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- Grasping the purpose of branding
- Differentiating among brand types and why it matters
- Getting up to speed on brand architecture
- Recognizing when branding comes in handy
- Getting a bird's-eye view of the ten-step branding process

Chapter 1

Wrapping Your Brain around Branding

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Because you're reading this book, I can safely assume that you want to build and launch a brand. You already have a general idea of what that entails. You create something that people value: a business, product, service, worthy cause. Then you position it as being something unique so that people will do what you want them to do: buy your product, subscribe to your service, join your cause, listen to your podcast, vote for you, whatever your goal may be.

That's what branding is all about, but to do it, you need to take a deeper dive, which is why you're reading this book. In subsequent chapters, I take you on that deeper dive. In this chapter, I encourage you to wade in slowly, building overall understanding of branding so that when you encounter the more detailed topics, you'll know how they fit into the overall picture.

Consider this chapter to be Branding Orientation Day. Here, I introduce you to the topic, explain some key concepts, and lead you through the ten-step process for building and launching a brand.

Understanding What a Brand Is and Does

A *brand* is a mental construct that identifies an entity (a business, product, service, organization, or person) as something special. As a mental construct, a brand is intangible; you can't see, hear, touch, smell, or taste it. But it can have a powerful impact on how people perceive and feel about something, such as an organization, person, or product.

Although a brand itself is intangible, several tangible items contribute to creating a brand, including the following:

- Brand name
- Mission and values (for corporate or individual brands)
- Personality
- Distinctive features (quality, design, value)
- Visual design elements (logo, color, typography, tagline, images, packaging)
- Content (website, blog posts, social media, images, video, white papers)
- Customer experience (location atmosphere, convenience, customer service)

All these elements and others contribute to the perception consumers have of the brand. Just think about one popular brand: Coca-Cola. Its brand name, red-and-white Spencerian script, and unique bottle shape are recognizable everywhere in the world and have been for more than a century. But although the company is built around soft drinks, its marketing focuses on selling happiness and camaraderie and on eliciting a strong emotional response from customers.

Creating a strong emotional bond with customers is the primary purpose of a brand. But a brand also serves other purposes, including the following:

- Differentiating an organization, product, or person from any competitors
- Building trust
- Building loyalty
- Establishing credibility
- Motivating customers to take action (buy a product or service, join a cause, vote for a candidate, watch a video, and so on)
- Building equity or value that can ultimately be sold

BRANDS VERSUS COMMODITIES

One way to think about what a brand is and does is to compare it with a commodity:

- **Commodities** are indistinguishable goods and services that serve the same purpose regardless of who makes them, such as gasoline, batteries, dishwashing detergent, coffee beans, Internet bandwidth, and vacuum cleaners. Unless you have a good reason to buy one commodity instead of another, you buy the cheapest one.
- **Brands** are offerings that are different in some way that matters to customers or clients, such as Shell gasoline, Energizer batteries, Dawn dishwashing detergent, Starbucks coffee, Verizon Internet service, and Shark vacuum cleaners. You're willing to pay more for your favorite brands because they're different and better in your mind than the competition.

If you're not a brand, you're a commodity, and if you're a commodity, the only way you can compete in your market is to offer the lowest price.



WARNING

Don't confuse the purposes of branding with brand purpose. *Brand purpose* is the brand's *raison d'être*. The brand purpose of Starbucks, for example, is to help facilitate human connections. And although Walmart is committed to charging low prices, its purpose is to help people provide better lives for their families. To define your brand's purpose, answer the question "Why is my brand here?" When you define your brand's purpose, you don't need to be concerned too much about the competition; you just need to be sure that everything you do aligns with that purpose.

Recognizing Different Brand Types

One of the first choices you make when you decide to build and launch a brand is what to brand — your business, a specific product or service, or yourself. In this section, I describe the brand types you can build and explain how branding differs for each one.

Business or corporate brand

Small businesses to large corporations often brand themselves to

- Differentiate themselves from competitors
- Increase recognition among customers and clients, investors, suppliers, potential partners or associates, and other stakeholders
- Build a strong positive reputation
- Attract high-quality job applicants
- Facilitate the introduction of new products
- Generate press coverage
- Charge a premium for offering something different and better
- Increase the market value of the business

The focus of corporate branding is mostly on mission, values, relationships, and the business's culture. Regardless of the size of the business, the goal is to position itself as a respected and valued member of the community — the industry or market in which it operates and the world overall.



REMEMBER

Corporate brands are slow to build and slow to change. You're building the brand the entire time you're building the business. Every decision you make from the time you name the business contributes to the brand, including the suppliers you choose, the people you hire, the culture that develops within the company, how you interact with customers, and your choice of businesses to associate with.

Product brand

A *product* is anything that's manufactured for sale to consumers. A *product brand* is the distinct value of a specific product in the minds of consumers; the product is different from and better in some way than something else the consumer could spend money on. The purpose of branding a product is to

- Differentiate it from competing products
- Make it easily recognizable
- Increase loyalty among consumers
- Compel consumers to pay more for the product

The focus of product branding is *differentiation* — making the product stand out in the marketplace. You build a product brand through product development, packaging, and messaging — everything that contributes to the consumer's perception of the product.



REMEMBER

Although corporate brands are slow to build and slow to change, new product brands can be developed quickly and often undergo rebranding.

Service brand

A *service* involves doing something for someone, so how can you possibly brand a service? Usually, you brand the service provider — the business or person providing the service. The purposes of creating a service are very similar to those for creating a business or personal brand:

- Differentiating the service and service provider from competing services
- Building credibility (demonstrating that the service provider is qualified)
- Building trust (showing that the service provider is reputable and reliable)
- Charging a premium for superior service

With a service brand, your efforts focus mostly on the following credibility- and trust-building activities:

- Earning certifications, awards, and other credentials and then getting them in front of customers, such as posting them on your website and mentioning them in brochures
- Presenting content that demonstrates your knowledge and expertise, such as articles, blog posts, social media posts, photos, videos, podcasts, and white papers
- Engaging with customers and prospects to answer questions and solve problems to further demonstrate your knowledge and expertise
- Soliciting and posting testimonials or positive reviews from satisfied customers
- Getting positive reviews from journalists, business organizations, and other trusted sources



REMEMBER

Like corporate brands, service brands are slow to build and slow to change. Your brand continues to evolve as your service evolves. As you introduce new services or develop ways to provide the same services faster, more conveniently, or more affordably, your brand evolves.

Personal brand

A *personal brand* is one that develops around a person. You already have a personal brand: your reputation. People may know you as a sharp-dressing, punctual over-achiever; a careless, fun-loving creative; a devoted parent and respected member of the community; or something else entirely. In a career or business, people develop personal brands to

- Increase demand for a product or service they provide
- Further their career
- Expand their opportunities
- Build credibility and trust
- Establish themselves as thought leaders

With a personal brand, your efforts focus mostly on the following activities:

- Discovering who you really are and finding your most attractive (and in-demand) traits, knowledge, and skills
- Expressing, in a genuine way, who you are, what you do, and what makes you so special



WARNING

Fake it till you make it doesn't work; people will eventually see past the façade.

- Being your best you — you are your business and your product, so you need to embrace learning and self-improvement
- Building a strong portfolio, which may involve earning credentials, developing or gathering samples of your work, or soliciting customer testimonials or reviews — anything that demonstrates success in your field
- Attending or speaking at industry events and other opportunities to get your name and face in front of people
- Presenting content that demonstrates your knowledge and expertise — articles, blog posts, social media posts, photos, videos, podcasts, white papers, and so on
- Engaging with customers and prospects to answer questions and solve problems to further demonstrate your knowledge and expertise



REMEMBER

You're constantly developing your personal brand whenever you do anything that affects other people in any way. Whether you're working as an employee or freelancer, launching your own website, posting content on your social media accounts, or driving through town, all your engagement with others contributes to your brand.

Other brand types

The brand types I've covered to this point are all business and commercial. Other brand types include the following:

- P**ublic brand:** One owned by the government, such as the Internal Revenue Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Central Intelligence Agency
- **Nongovernmental organization brand:** One owned by a not-for-profit organization that isn't affiliated with any government group, such as the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Anywhere, Ceres, and the American Heart Association (AHA)
- **Event brand:** One created to attract participants, attendees, and sponsors, such as Burning Man, NASCAR, the Olympics, and the Cannes Film Festival

Grasping Brand Architecture Basics

If you're planning to create several related brands, you need to choose the brand architecture that establishes how they're related. You have two options:

- **Branded house (monolithic)** consists of a master brand (usually, a company) with multiple subbrands (typically, divisions, product families, products, or services), all of which ride the coattails of the master brand. Virgin has several subbrands, including Virgin Records, Virgin Atlantic, Virgin Mobile, Virgin Comics, Virgin Wines, and Virgin Care.
- **House of brands (freestanding brands)** consists of several stand-alone companies, product families, products, or services, each with its own brand identity, none of which refers to the corporate brand. Proctor & Gamble has a wide variety of consumer brands, including Bounty, Charmin, Gillette, Puffs, and Tide.

Most organizations and people use branded house architecture because it offers the following benefits:

- **Easier and more affordable:** You build and manage a single brand.
- **Stronger:** Everything you offer reinforces a single brand. Another way to look at it is that you don't have a bunch of separate brands that dilute the master corporate brand.
- **Increased brand equity:** A single brand generally has more equity built into it and is easier to sell. With multiple brands, a prospective buyer of the business may want some brands and not others, and will expect to pay less for the business as a result.

Here are a few situations in which the house-of-brands architecture may be the better choice:

- You have deep pockets and a large corporation with diverse companies, divisions, or families of products or services.
- You want to introduce a new product to the market that would dilute or clash with your existing brand's identity. Suppose that an automobile manufacturer that built its brand around luxury vehicles decides to offer a line of economy vehicles. Selling economy vehicles would weaken the company's reputation for designing and building luxury vehicles, so creating a stand-alone brand probably would be best.
- You build or are planning to build a company by acquiring multiple stand-alone brands.



REMEMBER

A key factor in successful branding is consistency, so if anything you're introducing to the marketplace is inconsistent with your existing brand, consider creating a separate, stand-alone brand around it.

Knowing When to Brand

Do you really need to build a brand to accomplish your business, organization, or career goals? Well, not really, but building a brand will generally enable you to accomplish your goals faster and raise your level of achievement. In this section, I explain situations in which building a brand is always beneficial.



REMEMBER

Whenever you do anything that affects others, you're building a brand, regardless of whether you're aware you're doing it. A brand is simply the perception others have. The question isn't really "Do I need a brand?" or "Should I build a brand?" The question is "Do I want more control of the brand being created?" When you make a conscious effort to build a brand, you're making a decision to take a more deliberate role in influencing how people perceive your business, organization, products, services, or yourself.

Opening a new business

Whenever you open a new business, you're creating a brand, so before you even name your business, give some serious thought to how you're going to create a brand around it. Especially pay attention to the following tasks:

- Identify your niche — what your business plans to do different and better than existing businesses in the same space (see Chapter 2)
- Define your brand identity — your business's vision, mission, and values, and what makes it special (see Chapter 3)
- Clarify your branding goals, and establish ways to measure your progress toward achieving those goals (see Chapter 4)



REMEMBER

When you create a business, you create a brand, so think about your business as a brand from the get-go. Branding shouldn't be an afterthought. If you already have a business, though, it's never too late to benefit from branding.

Promoting an existing business

People commonly launch successful businesses without branding even crossing their minds, especially freelancers and other sole proprietors or one-owner operations. Most of these same people eventually reach a plateau with their business, or they start to see that they're losing business. For whatever reason, they realize that their business needs a boost and that they need to take a more active role in promoting it. They need a brand.

Creating a brand for an existing business is nearly the same as creating one for a new business. You're essentially rebranding your business. You may keep the business name (so as not to confuse existing customers) or change the name to something that aligns more closely with your vision for the brand. But you perform the same first steps that you would for a new business: identify your niche, define your brand identity, and clarify your branding goals.



REMEMBER

The initial steps in the branding process are about clarifying the vision you have for your brand. Subsequent steps focus on executing your vision. See "Stepping Through the Branding Process" later in this chapter for a step-by-step overview of branding.

Introducing a new product or service

If you have an existing business and are introducing a new offering, you probably don't want to rebrand your business to accommodate it. But you do need to think about how your new offering fits in:

- Decide whether to introduce the new product or service under your existing brand or a brand of its own. If the new product or service strengthens your existing brand, introducing it under your existing brand name is probably best. If it's likely to weaken your existing brand, creating a separate brand is probably best. See the earlier section "Grasping Brand Architecture Basics."
- Identify your market niche for introducing the new product. How is the new product or service different from and better than what's already available? If you decided to introduce it under your existing brand, how will it support and extend your brand?
- If you're introducing the product or service as its own brand, be sure to position and define that brand. See Chapter 3 for details.



WARNING

If a new product or service dilutes or clashes with your existing brand, create a new brand. Don't try to expand your offerings with something that doesn't fit.

Furthering your career

You don't have to start a business to benefit from branding. Just about anyone in the workforce who's looking to advance their career can benefit from creating and managing their own personal brand. As I mentioned previously, your reputation is part of your personal brand. You just need to be more active and intentional about the content you're putting in front of potential employers and clients. Here are a few ways you can start to strengthen your personal brand:

- Create your own website or blog, and post regularly to it to demonstrate your knowledge, expertise, commitment, and generosity. See Chapter 7 for guidance on creating a website or blog.



TIP

Unless you're consciously building a career as a critic or political pundit, don't post negative content or attack any person, group, or organization. Remain positive. As your parents probably advised, "If you can't say something nice about a person, don't say anything at all."

- Post a unique and engaging bio on your website or blog and all your social media profiles. See Chapter 8 for information about writing copy that promotes your brand.
- Include your website or blog address in all your social media profiles.
- Create a LinkedIn account. LinkedIn is the best social networking platform for professionals.
- Join and participate in popular online discussion forums (including those on LinkedIn) that are relevant to your industry or areas of expertise.
- Post regularly on your favorite social media platforms.



WARNING

Before posting anything on any social media platform, assume that a potential employer will read it. Ask yourself whether your post would impress that person or turn them off.

- Solicit testimonials from people you've worked with or for to post on your website or blog and social media accounts.

Becoming an influencer or a celebrity

If you're famous or influential (or want to be), building a strong personal brand is a key to your success. Your branding goal is to become popular — to have tens of thousands or even millions of followers on social media and to be in high demand due to your influence or celebrity status.

The key to building a personal brand to become famous is finding topics that resonate with large populations and that align with your own personality and goals, so that you can develop content that's both genuine and engaging.



TIP

With a personal brand, charisma goes a long way. Think about the charismatic people you know. They're confident, optimistic, approachable, engaging, and energetic; they tell great stories or jokes; they have strong convictions; they're not afraid to take risks; and they live life to its fullest. Start with those qualities, and you'll be well on your way to stardom.

Fundraising for a not-for-profit organization

People give an organization money only when they believe it's going to a worthy cause and trust the organization to use the money wisely toward that cause, so having a strong brand is essential.

When you're building a brand for a not-for-profit organization, focus on three areas:

- **Storytelling:** First and foremost, people need a compelling reason to donate to the organization. They need to believe that the organization will make the world a better place in a way that matters to them.
- **Credibility:** The organization must demonstrate that it uses money wisely to fulfill its mission. If money or projects are mismanaged, people will be reluctant to donate.
- **Transparency:** The organization must keep donors informed about where the money is going and about successful and unsuccessful projects. Transparency builds trust, and people won't donate to an organization they don't trust.

Raising capital for your business

Whether you're trying to attract private investors or planning to take your company public, branding is an important first step. You need to build a brand to convince investors that they can expect a respectable return on their investment.

When you're starting a new business, you'll be recruiting private investors, who want to see the following:

- Clearly defined products or services that have a reasonable expectation of selling well and generating a profit
- A strong management team with a track record of success or at least the knowledge and expertise to start and run a successful business
- A solid business plan, showing how the business will pursue success
- A clear and compelling brand story
- A culture of innovation to drive future growth



REMEMBER

Only after you've created a highly successful and popular brand should you take your business public. Branding at this stage focuses on highlighting the company's track record for success, its future ambitions (such as earnings and profits projections), its innovations, and its ability to execute planned initiatives.

Expanding into new markets

If you already have a brand and are planning to expand into new markets — in different regions of the country or in different countries — consider how your current brand will play in those locations and whether any adjustments need to be made. Certain colors might elicit different emotions depending on the culture, for example. You may need to hire a marketing firm in the location you're expanding into to provide guidance on design elements and content.

Stepping Through the Branding Process

Although the approach to building and launching a brand differs depending on the brand type and purpose, the overall approach is pretty much the same and can be boiled down to ten steps. In this section, I lead you through the process. Subsequent chapters cover specific steps in greater detail.

Step 1: Creating something to brand

Before you can build a brand, you need to have something to brand or at least a concept for it: a business or other type of organization, a product or service, or yourself. This step involves the following activities (see Chapter 2 for details):

- Deciding what to brand
- Identifying a market niche
- Formalizing your brand as a business (such as forming a limited liability company or corporation)
- Coming up with the money to build your brand

Step 2: Positioning and defining your brand

This step involves clarifying in your own mind what your brand is, what it does, why it's different, and why it's better. It's all about defining your brand identity

in a way that differentiates your brand from competing brands or other products or services that may attract the attention of your target market. See Chapter 3 for details.

Step 3: Establishing your branding goals

In this step, you set goals for your brand, including the following:

- Increasing brand awareness
- Creating an emotional connection with customers and prospects
- Differentiating your business, product, service, or self from the competition
- Building credibility and trust
- Increasing sales and profitability

This step also involves building a plan to meet your branding goals and deciding on ways to measure your progress toward achieving those goals. See Chapter 4 for details.

Step 4: Defining your brand's customer avatar

A *customer avatar* is a fictional character that represents your target customers. Its purpose is to give you a sense of your audience that inspires you to create design elements and content that are likely to persuade customers to support and even promote your brand.

This step involves research and analysis to get to know the people who make up your target market, describing your avatar in your own words, and refining it to keep up with the times and any changes in your target market.



REMEMBER

You can create more than one customer avatar to represent people from different market segments you're trying to penetrate. But you want to avoid trying to be all things to all people and making an avatar so broad that your design and content have no measurable impact on anyone. See Chapter 5 for guidance on creating a customer avatar.

Step 5: Creating a brand style guide

One key factor in branding success is consistency. Every time someone encounters your brand, you have the opportunity to reinforce your brand identity in their mind. Think of your brand as being a catchy song that gets stuck in the listener's head. A *brand style guide* is a rulebook that ensures consistency by governing everything that contributes to the look and feel of your brand, including the following:

- Corporate guidelines, including mission statement, values, and targeted demographics
- Colors
- Typography (typeface, sizes, and spacing)
- Logos
- Imagery (photos, illustrations, and infographics)
- Tone of voice (fun, professional, caring, and so on)

See Chapter 6 for guidance on creating a brand style guide.

Step 6: Building a branded website, app, and email account

Because so many people spend so much of their time on the Internet these days, creating a strong online presence has become an important part of branding. To begin to build an online presence, do the following things:

- Claim a unique domain that reflects your brand, such as GirlGangtheLabel.com.
- Build a website, blog, online store, or a hybrid of those three things in that domain. This site acts as your main hub. Then you can drive traffic to your main hub from other Internet sites, such as social media platforms and discussion forums.
- Use the domain in your email address (such as `amy@girlgangthelabel.com`) to reinforce your brand in every outgoing email message.
- (Optional) Create a branded app (or hire an app developer to do the work for you) that further reinforces your brand while making it easy for customers or clients to place orders and stay connected.

See Chapter 7 for details.

Step 7: Forming strategic partnerships

One of the most powerful ways to promote your brand is to form mutually beneficial partnerships with other brands, sort of like hitching your wagon to a star. If your brand is built around retail, getting your products into popular retail chains is one approach. I was able to persuade Nordstrom to carry my Girl Gang the Label fashion line, which was mutually beneficial. The partnership generated sales and revenue for both parties, increased my brand's profile, and helped Nordstrom position itself as a hip place to shop.


TIP

Always be on the lookout for potential partnerships. Even if you're flying solo or have a small business outside the retail space, you can find partnership opportunities to extend your brand's reach and boost brand awareness. See Chapter 9 for details.

Step 8: Launching your brand

After building your brand, when you have all the pieces in place, you're ready to launch it. This step involves scheduling the launch, preparing incentives to generate interest, getting press coverage, and making it easy for users to share your content with everyone they know. See Chapter 10 for guidance on executing a successful launch campaign.


REMEMBER

At this stage in the branding process, your goal is to get your campaign to go viral. To achieve that goal, you need to do a big push in both traditional and social media channels — wherever the people in your target market go for information.

Step 9: Promoting your brand

Promoting your brand involves everything you do during and after your launch to extend your brand's reach and strengthen brand awareness. It typically involves the following activities:

- Content marketing — sharing content that subtly promotes your brand without explicitly doing so (see Chapter 8)
- In-person experiences, such as events, pop-up stores, retail locations, and conferences (see Chapter 11)
- Podcasting — sharing audio presentations and interviews (see Chapter 12)
- Social media marketing (see Chapter 13)
- Email marketing (see Chapter 14)
- Advertising (see Chapter 15)

Step 10: Caring for and protecting your brand

Branding is a lifelong journey — the life of the brand, that is. As long as the brand is in existence, you need to care for it and protect it, which involves the following activities:

- Auditing and scaling your brand to increase its reach while expanding brand awareness
- Building on customer loyalty and longevity to transform customers into brand advocates
- Protecting your brand from competitors and anyone who may try to steal your intellectual property



REMEMBER

Attention spans are short these days. If you're not putting something fresh in front of your target customers at least a couple of times a week, they're going to forget about you.