

BRANDED ON MY OWN

We all know that design is paramount when communicating a brand, and that a brand is much more than a fancy logo and a catchy tagline, but how much more? BRENDAN MCKNIGHT hunts down branding guru Paul Nelson to find out.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT BRANDING? We hear about employer branding, personal branding, super brands, even brand Beckham. At the same time, everyone seems to be rebranding right now, with recent examples from Woolworths, Pepsi, the New South Wales Government, Melbourne, Kraft and the ANZ, just to name a few.

So why the sudden buzz around brands and what exactly is at the heart of it all? Paul Nelson, managing director of strategic brand consultancy BrandMatters, explains. "It has certainly been a busy period on the branding front. Effective branding is the interpretation and expression of an organisation's business strategy communicated across all mediums. When thinking about brands in this way, you can begin to understand what the buzz is about. We're also experiencing changes affecting market conditions, customer behaviour and media habits."

BrandMatters sees a brand as a unique promise that must be kept. To do this the promise has to have meaning as well as reflecting and enabling the business strategy. Defining that brand 'promise' (the essence at the heart of the business and offer) and expressing it effectively and consistently across all interactions involves insight and commitment, and a whole lot of work. So if you thought it was just a case of creating a logo and slapping it on your website, products and business cards – think again.

Like all industries, in the world of branding there are, of course, going to be winners and losers, the latter potentially costing a brand millions of dollars, both in terms of design fees and loss of consumer trust and reputation. When asked who he sees as the online movers and shakers in branding, Nelson says that recently, it's the social media and social network brands that immediately spring to mind, with the likes of Facebook and Twitter heading the pack. Then of course there is Google, which despite its challenges in China, continues to launch an endless list of applications and goes from strength to strength. As for those less fortunate, Nelson sees the most obvious recent examples being the infamous "iSnack 2.0" as well as the demise of the Tiger Woods brand.

For those of us in the design and digital media realm, today more than ever, working with the idea of a 'promise' and aligning that with a brand expression provides the basis for the strongest briefs and therefore the best opportunity to develop not only great design and great products, but also meaningful advertising and marketing communications.

The team at BrandMatters stresses that while logos, taglines and advertising are of course super important, and are key representations of the brand, the actual brands themselves are often the product of a perception that exists in the customer's mind. To explain, my opinion of

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL BRANDING

- Brands are built around one simple, unifying idea, which they deliver clearly and consistently
- Brands should own an idea in the market and this is what differentiates them from their competitors
- Brands understand their customers' needs and deliver to them
- Brands are built on a solid foundation of strong business fundamentals and are well-managed
- Brands internally 'live and breathe their brand', and
- Brands externally make their customers believe what they stand for.





Pepsi may be very different to yours, hence the brand experience must span across every interaction a person has with the brand, including the experience of the product or service, strong visual cues of the brand identity system like logos and colour, the 'tone of voice' in marketing as well as the manner of the person who represents the business. Everything counts, and a brand must ensure consistency across all touch points.

Nelson believes a 'brand' is the sum of all these interactions which, when combined effectively, will deliver more than the sum of its parts. What a brand should deliver is an emotional connection with the customer – one that builds and deepens from positive and consistent experiences with the brand over time. To do this the brand should evoke a positive feeling in the customer, represent something important to them, comfort, entice or excite them and reward their trust by never disappointing.

Bringing this to life, Nelson reveals some great examples of living and breathing the brand. First up is Apple, whose success is not a phenomenon, and definitely not rocket science. Instead it is as simple as the brand owning its promise, and keeping it in every single interaction, down to every finite detail, every single time. The brand is smart, innovative, streamlined and sexy, and these brand attributes are reflected through each and every aspect of the Apple brand interaction. The user's experience of the product lies with its aesthetically pleasing but sophisticated technical features, which have been made intuitive and accessible through simplicity. Then there is the packaging, which screams good industrial design, from the product casing itself to the experience of unwrapping the box. Even the shopping experience – aside from its online store experience, let's not forget the Apple store spatial experience – is a design feat, and it has created a space where you can see, hear, touch, feel and own the brand. Just look at how many people are inside an Apple store next time you walk by one.

Another, more home-grown example of a great brand experience is T2 Teas. The experience of shopping within the T2 environment has been designed, manufactured and articulated to align with the emotions and expectations of the enjoyment of drinking a cup of its tea. With the entire experience aimed at delivering on its promise, which we interpret as being: T2 is 'passionate about great premium tea and wanting to share this with you'. The 'experience' starts at the store and follows you to your lounge room.

ASK YOURSELF...

Is your brand:

- Credible – achievable internally
- Relevant – to customers and the market
- Unique – differentiated relative to the competition, and
- Sustainable – relevant in the future?

Does it offer:

- For employees – meaning, direction and a sense of pride
- For customers – ease of choice, lower risk, greater value, and
- For the business and the shareholders – higher margins, greater customer loyalty and secured future earnings?

Powerful brand strategy will also answer the following questions:

- Cut-through – how do we ensure our customers and distributors understand our positioning?
- Credibility – how do we gain the trust and confidence of our internal and external stakeholders?
- Value – how do we translate our power and intent into real business value and our share price?
- Communication – how do we drive consistent and clear messages?
- Coordination – how do we ensure alignment and coordination?
- Consistency – how do we ensure we are described consistently by all those who come across our brand?



Google™

Yet in the end, it's impossible to go past Google – an innovative brand that uncannily seems to know what the consumer wants – before they do. It starts with the reliability and credibility of the search function and then moves on, to the constant innovation to remain relevant, unique and ahead of the competition. It's finally topped off by the brand's ability to attract and retain the brightest minds in the industry, which makes it almost unmatched.

So, while rules were made to be broken, and a studio's aim is for its client's product to stand out the most, Nelson is happy to impart some branding 'golden rules' that should never be broken. "Creativity and distinctiveness is everything," he says. "Most branded communications aren't loved or hated, but simply ignored. Clarity is what drives creativity. Get the brief and the positioning right and it informs every subsequent activity. Last, consistency of the brand is critical – not just the obvious brand identity graphic applications, but also every brand touch point that impacts on the overall customer experience. If these three rules are followed, you're more than well on the way."

When starting the process of creating a brand, often it can be extremely overwhelming. With so many competitors, and so much to think about, BrandMatters has initiated a three-stage process entitled 'consult, create, express'. Here's the breakdown. Consult involves defining the positioning behind the promise. Create means clarifying and communicating the promise through key messages and an effective visual identity system. And finally, express involves keeping that promise and following through with consistent and unified brand interactions across everything – always. **DT**

USEFUL LINKS:

www.brandmatters.com.au

BRANDMATTERS' THREE-STAGE PROCESS IN MORE DETAIL:

Consult

The consultation process reviews and considers business, marketing and brand strategy implications and linkages. It includes research and collaboration to give us the knowledge to map your market and your positioning, relative to your competitors.

Create

This is where the brand starts to come to life. Once you have a clear brand position, you then have to translate and articulate that into a set of key messages and a visual identity system that effectively captures and communicates your brand's promise. This involves designing a meaningful logo and supporting look and feel that captures the brand's personality through use of colour, image style, typography and graphical elements to evoke an emotional response appropriate to the brand essence. To support this, create a set of guidelines that ensure the integrity of the brand identity is protected through its consistent application across all touch points and interactions, including print, online and all marketing communications both internally and externally.

Express

This is where you ensure the brand is expressed clearly and consistently through every interaction, across every touch point, every time. This is done through the provision of ongoing design, brand, marketing strategy and communications development. We must hold ourselves accountable through brand and marketing measurement services to ensure brand and marketing expenditure is delivering on its promise. 'Express' is living and breathing the brand promise on an ongoing basis.

Finally, with all this to consider, Nelsons explains it's important to remember to stay close to the brand across the entire process and to manage all touch points. "Obviously stay on message and don't launch and leave," he offers. "Remember also that branding is too important to be left to (just) marketing, so ensure you have senior management understanding and support, and measure and manage ongoing performance."