



Your Brand — Do You Really Understand What It Is?

I've got a logo. That's my brand, right?

That's a common assumption. Unfortunately, there's a lot of confusion about logos and branding. And confusion is the enemy of effective marketing.

Your brand, identity, and logo are not the same thing. Consider the following to assess how well you are communicating with your customers.

What's the difference between a logo and a brand?

Your brand is more influential than your logo. It extends far beyond your website or printed marketing materials. Your brand is the cognitive and emotional perception that others have about you or your company. It is the client's perception of who you are, what you do for them, and how well you do it for them. Did you notice the word "them?" Branding is about the customer—their problem and the solution you provide for them.

Your logo, website, print materials, and anything else used to connect with people, should convey or strengthen your brand. Here's an explanation of the differences of each and how they fit together.

What is a logo?

Your logo is a distinctive mark, symbol or emblem that instantly identifies you or your business. Its purpose is to communicate and represent your brand to the world. A logo

can be a symbol or icon along with words or just a symbol. Recognize these well-known logos?



When a brand becomes successful or well known, the logo can become the symbol alone (for example the Apple icon, NIKE swoosh, or Mercedes star).



A logo can also be a "logotype" logo, which is a word or words without a symbol like the examples below.



A well-designed logo enhances your branding. It is a critical part of the identity system of your business. The logo should be easily recognized by its color, shape, and form. The logo becomes associated with the identity of your company.

What is my identity?

The visual identity system, or brand identity system – is a compilation of visual pieces used to communicate your brand. It is also the way the brand appears to your audience.

Graphic elements, a specific color system, fonts, and a logo are the components that make it easy for customers to identify you. Your logo should be on everything including collateral materials such as stationery, brochures and signage, written content like evergreen blog posts, and white papers. Ideally, a business will establish guidelines for use of the logo for all of these communication pieces in a cohesive and consistent manner.

Your visual identity may consist of...

A Logo (The symbol of the entire identity & brand)

Stationery (Letterhead, business card, envelopes, etc.)

Messages (Messages communicated via email, video, or on paper)

Marketing Collateral (Flyers, brochures, books, websites, etc.)

Products & Packaging (Merchandise you sell and the packaging materials)

Apparel Design (Clothing items worn by employees, or sold to clients)

Signage (Interior & exterior design)

Anything visual that represents the business conveys your identity. Is your identity clear or confusing? Written words are also visual elements. Well written words communicate clarity.

What is a Brand?

Your brand conveys the most vital component of customer relations: trust. Trust is not just an intellectual conclusion, it includes emotional components.

Your brand is the overall, intuitive sense people form about you or your company. A brand is not just a logo and it is much more than a brochure. Many people think a brand only consists of a few elements – some colors, fonts, logo, and perhaps a slogan.

If your company exists, you have a brand. In fact, you have a brand whether you are aware of it or not. The way you do business and how you treat customers influences your brand. Your brand is the perception people have about you or your company.

Think colors are no big deal? Ever notice that surgeons and doctors don't use red in their logo? What is associated with the color red? Yes, you're right—blood. Energy companies use green because it conveys a positive sentiment about the environment. A brand conveys sentiment—and people are sentimental about brands. Think about your friends who are fiercely loyal to Apple products or folks in the Baby Boomer generation who still buy a brand of kitchen appliance because they are "the best" even though they have never compared them on Consumer Reports.

Most brands are not trying to scam consumers with cheap products. Unfortunately, most companies don't understand branding and its impact. The words used to convey your brand communicate your values and goals. The challenge is to communicate well through branding—why you are the company people can and should trust.

“ Confusion erodes trust. Clarity facilitates trust.

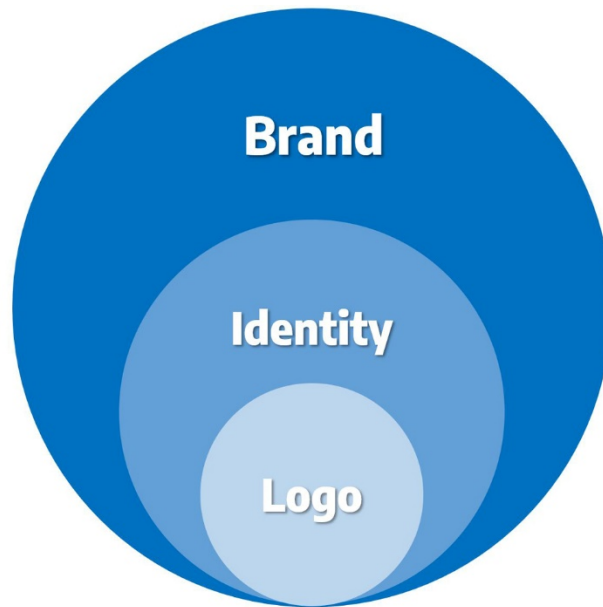
Trust is more than an intellectual conclusion. It also involves a sentiment, a gut response, an intuitive sense that you are trustworthy. Certainly, a clean design helps convey stability or professionalism. Pictures enable people to visualize your product or service. Video can show your product in action. But that intuitive sense is influenced most by the experience people have when they encounter your words.

Imagine a website with photos, a logo, a silent video, and no words except “Buy Now” on a button. What would be your level of trust to enter your credit card information?

Another example: The same website has text, but it includes poor grammar, sentence fragments, and missing punctuation. Does it instill confidence in the product, the business, or the buying process? Probably not. The words on your website, in emails, annual reports, white papers, and brochures are vital for the clarity of your brand and your trustworthiness.

If you make inferior products and want to market them as high quality, you will probably start with a bang and then fizzle quickly. Online reviews can be brutal and can make or break a company in today's digital business world. Most of the clients I work with have an excellent product or service, but they are struggling to communicate with clarity. Usually, it's because of confused messaging (incongruency). The product, logo, and branding are confusing to customers. Confusion erodes trust. Clarity facilitates trust.

A recap:



LOGO – *Identifies a business in its simplest form using a symbol or icon.*

IDENTITY – *Visual components which contribute to the overall brand.*

BRAND – *Perceived sense as a whole.*

Logo design, identity, and branding all have independent roles, that in combination, establish a perceived identity for a business or product. When done well, the combination can be a powerful influence benefitting your customers—and benefitting your bottom line too.

Now that you know this vital information, how is your overall communication strategy? Are there things you can do to improve your brand?

1,100 words

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