

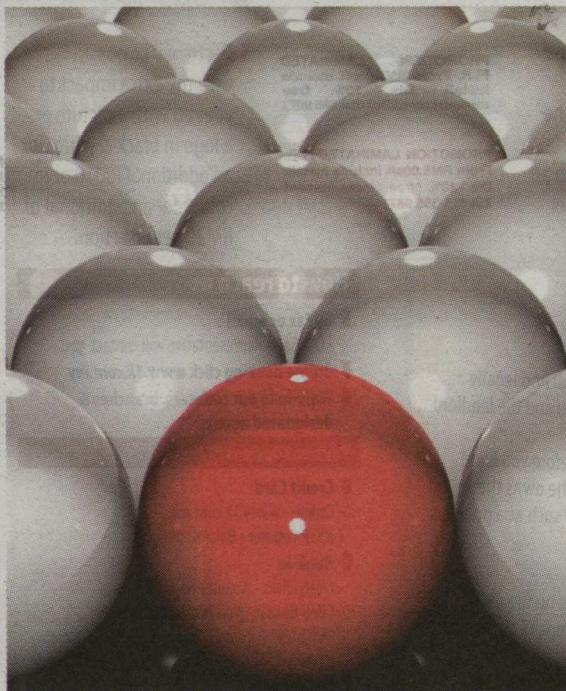
THINK branding is only for large multi-national corporations? Think again. Here are nine easy tips you can use to grow your brand with your customers.

1 Your logo really doesn't matter. Would you choose MSN as your search engine over Google because of their logo? No, having a nice professional logo is great, but it very rarely increases sales. It is more important to include your logo on every piece of communication. Put it on business cards, letterhead, envelopes, invoices, yellow page ads, building signage, newsletters, etc.

2 Have a professional website. It is not just good enough to just have a website, you must reflect your brand image. If you known as a top notch photographer, the last thing you want is a website designed 10 years ago. It doesn't reflect well on you. Everyone, yes everyone, uses the web today to check references. If someone recommends your service, you can almost guarantee they will go online to look for you. Your website design should be updated at least every two years to stay current.

3 Blogs are good. Blogs help your business on multiple levels. First off, valuable content on a consistent basis will make you look like an expert. People are looking for experts, not apprentices. The software that powers blogs has multiple advantages. It is very easy to publish. It is a database driven environment where style is separate from content so you will not need to go back to your web design agency for every little change. And use of tags and sitemaps make basic search engine optimisation easy. But the real reason blogs are great is that they enable conversation. Two-way dialog is much more valuable than a company that just dumps messaging

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and collateral on their customers.

4 Marketing strategy. You should have a comprehensive multi-touch marketing plan to get your value proposition in front of your target audience. This can take many forms. You can launch a direct mail campaign, email campaign, host a webinar, sponsor a local event, attend a trade show, attend networking events, cold call prospects, win awards, etc. There are a thousand different ways for you to be noticed. You have to find the best combination of methods for your strategic goals.

5 Research shows that people need to be exposed to a brand at least seven times before they buy. If you

simply do one touch and stop, you are wasting valuable budget dollars and probably wondering why your efforts are not successful.

6 Prepare a one page corporate overview. This one pager will be vital as a leave behind when you meet a prospect. Use short sentences in short paragraphs – people like to read quickly. Also make it very conversational; it is not a white paper. Your one page overview should include your value proposition, target audience benefits, previous audience experience, and a mini-case study – and don't forget your contact information.

7 Participate in local business events. By participating means being

on a committee. Just showing up at events is great, but you are just a face in the crowd. Ask to be on one of the committees. Believe it or not, it is as simple as just asking most of time. Groups are looking for volunteer help and it is a great way to elevate your status and visibility among the entire organisation.

8 Do what you say you are going to do. This may sound like common sense, but one of the primary drivers of brand loyalty is consistent experience. If you say you are going to have the photographs ready on a set day, be sure they are ready. Nothing leaves a bad taste in someone's mouth like missed expectations. Positive experiences lead to good feelings which lead to telling their friends. But don't forget that bad experiences spread much faster and are harder to overcome – if you get a chance at all.

9 Stand for something. People latch on to something they can understand and appreciate. If you are trying to be everything to everybody, chances are you will attract no one. If you think it is too controversial to choose a niche, remember the power of being seen as an expert. Experts are not good at everything, they are awesome at one thing. This allows you to better position yourself and charge more for your services. People seek out experts, not generalists.

10 Realise that you are not in control of your brand. That is right, you only set the direction for your brand. Your actual brand image is determined by your audience. You can use these tips to ensure alignment between your desired brand image and your actual brand image in the minds of your customers. Branding is not a one shot deal, it is an on-going juggling act of marketing, research, and conversation.