

Marketing Series for Women Entrepreneurs

Part 4: Branding: It's Not Just For Cows Anymore

"Brand" used to mean a stamp, a symbol, on a cow's rump, burned there, permanent. No matter how far on the range a cow wandered, it was clear who owned it and where it came from. These days the concept of brand is most often used to describe the recognizable physical or visual characteristics of a product, such as the logo and perhaps packaging. But there's a difference between a logo and a brand.

Is a Logo a Brand?

What cowpokes used to call a brand, we now call a logo. A logo at its most basic is a shortcut, a quick visual way to identify something about the product offered, "a picture worth a thousand words." (Note: what I refer to as "logo" can be an image or it can be a wordmark, the company name in a standard format which becomes the "logo").

It's a question of discovering what exactly the thousand words are that the picture represents. Once you know that, you can get to the brand that is layered behind the logo.

The Accidental Brand

A logo that is consistently used for a long time can, over time, acquire a brand. At the start it's just a name or symbol. But over time that logo comes to represent the experience customers consistently have each time they use a product or service with that logo on it. It becomes your reputation, your brand.

Many long-standing companies developed their brands this way and have done very well, even becoming synonymous with the product category they represent. Classics such as Coca-Cola, Kleenex, Jello, Band-Aid fall into this group. (Have you noticed how the Band-Aid TV jingle has recently become, "I am stuck on Band-Aid brand, 'cause Band-Aid's stuck on me"?)

The Purposeful Brand

Another option, if you don't want to wait years for the strictly organic approach, is to be proactive and purposeful by choosing the brand your company will have. It begins by deciding what you want your company to stand for, such as specific values or characteristics, then focusing energy on permeating those values or characteristics throughout the company.

As those values and characteristics come alive in the experiences your customers have, your reputation – and your brand – are built. Your business becomes the brand it set out to be.

Take **Angie Bricker**, owner of [The Natural Baby Shop](#) in Kelowna, BC. When she started her first business in 1996, she didn't know very much about branding, so she didn't develop one purposefully. As a result, over time, the store's brand started to develop as a reflection of the business and what it represented. Although this worked for her, Angie decided to take the exact opposite approach when she opened The Natural Baby Shop three years ago.

"I started from scratch this time and created a brand that embodies everything the business represents, which is raising babies in a healthy, environmentally conscious world through simple, fresh, pure living," says Angie. "This time I took my personality right out of the equation and focused on having clear focused branding that sends the same message every time."

The reason for Angie's complete 180° shift is that she's planning to franchise. "I needed to have solid branding that can be recreated time and time again, so customers can clearly recognize the business and the values that it represents."

Of course, there are always some companies that over promise and under deliver, so it's best to be both realistic about what you want your brand to be and conscientious about ensuring that you live up to the standards you've set.

The Embodied Brand

And finally there are those crazy people who jump into business and do what they love, letting their passion take the lead and adding the brand afterwards, like many entrepreneurs when they first start out.

In this situation, the founder's personality, unique approach and signature style are the brand. They embody the brand, own it, breathe it, live it, express it. In fact, it's more like the brand is rubbing off on the business than the other way around.

Diane Bernard of Sooke, BC is one of those passionate entrepreneurs whose business, [Seaflora](#), a line of seaweed skincare products, developed as a direct result of her values and lifestyle.

"I am a coastal person through and through, so I decided to do something for myself that would allow me to stay near the water. I wanted to start a venture that was unique, wild and value added for my community" says Diane. "I'm a third generation seaweed person, I'd been exposed to seaweed my entire life and love it very much, but I had never thought of it as a commercial venture. Then one day I was sitting by the ocean and had a big aha moment."

From there, Diane ventured into harvesting seaweed for food products and eventually turned the business towards her line of natural skincare products. Now known as The Seaweed Lady, she remains true to the name. An expert on seaweed, she is often called upon for her knowledge, works to protect the ocean and also offers tours to show people how seaweed is harvested.

"We eat with it, play with it and are truly passionate about this wonderful, healthy, clean, Canadian wild resource," says Diane. "The business dovetails more and more with the values that I bring into the company."

The embodied brand is an organic and authentic approach, but it's also important that a business come to internalize the brand so it doesn't rely solely on the founder's presence to ensure customers receive that same experience.

In the end logos and branding is about attracting customers. No matter how your brand comes to be, as long as it is an accurate representation of your business, values and characteristics, it will help you attract the right kind of clients for you.

Written in collaboration with Liz Gaige.

Liz Gaige, owner of [Market Navigators Consulting](#), specializes in bringing creativity and a shot of inspiration to business and marketing strategies for businesses of all sizes. By her own admission, she does her best work when she's just a little bit cheeky!

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