

Building a Brand

Whether you are direct marketing beef or selling seedstock, brand identity is the ultimate key to success. Here, marketing professionals share their strategies.

by *Kindra Gordon*

A quick trip through your local supermarket and it doesn't take long to realize that brands rule the roost, and consumers have strong preferences for brands that have been good to them.

For example, at my house my husband has deemed Heinz® the only ketchup brand worth purchasing. Even if the other ketchups are on sale, I stick to the brand I know my family will eat. I use that same philosophy with other foods they like as well — cereal, crackers, frozen vegetables and ice cream.

I've tried to deviate from our favorite brands a time or two because I had a coupon or something was on sale, but my family immediately noticed that "something tasted different," and they weren't happy about it.

Outside the grocery store, brands rule as well — from the vehicles we drive and the clothing we wear to the hotels we stay at when we travel. Sometimes our choices are driven by price, but more often than not, we stick with those products that have given us a good experience.

And by definition, that's what a brand is, says John Seymour-Anderson, who has worked in graphic design and advertising for more than two decades.

"A brand is really about establishing a

relationship with the customer," he says. "A brand is a promise. You are promising what people can expect" — be it quality, flavor, price, etc.

Seymour-Anderson has worked on development and promotion of national brands including Qwest® telecommunications, Apple® computers and Nestlé®. Presently, he is creative director for branding and packaging at Triangle Park Creative, a Minneapolis, Minn.-based firm that works with nonprofit organizations, food co-ops and independent producers on developing brands for their products and organizations.

He advocates that no matter what your business — selling a niche food product at the grocery store or farmer's market, or selling purebred cattle — building a brand is essential to adding value.

Randy Stratton, president of The Stratton Group, a Sioux Falls, S.D.-based marketing communications company, echoes the value of branding. He gives the example of a \$5.39 jar of organic spaghetti sauce vs. a \$2.49 jar of regular spaghetti sauce and asks, "Is there value in branding?"

Given the \$3 price difference, obviously the organic brand is able to add value and command a higher price, Stratton says. But

he adds that for the organic brand to be successful, "what happens inside the bottle has to keep consumers coming back."

What makes a brand

That said, Seymour-Anderson and Stratton say quality is foremost in building a successful, valued brand.

"A brand is a set of expectations. The product has to offer consistent quality. If it doesn't meet consumers' expectations again and again, consumers won't support it," Stratton says.

A second criterion in building a brand is to understand what position the brand occupies in the market. Examine what's unique about the product, what niche it fills, who will buy it, and where they will buy it, Stratton suggests.

"How can you develop a product or company that can get noticed? That's the bottom line," Stratton adds.

Seymour-Anderson says one of the most common misperceptions is thinking once you've got a logo, you've got a brand. But, he emphasizes, "a logo is not a brand. A brand is really about establishing a relationship and filling a need in the market."

Developing your brand

Given those criteria, where do you start when setting up a brand?

In short, Stratton says, "Your brand is

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you.” Thus, he suggests beginning with your mission statement and business plan to point you in the right direction. Those items should help you identify:

- ▶ why your product (or service) is needed in the marketplace;
- ▶ what you are promising the consumer in regard to quality, price, benefits, etc.;
- ▶ how you will position your product — perhaps include a statement about health benefits, quality of life, economic value, etc.; and
- ▶ where you’ll market the product.

Seymour-Anderson suggests developing a positioning statement worksheet to help identify these characteristics for your brand.


“Create a checklist answering who, what, for whom, serving what need, against whom, what’s different, etc.,” he says. “This whole form can read like a long sentence and become your mission or vision statement.”

And be on the lookout for special “gems” in your story. “Often we are so used to what we do daily that we miss what makes our

product or operation unique, special or magical. That’s the story that needs to be told through our brand,” Seymour-Anderson says.

For instance, are there generations of history behind your business; or do you make your product a special way, such as naturally, organically or with new technology?

As an example, Stratton points out the success of the bottled water industry. Different brands have been able to stand out by touting special filtering processes, taste or water source, such as the Rocky Mountains.

“Learn how to tell a story about the product,” Seymour-Anderson reiterates. Then incorporate that story into your marketing efforts — and it becomes your brand. 

Editor’s Note: *These branding remarks were made at the 2007 Value-Added Conference sponsored annually each spring in Brookings, S.D., by the South Dakota Value-Added Ag Development Center. See page 200 for Part 2 of this series, which examines how geographic location can be built into a brand.*

Making your mark

The entire goal behind building a brand identity is to get consumers to develop a loyalty to your product, service or organization. Minneapolis, Minn., marketing specialist John Seymour-Anderson says marketing and brand positioning efforts for your product therefore must allow for a progression that leads to trial, identity, action and loyalty by the consumer.

To help with this process, he suggests the following brand marketing tips:

1. Create awareness for your product by standing out in the midst of competition. This might include special attractive packaging for your product, or a consistent, recognizable advertising campaign for your livestock operation or business. Once you engage people and get their attention, let them know what your message is, Seymour-Anderson says.

2. Build understanding by communicating your story in terms that matter to your customer. He suggests using a brochure or web site to help share that story and your key messages (for example, a product that is good for your health or genetics that are superior for the industry). Likewise, your logo should include a brief statement that emphasizes this key message about your product’s value or benefits.

3. Educate consumers on what makes your product different and valuable. For instance, Seymour-Anderson has a client who sells grass-fed beef. Because there is a bit of a learning curve in how to prepare and cook grass-fed meat, the client included recipe cards with the product to help educate consumers on proper cooking methods — and teach them about the health benefits of grass-fed beef. The grass-fed company also hosts seminars for consumers and chefs. Ultimately this helped create a more positive experience with the product.

4. Close the loop by listening to what consumers want. If you are producing a food product, perhaps they want a different flavor. If you are offering livestock, maybe they want heifers or 2-year-old bulls along with yearlings. Also, look at other companies who are selling the same type of product as you and learn from them.

Seymour-Anderson says following these guidelines should help people build an affinity to your product. “If you are successful at creating a positive experience over time,” he concludes, “you build equity/loyalty to your brand.”