



WHAT SHOULD BE PART OF MY **BRANDING** REPOSITORY?

BY LARA MOFFAT

A One of the more frequent questions I hear is, “What *really* should be a part of a marketing plan?” Effective branding and marketing starts with a communications strategy suitable to a company’s business model. Only after distinguishing a business’s culture, clientele and services, can a company develop a fitting communications strategy—and one including messaging, content and platforms (traditional or digital).

Another question I frequently receive is, “What’s the difference between marketing and branding?” Marketing is tactical, a process identifying target consumers, effectively communicating with said audience and initially retaining them. Branding is strategic. It expresses characteristics, values and attributes that create engagement, loyalty and referrals. I advocate brand marketing focusing on communicating the brand message to drive awareness and encourage engagement.

So what should be a part of a branding repository? A repository is a collection of content, including copy (verbal and written) and imagery.

Depending on the medium, a communication may be timeless or have a shelf life. Once you’ve created effective content, file it where it’s easily retrievable. Don’t be afraid to

revisit past campaigns. Just because imagery is outdated doesn’t mean the message is irrelevant. The following are components of a rich branding repository.

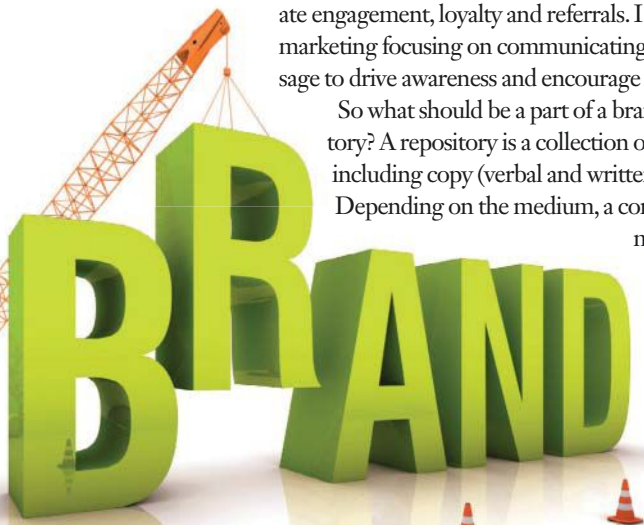
CONSISTENT MESSAGING

First, define your personality. Specify the services you offer, the demographic of your target audience, what differentiates your company and what matters to you as a professional. Being as specific as possible enables you to create messaging that resonates with and engages prospects, clients and industry colleagues. Remember, though, people buy a service based on the benefits of the service, not because of the service. Consistent and clear communications that place the consumers’ needs first will keep you top of mind and build brand loyalty.

Complementary collateral. Your letterhead, business cards, proposals and contracts need to be complementary. The look and feel of each must have a unified appearance because it reflects the professional nature of your business and, in some cases, is a deal breaker for whether you’re awarded the project. Beyond appearance, especially in legally binding forms, review them for consistent copy.

Professional promotional materials. Invest in quality graphic design and professional printing. Just because you know how to use a desktop publishing program doesn’t mean you should. Your office printer is fine for certain applications, but a professional printer is the best option. As with complementary collateral, professional promotional materials often sway a prospect.

Interactive website. A website is a company’s online communications specialist, though many sites remain



BEING VISIBLE, WHETHER THROUGH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT OR NETWORKING, IS PARAMOUNT IN TODAY'S MARKETPLACE.

static. If you haven't added a blog, don't delay. A blog allows you to further engage visitors, showcase your companies' personality, highlight your interests and helps with search engine optimization. You have only two or three seconds to make a good first impression online. Be sure your website mirrors your promotional materials and is streamlined for easy content navigation and intuitive user engagement.

Suitable social media. Look to your target audience when deciding which social media platforms are right for your business. The big three are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, followed closely by Houzz and Pinterest in the residential market. Each platform has its own advantages and a different way to engage. LinkedIn can be an amazing tool for consultants and managers, if used properly.

Purposeful public relations. Support the community that supports you. Being involved in the community benefits your company image, but it's also important for your employees. Psychologically, helping others strengthens the bonds of a group and develops employee loyalty. Fulfilled employees are typically your best marketers, so share your stories online and in press releases (locally and nationally) before, during and after events.

Effective networking. Being visible, whether through community involvement or networking, is paramount in today's marketplace. With active lifestyles, it's imperative to be involved and reachable. Your target audience, however, determines how often and in what capacity. Even as time is limited, networking is effective only if you take a sincere interest in the person and enrich the relationship. Supplementing face-to-face interactions, LinkedIn allows you to engage your audience even when you're unable to meet in person.

Where you invest your branding efforts will differ depending on the market sector, consumer and community. Start small and focused so you allow time to direct your initiatives effectively. Consistency and professionalism should be your guiding principles. As time and staff

permit, add another strategy and continue to review what's resonating with your prospects, clients and industry colleagues. Through effective brand marketing, you'll build awareness, encourage engagement and create lasting relationships. **LM**

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