'll find exactly the right ones for the job. It won't break the bank, but it might be a tough check to write. Do it anyway.

2. If you don't start now, it won't get any easier:

If you just started your business or it's in its early stages, now is the time to think about your brand.

Do it before you start filling up inboxes with proposals, collateral, and business cards. Do it before your new sales guy starts building PowerPoint decks with Google Images and The Drudge Report as his sole graphic points of reference.

Nature abhors a vacuum. And so do salespeople. Many salespeople are only as good as the PDF they have to forward to a prospect. They need stuff to sell with. If you're not giving them what they need they'll make it up themselves. Salespeople are good on the phone and in person. But when it comes to creating collateral or PowerPoint decks, they should stick to chatting on the phone.

But to have really good collateral, you need to have visual and voice standards. So spend a bit of time now working with a designer and writer to establish those. And soon you'll have everything your salespeople want when they press the "send" button.

Sure, you can let it ride for a while. But it won't be any easier, it won't be cleaner, and it won't ever be any cheaper than if you do it right now.

3. Thinking about your brand, even just a little, will inevitably reveal something about your business—it might even be earth-shatteringly great:

Peggy Noonan, who wrote speeches for Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, noted in her memoir that it often took something as big as a speech to get people thinking about issues. You might not have a big speech planned, so make your brand the catalyst for some big thinking at your company. Get someone to help you—or do it yourself. But do it. Need help? Just Google terms such as "brand personality" or "brand essence;" there's a lot of great material to guide you. Structure what you want to do then forge ahead.

Start talking about your brand with employees, customers, investors, partners. What do they think of your company? Does it match what you think your brand is all about? The only way you'll know is if you ask.

The answers you get might not redefine your business, but they will inevitably bring to light something you never considered, something you never wanted to consider, or something felicitous that will get you all fired up.

And, best of all, it will probably help you sell your products more effectively.

Only three reasons, eh? There are probably thousands of others. But these are the ones I'd focus on if I were you. Just because your business is young and foolish doesn't mean you can't think like an adult.

Courtesy of Open Forum