



Corporate Identity Part 1

Corporate image – what it means and why you should have one.

All companies survive on the strength of the relationships they build with their customers. Branding and image aren't just the glitter you add to a product, they're important tools that help you create relationships and sustain them.

Why is it that when someone dreams of owning a luxury car they think of Ferrari, Mercedes or Rolls Royce? What makes people choose Orange over Vodafone or vice versa? Why do people turn to the BBC when they want an authoritative source of news and information?

The answer is that the product delivers what the customer wants, but there is something more subtle at play. Most people have never driven a Mercedes, first-time mobile customers have no first-hand experience to guide their buying decision and many people across the globe only know the BBC by reputation. So why are they so sure they want the products? The answer is that each organisation has constructed a very precise image and set of associations that make their products, and the experience they promise, desirable.

Brand value

Brand equity, as it is known, is something that is increasingly being measured as an asset. When Jaguar was sold to Ford, Ford's accountants believed that over 80% of the purchase price was made up of the brand.

A strong corporate image coupled with precisely executed branding benefits a company's entire offering. Virgin, for example, has worked very hard to present itself as a responsible, reliable company that is on the customer's side. When Virgin launches into a new market, it has this reputation supporting it.

Effective branding makes the customer feel that purchasing a product says something about them. At its most effective the brand almost represents a philosophy. For example, Apple has always appealed to computer users who work within the creative industries. That, coupled with its rivalry with behemoth Microsoft, has turned the Apple Mac into the computer of choice for those who like

to see themselves as individual and free-spirited.

Apple capitalised on this by introducing the suitably idiosyncratic iMac, which stood out from usual beige-box PCs. Now a whole series of Apple products building on that design and set of associations, including the iPod MP3 player, are having a major commercial impact, which Apple is consolidating on through repeated innovations. Yet, it's a safe bet that many iPod users haven't fully researched the alternatives on the market. They're seduced by the intangibles, by what the iPod has come to mean.

More than just a logo

Small companies can and must 'live the brand' just as much as big businesses in order to win market share. That means reflecting the values they have chosen for themselves in everything they do.

The logo is a vital part of that, as it provides an instant visual shorthand communicating what the company stands for. But a designer working on a logo understands it is just one of a connected series of statements building a picture of what the company stands for, what it does, how it does it and what kind of experience customers and suppliers can expect when they deal with the company or buy its products or services. For that reason designers go through a detailed process to understand the company as whole as well as weighing a range of commercial factors.

In the case of Innocent Drinks – makers of real fruit smoothies – the logo was an inspired piece of design that was just the most visible aspect of a sophisticated promotional campaign.

Starting from scratch in a very crowded market it had to carve out a unique position. It capitalised on the fact that it was a small, independent company that

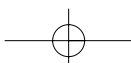


sold a pure, unprocessed product. It combined the notion of innocence and purity with a cheekiness that made the established competitors seem slow and stuffy.

The logo itself is a very simple line drawing of a circle with a halo that could be a face or it could be an apple. Backing up the logo, the bottles are very simple and very easy to hold, unlike the complicated shapes of smoothie bottles at the time. Delivery vans decked out in 'cow' patterns, a playful website, humorous, offbeat copy on its bottle labels and informal slogans such as 'little tasty drinks' that portray the company as being young, straight-talking and unconventional. After only six years in business, Innocent achieved a turnover of £11million in 2004.

To build and maintain a corporate image a company must express its brand consistently in a wide range of ways including websites, advertising and sales materials but also customer service, the look and layout of the workplace and the way the company functions as a whole. Failure to do that can mean a business could, at worst, appear fraudulent, and at best not exploit the brand's potential.

By Design Council



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