

Branding in a Competitive Marketplace

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In an age of social networking, tight advertising budgets and changing user preferences, it's critical for business owners to understand the evolution of media and consumer behavior. Today's chaotic information landscape inundates the average American with an estimated 2,500 commercial messages every day. It's a common belief that consumers have become immune to advertising, an outcome due to the saturation of marketing messages in our daily lives. Many businesses seem to fight this problem by running more advertisements not specifically targeted to the products or businesses' key audiences...

This information overload poses an obstacle for business owners, especially those working with small budgets and limited resources. Today, getting your brand out into the world takes more than hiring an agency to design creative advertisements and place them in magazines - it takes hiring strategic minds who know how to position a brand, recognize the importance of an emotional connection with that brand and understand consumer's changing behavior in today's web-based society.

So, how does a company brand their product, business or service in an environment where consumers can consult with each other online and offline before making a choice? Here are a few tips to position your brand, find a connection with your audience and drive business:

1. Identify your target audience – who do you want to purchase your brand?
2. Create a clear message of what you want to communicate to consumers, media, investors and stakeholders.
3. Research your competitors and your position within the marketplace. Establish what makes you different and develop creative strategies with emotional connections that resonate with your audiences.
4. Use a variety of media to carry your message.

5. Realize that you're not in control of your brand. You can secure alignment between your preferred brand image and your actual brand image through these tips, but your actual brand is determined by the public.
6. Educate your clients on social media practices and encourage them to join the conversation online.

Branding is critical to your business' long-term success. Whether you're an entrepreneur or a marketing director for a healthcare facility, architecture firm, retailer or restaurant, it's important to understand that brands are powerful sources



of competitive advantage and are more important than ever in today's online communities. It all starts with a user experience, and the savvy marketer knows how to capture the essence of that experiential emotion and reflect it back in marketing communications. Brands tell a story and human beings love stories, so join the conversation and tell yours.