

It's all about branding

From logo to packaging and promotions, your brand IS your business

by Brooke Hanson



In business, there will always be competition. And to succeed in a tough economy, a business needs more than just a great product or service – it needs a great brand.

Branding identifies and distinguishes a company within an industry. How often do you hear adhesive notes called "Post-its" and facial tissues "Kleenex?" These companies have branded their products so well they don't just compete with other products – they define their industries.

Trudy Dunson, a professor of marketing and management at Gwinnett Technical College names The Coca-Cola Company as one of the masters of branding.

"The Coca-Cola ribbon is one of the most recognizable logos in the world," said Dunson. "Coke is It and It's the Real Thing are two of the most recognizable tag lines. Coke's message has always been clear and consistent regardless of what audience they may be trying to reach. The message of Coke is carried out throughout all forms of media."

For The Coca-Cola Company, consistency has been key for branding, but for some companies, shifting their brand depending on market factors has been necessary.

To give their business a competitive edge, Service Foods, an online grocer in Norcross, shifted their brand to focus on the health benefits of their products.

"When we felt the recession was going to happen, we went through testing by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to be labeled as all natural," said Keith Kantor, CEO of Service Foods.

To enhance the Service Foods brand, the company strategically participates in corporate wellness fairs and utilizes social media to allow customers to interact with their team of health professionals.

According to Inc. magazine, Service Foods has seen an 825 percent increase in revenue over the last three years, catapulting from \$8.3 million in 2006 to \$76.6 million in 2009.

Kantor said developing Service Foods' brand to focus on the value the products and services provide has been important to their success.

"The easiest way to brand any business is to provide more perceived value to the client than they can get anywhere else," said Kantor. "Promote that extra value whenever and wherever you can."

Service Foods' brand revolves around a central theme, which according to Dunson, is important. "A common branding mistake

that I see is not establishing a real identity, therefore, customers are not able to relate or understand the brand," said Dunson. "Consistency with the brand identity across the board, such as displaying the same message in everything associated with the brand and also having a logo and tagline that will stick in the minds of customers [is important to creating a successful brand]."

To create or improve your company's brand, Mike Cohen, president of Trinity Consulting in Cumming, recommends identifying the market-segment your business can excel in, then engineering a business model to dominate that segment and exclude other segments.

"The Four Seasons wants to attract high-end travelers," said Cohen. "To do so, it must ignore the market segment seeking lowest price, no frills. It must then engineer a customer experience and marketing messaging that is consistent with its desired market."

Once this is done, a logo should be created to extend the commitment to the particular segment.

"Above all, the logo must accurately communicate the market position and messaging the company wants the consumer to recall," said Cohen.

Cohen cautions that a brand will eventually become irrelevant – regardless of its branding – if management does not keep promises made to consumers.

Keeping consumer promises has been a key part of the Chick-fil-A brand. The Atlanta-based company has marketed around the promise of high-quality ingredients and exceptional customer service.

"Staying true to these focus areas have been key ingredients to our recipe for success for the past 43 years," said Mark Baldwin, spokesperson for Chick-fil-A. "Our advertising budgets are miniscule compared to our competition, so we don't even try to compete in the advertising war to build our brand. Our best marketing comes from our customers telling their friends and family about their dining experience at Chick-fil-A."

Dunson's advice is to focus on the four P's of marketing: product, placement, price and promotion. By building a brand using these elements, a company will be on its way to establishing a strong brand – and hopefully, emulating the success of Atlanta brand-masters like The Coca-Cola Company, Service Foods and Chick-fil-A. 