

Brands Are about Relationships, Not Transactions.

By Karen Post

It's human nature to bond emotionally with someone with whom you have a strong relationship, like your best friend. In most cases these special friendships are earned over time and are based on a pattern of behavior and common values. Building a successful brand is a similar process. The more you understand about how your buyers and prospects tick, the more likely you are to plant the desired brand in their minds and create a lasting loyalty.

A brand or what I refer to as a Brain Tattoo™ is a psychological impression of value-based emotions, lodged on the mind of a buyer or prospect. Just like a traditional ink tattoo printed on some body part, a Brain Tattoo™ is put there by choice, due to some very personal and intimate value, and can be removed at any time, so plan your brand strategy carefully.

First step.

Once you know a market exists for your product and you can reach it financially, you are ready to connect with those who want what you have.

Business leaders are often seduced by many marginal market opportunities. You want to please everyone, but losing focus on your core brand dilutes prior branding investments. Single-mindedness is much more efficient and powerful than a shotgun approach for landing a brand.

Monitor or miss out.

Branding is about meeting emotional needs, delivering on a relevant promise and reducing the buyer's risk. To capture the buyer's insight, a business must continuously monitor its best customers. Otherwise it is leaving money and loyalty on the table. Depending on the structure and size of your business, this task can be handled by accounting or account services. Bottom line—it must be done.

Now that you have a handle on your best customers, spend time and resources to learn as much as you can about their desires, their motives and their values. Branding is usually far removed from product features and the transaction and is all about the relationship between two parties.

Learn and leverage with a loyalty lab.

There are many cost-effective ways to gather data from your buyers and prospects. Remember the more you know, the tighter you can bond with your brand.

Your goal is to get into your customers' heads.

Determine their motives, values and needs. Don't just inquire about product features and business.

Ask them what's on their mind.

Design a simple random or after-purchase questionnaire. Increase your return rate by rewarding customers who respond with a branded gift, not necessarily something with your logo on it, but something that symbolizes your brand promise.

Call them up and listen.

People love to talk. Depending on your objectives, conversations can be handled by a third party or an executive from your company.

Gather data from your Web site.

Web sites offer many ways to gather data. Invite your site visitors to give you feedback, participate in on-line surveys or sign up to receive something of added value. All of these methods can gather meaningful information and insights into your customers' minds.

As humans, we all have instinctive and culture-hardened value systems. Some of our values evolve with life experiences. Some remain as permanent as dry cement during our whole life. A few common values are: Successful brands connect through values, not product features.

Think about a brand you personally like and buy. What value does it deliver for you? That's the "value fix" and driving factor in your buying process.

The same system works for your buyers. Some classic examples of value branding include:

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|---------------------|--------------|
| Achievement | Duty |
| Adventure/Risk | Fame |
| Community/Belonging | Fun |
| Competition | Independence |
| Control | Power |
| Creativity | Status |

Harley Davidson.

The Harley brand is not about a means of transportation or sturdy shock absorbers. It's about an attitude of full-blown freedom, unleashing the rebel inside, and living your wild side.

Victoria's Secret.

Undergarments are a basic fashion commodity. Add some value/desire and personality (adventure, recognition, self-expression, and fun) to drive your advertising and you've got an international brand sensation. Both men and women were drawn in with these emotional magnets.

Remember a commercial brand is an emotional relationship between the buying market and a marketed product or service—a bond of loyalty, a connection of relevance and earned trust. The better you know your customers, the more impact can be planned into your brand—and pocket-book.

About the author.

Karen Post, The Branding Diva™, is an author, national speaker and consultant on branding, marketing and communication issues. For nearly 20 years she has provided branding counsel and communication programs for individuals; start-ups; local, regional and national companies; politicians; and nonprofit organizations. For more information contact Karen Post by email at kp@brandingdiva.com or 813-250-1730.
