



20 Branding Mistakes That Can Tarnish Your Company's Image

What do Apple, Colgate and Beyoncé have in common? They're all powerful brands that are instantly recognizable. They've taken the time to carefully curate their image and carve out a place for themselves in the world. They've also been so successful at it that they're now a part of millions of people's daily lives.

That's the power of branding. As a business owner or marketing director, you may aim to have that level of successful branding, but you also know it's easier said than done. If your branding hasn't been hitting the mark, these 20 branding mistakes could be the reason why.



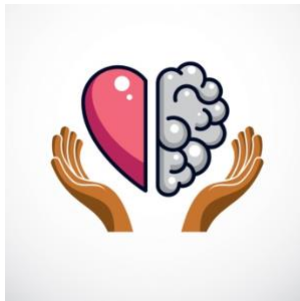
#1: CONFUSING BRANDING WITH MARKETING

Many business people often confuse marketing for branding, and yet the two are very different. Branding is the discovery of who you are as a company, the shaping of your identity in the grand scheme of things. Your values, tone of voice, personality and visual aspects all fit into your branding. In short, it's the sum total of the way your identity makes people feel. Marketing, on the other hand, is the process of letting everyone else know this identity. Think website content, social media posts and SEO.



#2: NOT ALIGNING YOUR BRANDING WITH YOUR BRAND

A major mistake that new marketing personnel make is thinking that they have full control over what their brand is. In fact, customers have an equal – if not more important – influence in determining what your brand becomes. When you choose your values wisely and shape your personality well, your real audience reacts and they reflect your brand back to you. A little confusing? Think of branding as similar to getting ready in the morning – you pick your outfit and make yourself look nice. Then the consumers hold a mirror up to you and show you what you really look like. The outfit may have looked nice in your head, but if the reflection says otherwise, it's time to re-evaluate. Ultimately, you want to build loyalty with your customers, as their potential lifetime value to you is way more important than a single purchase.



#3: NOT KNOWING WHERE SUCCESSFUL BRANDING STARTS

Did you know that companies with a strong employer brand reduce their cost of hiring by 43%? Successful branding doesn't start with positive hype from the market. It starts internally, with a company culture that attracts the best talent and makes employees feel proud of their work. You know you're on your way to successful branding when your staff wears the company logo as a badge of honor.



#4: FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

A study by IBM determined that 80% of consumers felt that the majority of brands don't understand them as individuals. To put this in context, out of 100 of your clients, only 20 feel you are actually connecting with them as much as you think. To improve these statistics, keep your ear to the ground and actually listen to your customers. What do they say about your brand? And if they are repeat customers, why do they keep coming back?



#5: NOT AUDITING YOUR MARKETPLACE

Do you know who your competitors are? Great! How about your content competitors? Sometimes you may overlook a company because they aren't your direct competitor, but once you audit your marketplace you may find that the same company is competing for your exact target audience. If a customer is in a scenario where they have to choose between you and the competition, you want them to choose you. And the only way to ensure that is to analyze the marketplace and carve your niche.



#6: USING A TIRED TAGLINE

Taglines are a fun way to communicate your brand philosophy quickly and efficiently to your audience. However, not all taglines are created equal. If your tagline is more than five words long, you don't have to put it on your logo. It may be better suited on your website banner. And while you're at it, research your tagline and make sure it lands well with the audience. An unfortunate mistake by RadioShack – where they changed their tagline to “Our Friends Call Us the Shack” – cost them a whopping \$200 million in lost sales! Turns out their customers thought it sounded too “low-end” – even for Radio Shack.



#7: CONFUSING UNIQUENESS FOR VALUE

Setting yourself apart from the competition may be the hardest yet most important marketing exercise you'll undertake in the life of your business. But keep in mind that your Unique SELLING Proposition (USP) should promote what's uniquely VALUABLE about your product or service, not just its uniqueness. Figuring out your brand's most special quality and capturing it in a memorable tagline just might become your most vital element in earning “favorite” status among the 33%+ consumers who say they shop for and believe in the brands they choose.



#8: THINKING SMALL

This mistake is particularly prevalent among local business owners who have internalized their “smallness.” Since they serve their nearby communities, they focus all their branding efforts towards the local market. However, the internet has opened up the world so much that even local companies can (and do!) gain international notoriety. One right branding move could boost your company into the global limelight. Think of your branding as a gift to the world and it just might become that.



#9: FORGOING BRANDING GUIDELINES

Nearly all (about 96%) of large companies in the US have developed branding guidelines. But do they actually use them? A recent survey showed that only 25% of companies used their branding guidelines exactly as written. Sure, it’s important to stay fresh and flexible. But if you ignore your branding guidelines too often or too egregiously, your stand a better chance of appearing inconsistent and/or amateurish.



#10: GOING OUTSIDE YOUR LANE

Remember when Colgate put out a frozen food product? Of course you don’t. It even sounds ridiculous, right? And yet, it actually happened. Needless to say, consumers weren’t buying it. By this time, Colgate had been established firmly as a toothpaste brand, and stepping outside their lane made consumers uncomfortable and even angry. Take this as a lesson for your own branding: don’t stray so far out of your lane.



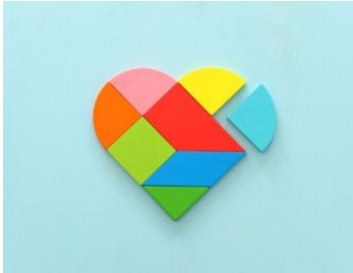
#11: BEING ON EXTREME ENDS OF THE RISK SPECTRUM

You’ve heard it said the bigger the risk, the higher the reward. That doesn’t always apply in branding. A well-calculated risk can pay off immensely for the company: conversely. A poorly timed one can put a dent in your company image. On the other hand, playing it too safe makes you appear boring and monotonous. Find that delicate line between daring and tame and you’ll have an unforgettable yet respectable brand.



#12: REFUSING TO ADMIT MISTAKES

Everyone makes mistakes. The key is to acknowledge your mistake quickly and show that you care about your audience's opinion. Remaining silent or doubling down can appear self-centered and could harm your overall brand. Studies show that US companies lose about \$41 billion a year due to poor customer service. Don't feed into this massive loss by not apologizing to your customers when you are wrong.



#13: LACKING DEPTH IN YOUR CONNECTIONS

Customers with an emotional connection to a brand have a higher life time value that's triple of that for brands that don't promote an emotional attachment. But an emotional connection with your audience doesn't come cheap. You have to prove to them that you're more than just a money-loving corporation, and that you actually care for causes that are much bigger than corporate interests.



#14: NOT HONORING YOUR BRAND'S FLAIR

At least one study has found that 78% of customers find brands that use custom marketing content to be more trustworthy than those that use generic, one-size-fits-all marketing content. Make sure the content you put out is true to your brand personality and that your voice is consistent across all platforms.



#15: RECYCLING COPY THOUGHTLESSLY

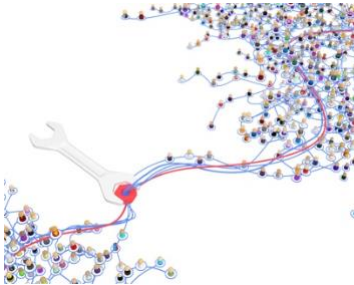
Consistency isn't copying your posts and putting them out verbatim on every single platform. This tactic can make you look lazy and warrant some negative feedback from your customers. Also, too much self-promotion can damage your company image, as 78% of consumers tend to unfollow brands that self-promote a lot. Make your content unique to each platform without losing your distinct brand personality.

#16: DEPLOYING COLORS THAT SEND THE WRONG MESSAGE



Logos, letterheads, flyers – whatever visual assets you use in your branding strategy need to be pleasing to the eye. Choosing the right color for your company can improve brand recognition by up to 80%. You don't need to master color theory to make a lasting impression on their customers, but hiring an art director with good instincts will take you a long way. Their color choices should reflect knowledge about human optical ability, psychology, cultural influences and a seemingly endless array of insights into what "works" and what doesn't.

#17: ENDLESSLY TWEAKING YOUR BRAND



Let's face it, branding is an ongoing task that is never truly finished. However, it's so easy to get caught up in the creativity of it all that you can lose precious time by reworking, tweaking and updating your marketing materials endlessly. Try setting a deadline for your final branding decisions and honor the worth of your own time.

#18: NOT CHANGING WITH THE TIMES



As a brand, it's important to keep your image refreshed and current, reflecting the sign of the times. Not only does this spare you the constant jabs from younger generations, it also opens you up to a whole new audience you may never have considered before.

#19: FAILING TO TRACK BRANDING EFFORTS



Only 48% of marketers claim to measure metrics related to branding. This means that the majority of marketers aren't aware of what's really going on with their branding nor their brand in the market. As a result, these marketers have inflated opinions of how well their campaigns are doing when in fact, the consumers would say otherwise. Track your branding efforts and to see what your customers really respond to.



#20: MAKING DECISIONS IN A SILO

More often than not, insider opinions tend to be peppered with high praise and a little less honest criticism. And yet that's exactly what your branding needs for success. So get some outside opinions on your branding. Whether you go with an agency, a focus group or one-on-one interviews, an outside perspective – or even better, one with some knowledge and experience – can give you invaluable feedback you'd never have come up with on your own.