

K O R E  I M A G E

## Is Branding Relevant **Now?**

**We all know brand development is important.  
But how can now possibly be the right time?**

By Mark A. Curtis

There is no question that the business climate is fundamentally different than it was in the free-spending days of the mid - 90's. It's even very different from what it was just over a year ago. Today, profits don't decide the size of your bonus, they decide your organization's ability to survive. Conventional wisdom says that strategic, long-range marketing "investments" such as brand development should be put off until better times. It would seem that now is the time to stay tactically focused on projects that will deliver immediate, measurable return.

The irony is that the most strategic marketing initiatives hold the key to delivering *immediate* impact in today's most critical business challenges – including generating sales, maximizing ROI and increasing profits.

This is because initiatives like brand development force an organization to make strategic decisions about who they are (or want to be) and focus all marketing efforts around supporting that single brand image. Coordinated marketing across all media creates far greater returns and maximizes the value of every dollar spent. Even more can be gained by coordinating these focused efforts with those of sales, customer service and HR.

Consider these three real-time scenarios and how brand positioning and image development offer you the right solution – especially in today's economy.

## Scenario 1

### Breaking The Sales Barrier

Through a series of good, forward-thinking moves, your company has steadily changed its core business. While new customers have a more current and accurate view of your brand, older customers (along with the general marketplace) still see you as you have been for the last fifteen years. Sales cycles are long as sales teams must re-educate prospects about your core strengths. Opportunities within your existing customer base remain untapped. Marketing has become tedious as different groups still have different ideas about who the company is and where it is going

*The Branding Payoff:*

By stepping back and building clear consensus around your targeted brand positioning, you can develop and launch a focused brand image that will end confusion and offer tremendous sales advantages:

- Clarity Of Message
- Unity Across Sales, Marketing
- Reintroduction To Current Accounts
- Shorter Sales Cycles
- Increased New Sales

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**Eddie Bauer** just announced its first ad spending since 1999 with a \$12 million marketing campaign focused on battling years of identity confusion by clearly defining its image as a retailer of rugged outdoor wear.

Source: Wall Street Journal, August 30, 2002

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## Scenario 2

### Enabling Business Transformation

Responding to market conditions, the president unveiled her new focus for the organization. To be successful, this new strategy requires changes both inside and outside the company. Marketing must re-evaluate its messages in light of the new direction. Sales must take a more strategic approach to reaching customers. Customers, prospects and your own employees must all learn to view the company in a new light. The biggest challenge? Everyone is still struggling to get their heads around the company's last major change in focus of a year ago

*The Branding Payoff:*

No other initiative offers more promise in enabling business transformation. By defining the new company position, expressing the brand through all marketing vehicles and forming tight partnerships across the organization, you can:

- Align marketing with business strategy
- Create universal understanding of company direction
- Make the new direction “real” to employees
- Achieve desired results in much less time

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**“It's time** to make the brand a common knowledge among all employee; so that it can be a source for innovation and new ideas among all competencies within the company's organization”

Source: “Brand Activation” whitepaper by Paul Morel, Peter Preisler and Anders Nystrom featured on BrandChannel on February 22, 2002.

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### Scenario 3

## Getting More From Less

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“We don't spend at the same rate as the leading advertisers, so it's even more important that all of our communications are orchestrated so that we have a larger effect on the marketplace.”

- Jim Speros,  
Chief Marketing Officer, U.S. **Ernst & Young LLP**

Source: Wall Street Journal Online, Sept. 9, 2002

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For many years, the company's overall messaging, look and feel was consistent, recognizable and on-target. However recently it has become obvious that the old brand image is outdated compared to the rest of the industry. Small experiments have started with marketing. Direct mail has taken on a humorous tone. The new web site designs you are considering look very high-tech and modern. The sales guys' presentations feature their own messaging with a “kitschy retro” theme. There is more pressure than ever to provide a quantifiable measure on the return from an already reduced marketing budget. But the more your company tries, the lower the numbers seem to get

*The Branding Payoff:*

By getting the executive team to agree upon the core concepts that represent your company, you will have the framework you need to strategically design a single, powerful brand image. With this new brand image you will:

- Create a single identity and message
- Coordinate sales presentations, direct mail, the web, corporate videos, trade shows, brochures, and business cards
- Increase quantifiable return (as each new tool builds on the brand's momentum)

In all of the above scenarios, branding is an essential ingredient to the immediate and long-term success of the organization. The key is a commitment to a brand development process that enables you to think strategically, make decisions in the right order, and draw direct connections to the decisions you face today. In cases such as these, the question is less about whether you can afford to address branding today and more about whether you can afford not to.

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