

10 Brand Do's

» Branding 101

Frankly – nobody cares what you think about your brand. They don't ask you for your opinion regarding your product or the ballot issues you're sponsoring. Your target audience has its own perception of what "it" is about, a feeling that they may or may not be able to articulate. This unarticulated sense is what will dictate how they respond to whatever you place on the table.

Remember, a brand isn't about what you think. It's about what they think.

1. Be Honest.

What is your brand, how is it truly positioned, and where can it grow?

2. Research.

No matter what you believe and the degree of your conviction – remember that it's not about you. Conduct a brand audit and find out what people really think and what they really want. Turn the audit inward: what are your core values, and how are they communicated? Now compare the two audit results.

3. Maintain Brand Integrity.

Good brand equity is worth its weight in gold; bad equity is an opportunity to be honest (see point number one) and realistically enhance your brand positioning.

4. Articulate Your Strengths.

Why is your brand special? How is it differentiated within the marketplace? As you answer these questions, remember points one and two, and own the answer – it's the backbone of your brand.

5. Define Your Brand Strategy.

Your competitors have one. You should too. The bigger your brand, the more it needs management and a broad strategy. Without it, your left hand may not know what the right hand is doing. Find a way to make both hands work together. It saves time, money and tends to be more effective.

6. Be Consistent, Not Rigid.

There's always room for creativity and opportunities to align your issue with current trends and events as needed. Brands must be dynamic or they stagnate.

7. Celebrate Your Brand.

Don't keep it a secret. How will you let people know what your brand is? The more people know, the more they buy in. That's as true for your internal communication efforts as it is for your PR, earned media, paid media and community outreach.

8. Respect the Magic.

Cultivate the creativity and magnetism of your brand. It's what people remember and love.

9. Collaborate.

Remember how brand is experience? Make sure that everyone involved in creating the experience gets a chance to participate in defining, maintaining and enhancing the brand. Information gathering can yield new, refreshing ideas. The implementation can elevate the brand experience to a whole new level.

10. The Sum of Parts.

Hand in hand with point number one (Be Honest), is making sure that your honest answers are reflected in the many ways your brand interacts with the world. Remember: you can't lie. Just because you want your brand to be down-to-earth, doesn't mean that it can be – at least not right away. If the product (or issue, or organization, etc.) is anything but down-to-earth, no amount of clever design, copywriting or blogging will make it so. Because your brand is reflected in the greater experience of the product, organization, issue, etc., you must keep your eye on the big picture – even as you obsess over the details. It is not about your tag line, your earned media strategy or your advertising campaign. It's about all of these things working together to support the brand.