

# Consistency with Passion

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## Branding's Greatest Weapon

By Carolyn Hayes Uber

Simply put, **image** is *earned*, while a **brand** is *created*.

IMAGE is the way in which the public perceives a company. Every exposure to your company, from the warmth in the voice that answers the phone to the consistent accuracy of your invoices to the easily read signage in your shop contributes to your image. Some businesses do this well, some not so good, some so-so.

BRANDING, on the other hand, is not a perception issue, but a strategic issue. Corporate branding is a statement of how a company views itself as an organization and how it wants to be viewed by others. In essence, it is a promise to all those who come in contact with it as to what they can expect from the company, from the professionalism of its people and the quality of the products to the level of customer service. A brand can be carefully and deliberately crafted to suggest specific characteristics of the company to the public.

To be successful in the long term, a brand must clearly and consistently reflect the core messages that make a company unique. A strong corporate brand can have a profound impact on motivating audiences to choose products or services for reasons beyond price and convenience, while also promoting an internal culture geared to sustaining customer relationships.

Ineffective brand management leads to a devaluation of this valuable asset. If a brand system goes unmanaged, it will atrophy; resulting in a fragmented collection of visuals, processes, and culture, all intended to positively represent the company, but instead suggesting an organization that is confused, inconsistent, and unfocused.

CONSISTENCY is truly the magic word when it comes to brand management. Even the most mundane graphic symbols, applied consistently, and with discipline, speak volumes about quality and reliability. The more uniformly a company presents itself, the more clearly defined is the picture presented to the public.

Besides the obvious benefits of a strong company brand and its influence on customers and prospective buyers, it can also have a catalytic effect on organizational thinking. Institutions that undertake a commitment to create and sustain such a program find that essential questions like "who are we?" and "what

is our purpose?" must be addressed. This process wakes people up, stimulates ideas, and invigorates a company at all levels.

The truism of a carefully crafted and well-managed branding program is the Circle Effect: Companies are recognized because they are successful and successful because they are recognized.

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