

HOW-TO



Define and manage your brand

BY LARA MOFFAT

When was the last time you evaluated your brand? What process did you use to define it, and how have you managed your brand? What's branding? Simply, branding is how you and your business are viewed in the marketplace. However, it's not that simple. A brand takes a process to create, time to develop and consistency to endure.

Branding isn't solely a marketing concept—it plays a part of how every aspect of your business is communicated and perceived. The saying might be cliché, but perception is reality in the eyes of the consumer, and you want to be perceived favorably. Think about all the contact you have with your team, clients and community. How are you and your business viewed?

When defining your brand, there are several basic questions to ask:

1. What core services or products do we offer?
2. Are we servicing what our market wants?
3. Do we need to modify our business model?
4. How are we perceived by our employees, clients, competition and prospects?
5. Does our team have a clear understanding of its role in our success?

By answering these questions, you'll be on your way to clearly specifying your services, identifying your market and differentiating your company, which will help determine how to manage your brand. Use the following guidelines to help define your brand and develop a plan.

STATE WHAT SERVICES OR PRODUCTS YOU'LL OFFER. The more specific you are about stating what you do, the more likely you'll be able to communicate accurate messaging to the community. This includes internally to your team and externally to your customers, industry colleagues and prospects. If you're routinely contacted by consumers about services you don't offer, it's time to review what message (i.e., promotional materials) you're sending to prospects.

DETERMINE WHAT MOTIVATES THE DECISION MAKERS IN YOUR KEY MARKET. Knowing your target audience is essential to

marketing to any given audience effectively. Identify the consumer behavior—the study of when, why, how and where people do or don't buy a product or service—that motivates your specific group. Consumer behavior will vary greatly from residential to commercial and from tree sales to high-end landscape construction projects. Additionally, it's important to note people don't buy a service because of it; they buy it because of its benefits.

PROMOTE WHAT DIFFERENTIATES YOUR COMPANY FROM ANOTHER.

At first glance, many landscape companies offer the same services from the consumer's perspective. But your clients aren't concerned with the service—it's the benefits they receive that are paramount. Define a personality that speaks authentically to your target audience, business model and community culture. Focus on a client's lifestyle, a company's involvement within the community or its sustainable practices.

NOW IT'S TIME TO MANAGE YOUR BRAND. Develop a plan that reviews and integrates all contacts your business has with the marketplace: employees, clients, industry colleagues, collateral, marketing, equipment, etc. Every impression makes an impact on branding, and professionalism tops the list as the way to build a positive brand. Think about the individuals you respect. I bet you have a high regard for them because they're professional in the way they talk, act and look. The same is true for your business.

Train your employees to be professional by valuing what they do, and that investment will have a high return. By engaging your staff and making it aware of the business direction, you'll build ownership and develop a team mentality. Set expectations first through leading by example and second by holding yourself accountable. Put tools and guidelines in place that enable all to achieve. Then expect attention to detail, from the cleanliness of the fleet to the consistency of marketing materials. Acknowledge the successes, and constructively correct the misses.

Each year devise a focus. During



QUICK TIP

Determine what motivates the decision makers in your key market.

the initial year, work with your entire team, from senior managers through crew members, and lead exercises that provide them with the basis to communicate your brand. Start with a clear and concise mission statement or tagline—a succinct version of an elevator speech. Ensure everyone understands and lives it. Remind them about the message in speech, conduct and print. Share it in press releases, promotional materials and conversations with clients and colleagues. By embodying and embracing your brand, your company will be difficult to miss in the marketplace. **LM**

Moffat, former director of marketing and recruitment for Lambert Landscape Co. in Dallas, is principal of LM Creative Consulting. Contact her at Lara@LMCreativeConsulting.com.



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