

You Don't Start at the Beginning

You Have the Makings of a Brand at Hand

This “Top Gun” series of books is focused on the successful consultant. If you are in that demographic, you probably have created the recipe for one or more brands merely through the dint of your success over the years. (If you don't fit that demographic, read on, because you'll learn what to put in place as you gain clients and momentum that will establish brands for you all the more quickly.)

IDENTIFYING THE INGREDIENTS OF YOUR BRANDS

There are two primary sources for determining the elements of your brands that may already exist:

1. Those traits and attributes that you've tended to emphasize and support in your promotional materials, publishing, speaking, and discussions with prospects

2. Those results and accomplishments for which existing clients have tended to laud you and provide testimonials

Of these two sources, the second is by far the most important. That's because they provide a view "from the outside in," meaning that others who support your work attribute these abilities as the reason they have happily invested in your help. In other words, the perspective is from the position of those very buyers and organizations that you want to appeal to as future clients in your marketing plans.

This is a vital separation of criteria (your perspective versus your clients') because we're all fooled much too easily. At one point I was delivering a speech to four hundred outstanding small business owners at an awards banquet and the crowd responded with overwhelming enthusiasm to my "four points for every small business." At the conclusion of the night, I was told that I was the finest speaker that the group had seen in its fifteen years of existence and awards nights.

"Come on," I said with false modesty, "I'm sure I'm not the very best of all those speakers."

"Oh, but you are," gushed the program chair. "Everyone is talking about your performance."

"Well," I said, unable to resist, "what did you particularly enjoy about it?"

"Why, we've never had anyone here who could hold a microphone, walk around the stage, and speak all at the same time!"

"What about my four points for small business?" I stuttered.

"What four points?" she asked.

Brand elements should be examined in terms of what has attracted someone to you, not what attracts you to yourself.

RECIPE: FINDING THE RIGHT RAW MATERIALS AND MIXTURES

To ensure that you begin on the path of least resistance—with those attributes that your clients already tend to associate with you as valuable to them—use this checklist to assemble potential brands or their elements:

- *Is there a pattern to your testimonial letters?* Do the testimonial letters and even informal notes of thanks tend to refer to a common theme, such as the rapidity with which you built teams or your ability to resolve conflict in a constructive manner?
- *Have referrals cited common reasons for contacting you?* Do prospects who reach out to you from third-party endorsements mention a unifying reason, such as an affinity for both executives and front-line managers, or multi-cultural sensitivity?
- *Has your marketing gravity¹ generated a particular kind of interest?* Do your marketing efforts create an attraction for prospects in a common area, such as sales acceleration or expert witness work?
- *What speech content has tended to draw the largest audiences, most repeat performances, and/or the best reactions from the participants?* Are there paid or free speeches and talks that have used particular themes which the audiences and/or organizers have requested the most often and reacted to with the most enthusiasm and follow-up?
- *What articles or interviews have generated the easiest placement, most requests for additional material, and/or best follow-up?* Have you published items around certain topics or issues that have been easiest to place, or that have actually been requested of you by editors and interviewers?
- *Do you have products that sell far better than others?* Are there manuals, booklets, charts, or other job aids that are exceedingly popular? (This takes on extra weight if the item is among the most expensive that you sell, meaning that the interest overcomes price sensitivity.)²
- *Do certain pages on your website attract far more "hits" than any others?* Are there content-driven aspects of your site (that is, apart from free offers and other inducements) that generate more interest for visitors than others?
- *What do client surveys tell you?* Do your clients provide a pattern of results, outcomes, or general improvement as a result of your services? (If you

¹See the following chapter for "gravity" specifics.

²For example, one of my most expensive items among thirty products is a \$149 book entitled *How to Write a Proposal That's Accepted Every Time*. I know that proposal writing has to be one of my brands because of its immense popularity. So "The Value Priced Sale and the Perfect Proposal" has become a brand and the title of a cassette album.

don't utilize client surveys, a branding strategy is a good justification for beginning them.)

- *What do you hear when you network or socialize with colleagues?* Do people who have just met you say, "You're the consultant who's known for changing images overnight," for example? Or are you introduced to others by people who know you as, "This is the person who creates high-profit customer call centers"?

Use the template above to determine what common themes and unifying attributes are associated *with the results that you've generated*. This view "from the outside in" will be the most rapid, dramatic, accurate, and highest potential "lure" for creating brands that will appeal to similar buyers in new organizations.³ The odds are that you have a great deal of material that can lead to successful branding, but you don't have it manifest or organized in the proper manner that reveals its true power.

Branding must be built on repetitive and distinctive abilities and accomplishments that can be replicated. If you can't duplicate it, or if it isn't sufficiently distinguishing, it's an isolated incident and not a brand, no matter how successful at the time.

Finally, note that we are constantly talking about "themes" and "patterns." Don't allow a single success, no matter how grand, with a particular client to lead you to believe you have a brand in that area. By definition, brands must be apparent and appealing to a range of buyers, even in narrow markets. Consequently, a singular success may be so unique that its appeal does not transcend that organization or even that brief window in time when you worked with that client. Many consultants have made the mistake of trying to parlay a single suc-

³Note that this is an excellent process if you want to build brands on current success. But if you choose to build brands that lead you in new directions (for example, you've been highly successful in the low-paying human resources and training areas but want to move into line management consulting), then you need to reorganize your image. We'll cover this process later in this chapter.

VIGNETTE

I was approached by a woman during a workshop for consultants who was dressed in stylish army fatigues—camouflage—which has become all the rage. She said, “I’ve thought about it a long time, and I don’t have a brand that I can identify. Can you help? I’ll pay whatever it takes.”

Despite a flash of mercenary mayhem, I asked why she dressed like that, and what her consulting specialty or field was. She told me that she focused on creating organizational change among those who thought it hopeless—companies being outclassed by the competition, old “brick and mortar” shops, employees who felt incapable of improvement, businesses in tough markets.

As for her outfit, she was the first woman paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division, one of the very first at West Point, where she finished first in her class, and held several other distinctions that made my eyes pop.

“You’re the change commando,” I joked. Then we looked at each other for a few seconds, and she went scurrying back to her seat to begin writing her new marketing materials.

I wonder how much she would have paid. . . .

cess into a brand, when the success may be more due to the client’s situation, the timing, or even luck (which even the best of us desperately need and pray for on occasion) than due to any distinguishing consultant attribute.

I once was part of a “virtual consulting team,” consisting of one other independent consultant with whom I had never before worked and an internal consultant from the client company. We were able to beat one of the “big five” consulting organizations for a major, six-figure project by building on the “virtual” brand and demonstrating how our unique blend of external savvy and internal presence were just right for a restructuring project. We never even attempted to duplicate that again, and I’ve never found the conditions elsewhere that would allow me to attempt it.

Some unique successes are simply that, and not necessarily conducive to building a brand. That’s why the search for repetitive perceptions, trends, and commonality is so important.

Some overall criteria for what patterns to include as potentially brand-worthy:

- Originate with your best, largest, and longest term customers (Go with the strongest flow)
- Can be replicated by you, alone, without unique assistance or conditions (Brands shouldn't be reliant on other resources)
- Appeal to the widest possible array of potential buyers (Get the most bang for your buck, as the fireworks people are fond of saying)
- Are configured or labeled uniquely enough to set you apart from the competition (Established brands are very difficult to displace)
- Represent, in your view, future market needs, competencies that you will continually improve, and your continued passion, as cited in the prior chapter on the convergence of these three factors (Don't pursue a brand in which you will lose interest, ability, or market need)
- Are resistant to trends, fads, technology leaps, and other uncontrollable forces (Try to assert maximum control over your brands)
- Are not capital intensive (You want to maximize ROI)
- Can be readily defended, and might be trademarked, patented, copyrighted, and protected in other manners, legally and ethically (A great brand that is usurped is a very bad misfortune)
- Provide for minimal brand competition with larger firms or with brands firmly established in the field (You might make a great cola, but that's not a market that's going to provide either high margins or decent market share without getting bloody)

Once you've understood your brand potential, you have to help others to understand their actuality. Those are two vastly different endeavors.

MAGNIFYING YOUR EXISTING REPUTE

Once you've isolated those accomplishments that lead to branding, you can begin to magnify them, which is what you've really just done for yourself and now must do for others. You might look at it this way:



Your brands already exist, but they have not been sufficiently emphasized or accentuated (probably not even for yourself prior to this exercise). You need to bring a magnifier or amplifier to bear in order to provide more visibility and awareness for prospects.

First, you have to decide what levels of branding you wish to pursue. These levels are not mutually exclusive, and some organizations engage in all of them. But the level you choose will make a difference in terms of the type and range of magnification you apply.

Corporate Branding. This brand embraces your firm or practice as an entity and will build on that name. McKinsey has become a brand, as has Boston Consulting Group (and then BCG).⁴ The gamut of organizational abilities and potential is encompassed in a corporate brand. The key buying questions that corporate level branding answers are:

- Is this a trustworthy and reliable organization?
- Is this a legitimate and solid firm?

Advantages: One size fits all, and the corporate brand, if successful, can be used for all of your promotion and market impact. It is a single focus that is most easily promoted. You've probably seen full-page, strategic ads placed for the likes of Andersen Consulting toward this end.

Disadvantages: Smaller firms, and certainly solo practitioners, seldom have the worth of what they've done represented by the company name. Also, corporate branding is best done in conjunction with other levels of branding, in that solely corporate branding is most successful when the offerings of the firm are narrow and fixed. It's tough to be "all things to all people" if your firm

⁴One of the features of corporate branding is that a "shorthand" or initials may result, demonstrating the power of the reference. Federal Express, for instance, legally changed its name to FedEx, because that is the brand name that the market developed for it. Go with the most powerful flow.

attempts to use a single corporate brand but actually has a diversity of offerings and potential for the client. The buyer generally will associate you with a single image.

Branding can occur at a variety of levels and emphases. This is an organic process, and you can build additional levels over time without threatening prior work if you plan carefully.

Unifying Branding. This is a common form of branding, which features a single brand that is applied to a range of products and/or services. Mercedes provides its names on all of its various models, even trucks, as a unifying brand or marque, as does Fleet Bank or Campbell's Soup.⁵ In consulting, the Psychological Press puts its imprimatur across a wide array of test instruments that it creates and/or endorses and distributes, and Towers Perrin provides a variety of compensation and benefit services and reports under its unifying branding.

The questions which unifying branding answers include:

- Are these products and services of equal value and integrity?
- Does this firm offer a diversity of connected services?

Advantages: It is relatively easy to connect the services offered to the company offering them, and one brand can accommodate a variety of products and services, making it cost-effective.

Disadvantages: A lack of differentiation can easily occur when there is a wide variety of offerings. In other words, the unifying brand "elasticity" must be so wide as to be non-discriminating. It's one thing to encompass all types of Mercedes-Benzes, despite cost, but it's another to attempt to encompass strategy formulation, executive coaching, front-line workshops, and competitive

⁵As opposed to Procter & Gamble, which uses differing product names without any unifying identification with the company, or Toyota, which deliberately removes its name from the Lexus line.

analysis. The more you specialize, the more a unifying brand might apply effectively; the more you generalize, the more problematic it becomes.

Service Group Branding. To overcome the disadvantages of too much elasticity noted above, groups of services (or products) can be assembled under a particular brand designation. Lincoln/Mercury is a division of Ford with a particular market niche, advertising, promotion, and well over a dozen unique models. When one sees, say, a Lincoln Navigator SUV, one does not instantly (or, perhaps, ever) think of Ford. Similarly, “shareholder value” is a brand used by some consulting firms⁶ to differentiate a range of their services within a larger array of other offerings they provide. Obviously, this strategy enabled a firm or practice to group similar services (even when there is overlap from grouping to grouping) around several distinct brand images.

The questions this approach answers in the marketplace are:

- What are the natural synergies that the offerings provide?
- What is the “universe” within which the services exist?

Advantages: Service group branding affords the ability to take virtually unlimited services for the generalist and group them into “specialist” packages, each with a distinct image and recognition factor. The approach prevents the “all things to all people” syndrome often associated with the generalist, and even offers the practitioner who is uncomfortable with such generalizing the ability to more specifically organize offerings and their promotion.

Disadvantages: It requires some careful organization married to acceptance of ambiguity to create discrete packages that represent various value propositions, but which may also overlap in places (for example, a 360° feedback technique might apply in both the executive coaching group and in the team-building group). Also, if a key buyer closely identifies you with a particular package without awareness of others, it may be very difficult to broaden that viewpoint, especially and ironically after great success in that single group area.

⁶The first firm I heard do this was Braxton Associates in the early 1990s.

All branding levels have pros and cons, which is why it's almost always best to embark on a strategy of multi-level branding. The emphasis here is on "strategy," so that the various levels are mutually supportive.

Single Service Branding. This may be perceived as the most common level that we see as consumers, but it is actually on the decline in favor of group branding. The equation is simple: One service (or product), one brand. If you offer only a single, narrow service, the choice is simple. If you offer (as I hope you do) more than that, then multiple brands are called for. You might refer to these as "horizontal brands," since they don't create additional levels but differentiate parallel service and product offerings. There are practitioners who serve only as expert witnesses; there are trainers who provide solely telemarketing seminars for banks; there are turnaround consultants who deal only with family-owned manufacturing businesses of less than \$20 million in sales. There are also practitioners who provide a wide range of otherwise unrelated services, and each merits and needs a brand of its own.

The questions answered here are:

- What is the validity and distinction of this particular service?
- What is the degree of specialization in this area?

Advantages: This is a very simple technique and easy for the buyer to relate to. "I want some M&Ms" is never confused with "Get me the candy coated chocolate from the Mars Company." Similarly, "Get me The Telephone Doctor™" is far easier than "Find Nancy Friedman, who specializes in phone techniques." You can have a plethora of single service brands providing that kind of focus for potential buyers.

Disadvantages: These can create tremendous distraction, loss of focus, and additional expense, unless coordinated in an intelligent combination with other levels of branding. Solo practitioner and small firms (and even large firms) tend to subsume those single-service brands that are not immediately in use, request-

ed, or favored. (This is why services that are acquired through acquisition are often trampled by the existing strong services and support systems of the acquirer.) These are tough to use in any quantity without broader coordination.

Note: Some single products take on a branding force so strong that you have to make changes in the product or service to fully exploit the branding. On the one hand, Kleenex, Formica, and Xerox were all threatened with becoming generic brand names for facial tissue, countertops, and copying (as is FedEx today for overnight shipping), so that “Kleenex brand tissues” had to be amended to the name. More recently, one brand of duct tape actually changed the product name to “Duck Tape” with a picture of a duck on it, because so many people mispronounced the product name that the manufacturer decided it was more profitable to simply go with the flow and exploit the name that the misinformed buyers were actually using.

Personal Name Branding. This occurs when you are able to develop a reputé about your own name. I don’t mean a name that has become generic for a company (such as, McKinsey or Andersen or Merrill Lynch), but rather your name representing your personality and talents. Many consultants who are known for their “smarts,” whom people want on retainer, who are known to achieve results (“You need to contact a guy named Alan Weiss for this project before you do anything else”) have developed personal name brands. This is an ideal situation, since the promotion of the brand and promotion of yourself are one and the same.

The questions answered in such promotion:

- Why have I heard so much about this person?
- What does his or her name represent in terms of value to me?

Advantages: “Find Alan Weiss” is the best form of brand promotion imaginable and creates a “buzz” in the marketplace. Moreover, the brand can’t be stolen, duplicated, or impinged on. There is only one you, and you don’t have to bolster that with added validity (for example, “We were the first to create the ‘balanced scorecard’ approach to performance”). You are the only one who is you.

Disadvantages: There is a high degree of ambiguity involved, and prospects can quickly lose interest unless you demonstrate rapidly (in print, on the web,

and/or in conversation) exactly *why* you're so valuable. There's also the famous "Hollywood phenomenon" that goes like this: "Get me a young Alan Weiss," "Get me an Alan Weiss who knows insurance," "Get me a less expensive Alan Weiss," and so on.

Note: If your name has become a brand unto itself, take all necessary actions to build on it and protect it, since you may have used the other branding techniques to create your name recognition, and they are still the "gravity" factors in place. For example, I've taken the domain name "AlanWeiss.com," and if someone tries to find me that way or writes an email to Alan@AlanWeiss.com, the search and the mail are automatically forwarded to my SummitConsultingGroup.com address and to my email at that address. When I began in the business, no one would have tried to find me that way, since the web wasn't in use to the current degree and neither was my name. Without altering any of my other web "gravity," I've ensured that people trying to find me by this brand name will be directed toward my major source and promotional material.⁷

Keep your name aligned with whatever you do, so that the chances of your marketing efforts attaching themselves to your name, making it into a brand unto itself, are maximized. The most powerful branding is value associated with merely the mention of your name.

RE-ENERGIZING YOUR BRAND FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT

We alluded above to the fact that you might want to reorganize your branding efforts now that you've reached this point of success. That's because branding can plateau. A brand can take you on a steep growth curve, but it can level off, as shown in Figure 2.1.

⁷If you're interested, there are many sites on the web that can arrange this for you. I used one called NameSecure.com, which charged under \$100 for two years of registration, maintenance, and forwarding.

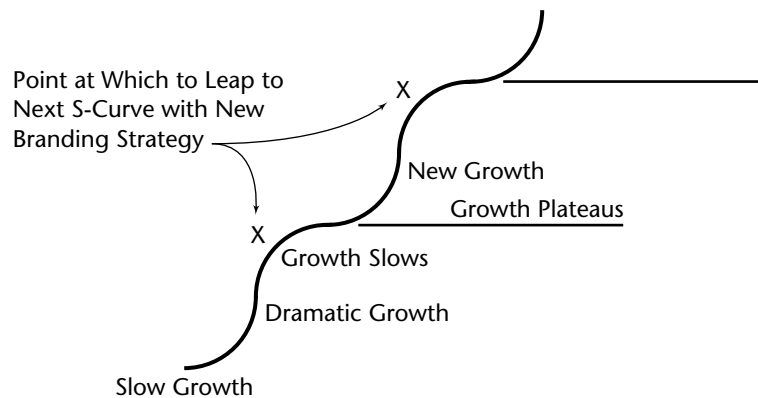


Figure 2.1. Avoiding Brand Plateaus

In Figure 2.1, the plateau phenomenon can be seen. Brands do become dated, passé, and copied (legally or illegally). The reasons include:

- The brand is associated with a past event that is no longer deemed modern or current, such as “space age” or “laser-like.” In consulting, “shareholder

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Poland Spring had been a rather pedestrian purveyor of bottled water. The company focused on home and office use. However, with the advent of the bottled water craze, Poland Spring revitalized itself with bottled water for sale in supermarkets, grocery stores, and even some restaurants. It continues to do what it always has—bottle water from the ground and its proprietary “springs”—but is now reaching a far trendier audience.

When consultants move from an accent on their technology (for example, running change management programs) to an emphasis instead on current buyer needs (for example, creating innovation and positive change in competitive markets), the consultants are taking their regular spring water but bottling it so that it reaches more sophisticated tastes.

Staying current means constantly climbing, not resting on the plateau.

value” and “portfolio management” are two brands that have come and gone. No one wants to go through it any longer.⁸

- The brand has fallen into disrepute. “T-groups” and “left/right brain” thinking were very hot training issues in their time, but have been debunked or demoted in terms of actual utility on the job.
- The brand has become too generic for meaningful attraction. We’ve cited “It’s Miller time, let’s have a Bud,” and the problems with using a term such as “Xerox” as a verb. “Strategic planning,” probably first created and detailed by Peter Drucker during his early work at GM and GE, is no longer a differentiator for a consulting firm.
- Some brands are too easy to copy. Social Style Theory, probably first created by a Dr. Robert Merrill in the 1950s, was since marketed and implemented by a plethora of training firms. There are books out today, albeit not very good ones, that deal exclusively with this approach without ever mentioning the source or originator.
- The brand has established a negativism that is exacerbated by attempts to change it. Oldsmobile, one of the great names in automotive history, has disappeared. GM’s attempts to change what it perceived as a stodgy image were focused on “not your father’s Oldsmobile,” which alienated young and old alike. As buyer demographics change, brands must change, but not at the cost of what has made them popular. (Mercedes, flush with new technology and great designing, still draws on its automotive history in its advertising, which has enabled it to go “down market” with the A class while maintaining the exclusivity of its marque.)

Too often we find words like “new” and “improved” and “better than ever” on the same old products. And that’s why consulting firms and academics are continually producing “new” models surrounding strategy, finance, the management of people, and other factors that haven’t really changed (for example, “reengineering,” the “learning organization,” and “knowledge management”).

⁸For those of you born after the 1970s, Erhard Seminar Training (est) was the brainchild of Werner Erhard (aka Jack Rosenberg) and became a cult-like, draconian self-awareness seminar series that fell out of favor as swiftly as it had arisen.

FIVE WAYS TO ENSURE BRAND FRESHNESS

If you are seeking to reorganize your branding efforts, or if you fear that you are reaching a plateau, remember that the time to act ideally is prior to reaching the plateau. You want to make the “leap” while you have upward acceleration, not after you’ve flattened out, which requires more velocity to escape to the next higher level. Never be content with your brand efforts. Always be vigilant for ways to improve on them. Here are five techniques:

1. *Establish Branding Priorities.* From the list above you may decide that one element will be your first priority, another will be secondary, and two others will be tertiary. You can invest time and resources accordingly and, if you see more movement from one tactic than from others, you can “promote” it to a more primary force in your marketing efforts.
2. *Create Niche Brands.* This means that you may have one brand for your insurance consulting business, another for your executive coaching specialty, and a third for your workshops and seminars. They may at times overlap, which is fine. In this way you can build on what you’ve traditionally been successful in (“The gold standard in agent training”) while building potentially wider brands in other areas without diluting the first one and the bread that’s already on the table (“America’s business coach”).⁹
3. *Use the “Private Label” Mentality.* For example, the CVS drug store chain has its own brand of popular over-the-counter medications, less expensive than the more famous brand names. This technique can also be used to denote premium value and premium prices. It’s easy and effective to create the “Acme Consulting Small Business Growth Process,” for example. I utilize the Alan Weiss Private Roster Mentoring Program, using my brand name to provide cachet and distinction for mentoring, which is in and of itself a widespread, undifferentiated process.
4. *Engage in Co-Branding Efforts.* I have an alliance partner, Kennedy Information, which publishes *Consultant’s News*, *What’s Working in Consulting*, and engages in a wide variety of other consulting-related products and

⁹I once knew a guy who ran seminars all by himself, but every piece of promotion would cite the fact that he was “personally presenting” that particular seminar on that specific date. It was an interesting approach that cost him nothing.

services. Together we run a seminar series called “Rainmaking: Strategies for Consulting Success,” presented by Alan Weiss. These cash in on the Kennedy brand for consulting resources, and my brand for excellent presentations and value-based pricing. Co-mingling our brands creates a powerful synergy. I also publish some of my books through their production company, and edit one of their newsletters. You have seen numerous instances of a product being offered with the admonition that it can also be purchased using a certain credit card, which is another example of effective co-branding.

Brand change or alteration is always best done from a position of strength. Don’t examine a brand addition or change strategy as a last resort to weak performance. Examine it regularly as an aggressive strategy for growth.

5. *Broaden or Elasticize the Existing Brand(s).* *Playboy* used the brand derived from the magazine to embrace products, video, and catalog sales. Everyone from Calvin Klein to Ferrari has tried to stretch existing, high brand recognition, with varying levels of success. If you have some products or services that seem orphaned or are poor performers, consider “embracing” them under one of your successful brands to see whether a synergy will take place. For example, if you are having erratic results with a public speaking career, try billing yourself as “The Strategist” (assuming that your consulting work has flourished there) or as “The Coaches’ Coach.” If successful, the “orphan” should not only flourish, but should then lend strength to the overall brand, as well.

THE CRITICAL CASE FOR STRATEGIC BRANDING

As a successful consultant, you have the wherewithal to create effective brands immediately, if you haven’t already done so. But brand creation, by intent or by default, is clearly insufficient. You need a brand strategy that coordinates your

efforts, maximizes allure, and can evolve as your success continues (and as conditions inevitably change).

Your various brands should, optimally, provide synergy and mutual support. While it's quite acceptable to keep some brands "isolated" so that they appeal to a particular buyer or market or represent a particular talent, it's far better to create a dynamic support among brands. In this way, your strategy supports your competitive intelligence work, which provides speaking opportunities, which create interest in your strategy work, and so on. As a rule of thumb that might make several readers rather irate, the more a brand is neatly isolated with no relationship to the rest of your work, the more likely that it is an avocation or pastime, and not an occupation. I often find consultants with weird, unrelated outcroppings of offerings, such as presentation skills, or overcoming adversity, or facilities management. These are almost always remnants of one's past or a personally interesting diversion, but seldom a major service offering of interest to buyers.

The strategy needn't be complex, but it should be systematic and continually examined for marketing results and potential. One such methodical approach can be seen in Figure 2.2, which is expanded below.

1. Define your strengths *through your clients' eyes*. Don't be content with an assessment of your own abilities or successes. Find out why your clients have hired you, particularly repeat clients and larger clients. Have them explain the reasons in terms of their business outcomes, not that you're simply such a consummate professional. (There are a lot of consummate professionals, but not many who can increase sales by 20 percent, if you get my drift.) I've worked with a person whose entire, lengthy accolades talk about how well he facilitates groups and keeps meetings flowing. That's nice, but not especially breathtaking. We went back to his clients to specify that those same talents actually produced decreased conflict, better teamwork, more productive units, and greater cross-functional collaboration to meet business goals. The former was the basis for a pat on the back; the latter was the basis for a brand.
2. Establish your brands based on those strengths. We've discussed at length the alternatives to creating brands (and in the next chapter we'll talk at length about the tactics to implement them). Dispose of brands that haven't been productive or do not exploit the strengths. Don't be overly modest about being shameless in that promotion. I was recently called

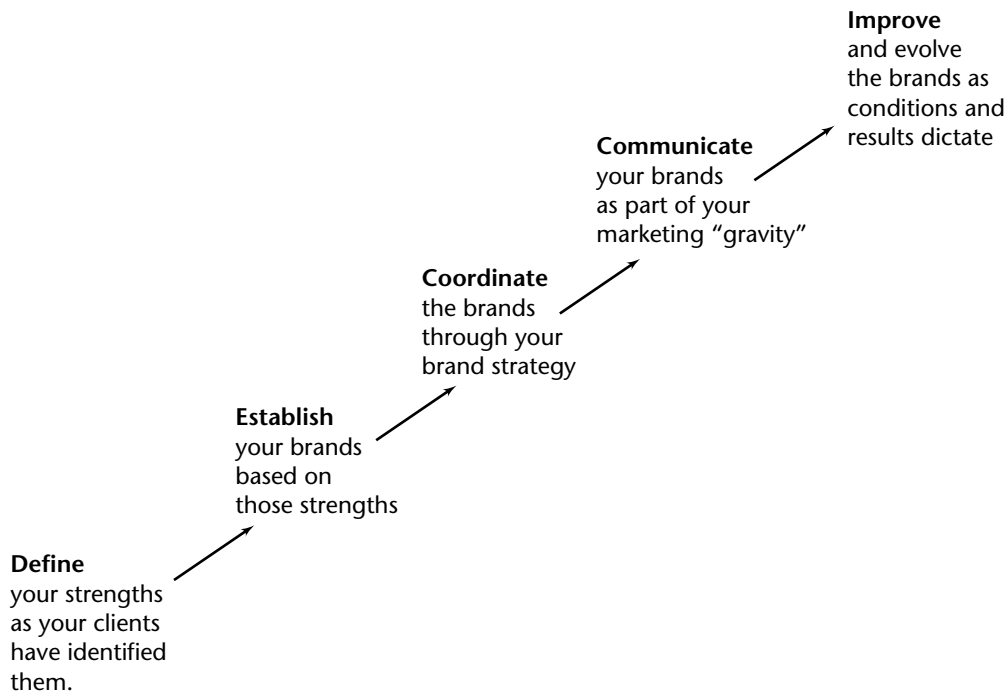


Figure 2.2. A Strategic Approach to Branding

"the rock star of consulting" and immediately began to use it as a brand in certain professional niches. Create as many brands as your comfort level, business planning, and reputation will allow.

3. Coordinate the brands through the brand strategy discussed earlier. Ideally, create a synergy so that brands can support each other and embrace otherwise "orphaned" elements of the business. Make sure that none is contradictory. Confine some to certain markets and certain usage, and broaden others so that they virtually always accompany your name. Be clear on their priorities and what you intend to invest in each.
4. Communicate your brands as part of your marketing "gravity." This is the subject of the next chapter, the tactics that will implement your strategy. Brands cannot be passive and do you no good if dormant. They must be an integral aspect of your promotion and image. Ironically, their ability to attract is reinforced by their ability to attract. In other words, "Get me Alan Weiss, the mentoring expert," becomes simply "Get me Alan

Weiss.” The success of the attraction solidifies the simplicity and power of the brand.

5. Improve and evolve the brands as conditions and results dictate. You want to avoid the plateaus and take advantage of the upward acceleration. Be prepared to “leap” to the next S-curve of brand growth and attraction. The best way to avoid the competition or keep the constantly changing times from undermining your branding efforts is to be constantly on the lookout to improve them yourself. At the very least, schedule a twice-a-year review of your brands and branding strategy with your trusted advisors or another, non-competing consultant.

Branding strategy and marketing strategy are inextricably linked. You cannot—and should not—perform one without the other.

BRAND NEW LESSONS

You don’t have to start at square zero. You probably have brands, or the potential for brands, clearly established by virtue of your past successes. Your challenge is to isolate what the most powerful potential is in terms of your own business strategy and to coordinate and invest in those that will provide the most acceleration toward your business plans.

To establish that future, you first have to take a look back, with the help of clients, to determine what client results best symbolize your talents and contributions.

The ultimate brand is your name. As your brands mutually reinforce each other and create synergy, a key goal should be to make your name synonymous with your intended market strategy, or simply with excellence in your field. Build on this with effective and relentless communications. You want the buyer to say, “Get me that Sharon Smith,” not “Get me, oh, what’s her name. . . ?”

