Does Your Branding Suck?

HOW TO TELL & WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

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Does Your Branding Suck?

Chances are if you're reading this, you have a hunch your branding isn't great and you're wondering if it's worth changing. After all, rebranding takes time, money and energy—resources that most small-to-medium-sized businesses (SMBs) can't afford to waste.

Sagefrog's annual <u>B2B Marketing Mix Report</u> demonstrates that while brand awareness is a top three marketing priority, branding barely makes the cut as a top ten marketing investment.

So, if your branding is doing more harm than good by damaging your company's perception in the marketplace or affecting your team's success, then a strategic investment in your brand is just the thing you need to repair the damage and bring you closer to your long-term goals.

The power of branding is real. Great branding has catapulted some of the most inconsequential companies up and to the right, and bad branding has killed promising ones. The ultimate goal is to look, feel and sound like a company that people want to do business with.

Find out what makes a brand great, what makes a brand suck, where your own branding falls on the spectrum and what to do about it.

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Branding is helpful for your company and your customers.

Branding is for you. Successful business leaders and their teams typically have an abstract idea of who their company is, where it's going and what makes it different or better than competitors. But oftentimes interpretations of these defining aspects are not shared by all. Branding can help unify and inspire the entire company by establishing a clear definition of the present and a clear direction for the future—all written down on paper.

But it's also for <u>them</u>. Customers are your company's lifeblood, so everything should be done with them in mind. They are your target market, your core audiences, your buyer personas and your prospects. It's for them that you're making the effort to create a brand they identify with, recognize and love.

WHAT SHOULD BUSINESS LEADERS THINK ABOUT WHEN EVALUATING OR BUILDING THEIR BRAND?

- > How the brand and its products or services are perceived by internal team members and customers and competitors in the marketplace
- > What matters most to the brand's core audiences when they begin and end their search for a provider or partner
- > That the beliefs of a company's leadership and team drive and inspire the brand and dictate what the company will look like in the short- and long-term future

Careful and thorough introspection makes the difference between a brand that connects with its audiences and one that frequently misses the mark. Keep these questions in mind as you learn what makes effective branding and start to evaluate your own.

Do you know why you do what you do?

You might know your company's origin story, but are you sure that the rest of your team understands why you do what you do, every day of the week? If you can place a reason as the driving force behind why your company exists, that message will permeate everything you do, making its way to modern consumers and potential new hires who choose to work with companies that run on a focused, sincere mission.

WHAT'S A MISSION STATEMENT?

A mission statement explains your company's purpose and why it exists. It's a single, brief statement that summarizes why and how your company does what it does every day for customers.

WHY DOES MY COMPANY NEED ONE?

Without a mission statement, your team can't determine how what they do on a daily basis relates to the company's core purpose. Potential clients will also feel unsure of your ultimate objective and they will opt to work with a competitor that has a clear goal they can identify with.

What Makes A Good Mission Statement?

- » It explains specifically why your company exists
- » It communicates your primary offering
- » Your employees can remember and recite it



Example of a good mission statement

Sagefrog's Mission Statement: To unlock client potential and accelerate their success through B2B brand building and the strategic integration and optimization of marketing services.

This mission statement communicates the company's main objective—unlocking client potential and accelerating their success—to core audiences. It also tells employees how this goal will be achieved. The statement is simple and straightforward, bringing clarity to everyone working with and for the brand.



Do you know where you're going?

As a business leader, you can probably rattle off a long list of numbers that reflect your goals for the trajectory of your company. But the KPIs for your 10-year plan hardly help sales leads and job seekers as they search for companies who showcase their intentions for growth and continued innovation. Does your company aim to be the most trusted provider in the region? Does it seek to reach a breakthrough in the industry? To achieve greatness, you'll need a vision for the future.

WHAT'S A VISION STATEMENT?

A vision statement explains your company's direction or where you're going. It's a short statement that helps employees envision what the company will look like further down the road.

WHY DOES MY COMPANY NEED ONE?

Without a vision statement, your team won't know what their company hopes to look like in the future, how their role fits into the bigger picture and what's behind leadership's larger business decisions. Vision statements may also be shared externally for customers or investors who seek long-term goals to ensure they're working with the best.

What Makes a Good Vision Statement?

- » It unites your multiple longterm business objectives
- » It's aspirational but attainable with long-term effort
- » It's a brief but compelling goal for the future



Example of a good vision statement

Sagefrog's Vision Statement: To be recognized as the top B2B marketing agency in the region.

This vision statement tells employees exactly what the company wants to be recognized for. It's easy to understand and provides a common goal for the team to rally around. It also brings clarity to why certain strategic business decisions are being made and keeps the bigger picture top of mind for everyone in the business.



Do you know who you are?

Do your team members know the traits that define your company's personality and do those attributes shine through so others in the market perceive them? Establishing a personality and tone of voice helps reinforce a brand's appearance and guides its interactions with audiences, partners and others in the marketplace.

WHAT'S PERSONALITY & TONE OF VOICE?

Personality and tone of voice set standards for how your company should appear, sound and act externally in all marketing communications and in person through those that represent your brand. Personality and tone of voice can reign in the key characteristics you want associated with your brand.

WHY DOES MY COMPANY NEED ONE?

Without these guidelines, you may send conflicting views about your company to current and potential clients, which could negatively impact your reputation and sales. Incomplete or unenforced brand personalities may also produce marketing materials and collateral that seem to come from very different companies. By setting your personality and tone of voice in stone, you bring more control to your brand's appearance.

What Makes a Good Personality & Tone of Voice?

- It aligns with your company's core values
- » It's descriptive and clearly actionable
- » It serves as a tool for achieving your mission and vision

Sagefrog's Personality & Tone of Voice:

FRIENDLY & APPROACHABLE

Friendly and approachable in nature, the brand must use the first-person plural point of view to connect with audiences and use conversational language to convey the brand's casual, welcoming and down-to-earth approach to business.

BALANCED & STRATEGIC

Tactics without strategy is not the path to success. The brand must showcase its pragmatic, strategic approach to marketing throughout all client interactions, making it clear that balancing creative skill and knowledge with marketing intent produces real results for clients.

CONCISE & PRECISE

Time is of the essence and clarity is key when it comes to capturing the attention of audiences through marketing. The brand must communicate concisely and precisely, taking a less-is-more approach to both writing and design and steering clear of vague terms and business jargon.

This personality & tone of voice features adjectives that describe the company's key character traits and explain what each means for the brand. It also gives clear direction on how each concept is applied to everything that comes from the company.



Do you know what you stand for?

A healthy and enriching company culture is what makes a truly productive and successful team. Company culture is built on powerful values—characteristics shared by the entire team that support the unique ways you do what you do. Citing all of the values that you stand for shows your team and your audience that your business is run with care.

WHAT ARE CORE VALUES?

Core values define, and continually refine, your company's culture. They're character traits shared by the leadership team and all the employees who make a perfect fit for the company. Core values are used to build a cohesive team by guiding the hiring, firing, reviewing and rewarding processes.

WHY DOES MY COMPANY NEED THEM?

Core values are vital to a company's success because people are a business's most important resource. By organizing your business around a set of shared values, you can ensure that your people power is rowing in the right direction as one. This has a great impact on your output and bottom line and will create a rich culture that attracts top talent and is noticed by customers.

What Makes a Good Set of Core Values?

- » They're honest, authentic and heartfelt
- » They're embodied by the company's leadership
- They define the ideal employee for your business

Sagefrog's Core Values:

CAN-DO ATTITUDE

We are adaptable, eager to try new things that benefit our clients. We're positive and pleasant to be around and are always happy for others' achievements. We're also resourceful—the unknown is not daunting for a Sagefrog.

HUMBLY CONFIDENT

We know our stuff and possess a quiet confidence, but we also realize that we don't know it all. We welcome the ideas and input of others, and we detest arrogance and are not boastful—it's just not our nature.

TEAMWORK

We're collaborative, recognizing that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We're helpful, respectful, and we have fun together. We're also drama-free, have emotional intelligence and are professional at all times.

DEPENDABLE

We're dedicated to our work and focused on achieving our clients' objectives—no matter what it takes. We get stuff done and do what we say, fostering an environment of trust without fear.

STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE

We're passionate and proud of our work, naturally going above and beyond. At our core, we're growth oriented, eager to build Sagefrog and grow as marketing professionals. Striving for excellence also means we're lifelong learners with a thirst for knowledge.

DO THE RIGHT THING

We're honest with ourselves, our team and our clients, not afraid to be vulnerable and ask for help when we need it. We're fair and trustworthy and have integrity in our words and actions. We also work hard, recognizing that excellent work is the reason Sagefrog exists and what propels us forward.

These core values were developed by looking inward at the characteristics already apparent among the members of the company's team. Each trait is memorable and their combination is unique to the brand.



Do you know what makes you different?

What makes your company different or better than the competition? A messaging platform will illustrate the details of your unique business approach, the impressive qualities of your products and services or the innovations you contribute to the industry. Messaging shares your differentiators in a way that explicitly states why prospects should choose to work with you.

WHAT'S A MESSAGING PLATFORM?

A messaging platform is a series of three or more key messages, also known as value propositions or uniques, that explain why prospects should choose you over the competition. A messaging platform can be presented in multiple levels or tiers, from simple key headlines to detailed messages.

WHY DOES MY COMPANY NEED ONE?

Without a messaging platform, your brand could get overlooked by prospects and potential partners in the marketplace and your team will lack a unified way of speaking about your company and offerings. A messaging platform that resonates with your audience will prove the exceptional value that your team brings to the table. And with these key messages ready to go, everyone in the company will be an extension of the sales team because they'll know what makes you unique and how to explain it.

What Makes a Good Messaging Platform?

- » It's factual, descriptive and based on real reasons why clients choose you
- It's flexible and easy to state in a few words or in a detailed paragraph
- » It's consistent with your personality and tone of voice



Example of a good messaging platform

Sagefrog's Messaging Platform:

RESPONSIVENESS & FAST TURNAROUND

We're a modern marketing agency recognized for expedient strategy and quality work, plus extreme accessibility that makes our full-stack expertise seem just a cubicle away.

STRONG INDUSTRY & BUSINESS ACUMEN

We're B2B marketing specialists in healthcare, technology and business services who combine our acute understanding of these industries with strong business acumen to accelerate client success.

STRATEGIC INTEGRATION & OPTIMIZATION

We drive strong and consistent brand awareness, qualified leads and ROI for clients by integrating marketing channels to increase the impact of each tactic we execute and optimize your marketing spend.

This messaging platform is built on differentiators that real clients have expressed about the company. The messages are succinct and compelling and clearly explain who the brand is and why you should choose them by balancing language about the company itself with the benefits it brings to clients.



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Do you have a professional look and feel?

You might think your brand looks presentable, but are you sure that audiences see a brand they feel proud to work with? To be taken seriously by clients, partners and competitors alike, your company should be represented by a visual identity system that unites brand purpose and personality while remaining consistent.

WHAT'S A VISUAL IDENTITY SYSTEM?

A visual identity system is a complete visual starter pack for businesses. It encompasses logo design, color palettes, typography, imagery style and iconography and shows how these elements come together to define your brand's appearance.

WHY DOES MY COMPANY NEED ONE?

A visual identity system polishes your brand's look and feel to make it clear that you care about presentation. The visual appearance of a brand is one of the few aspects that prospects get to know and ideally recall when assessing their options. With a comprehensive and cohesive visual identity, you ensure your brand has a trademark appearance that looks worthy of contemporary consumers.

What Makes a Good Visual Identity?

- » It factors in common industry visuals and the competition
- » It considers your marketplace perception and long-term growth
- » It's used consistently across all channels and marketing materials

Sagefrog's Visual Identity:



This visual identity is cohesive, vibrant and mimics the brand's personality and tone of voice. It's used consistently across all marketing communications, letting the marketplace know that the company takes pride in its appearance and pays attention to the details.

Does your visual identity suck? yes or no

Does your branding suck?

See how your branding measures up by reviewing your answers on previous pages.

If you answered mostly YES...

Yikes! Sorry to tell you, but your branding sucks.

If you answered mostly NO...

Way to go! Your branding serves your company well.

If you answered an even mix...

Hmm. Chances are your branding sucks. If some elements aren't serving you well, they can cause others to fall by the wayside.

What to do if your branding sucks

- » Partner with an experienced marketing agency to get immediate help from the experts
- » Work closely with your marketing agency to develop or update your brand strategy
- » Use the new brand strategy to guide the setup and implementation of your marketing plan

What to do if your branding is on point

- » Determine if you're in need of a brand refresh, which could put you ahead of competitors
- » Review your marketing and sales tactics to ensure all elements follow your brand strategy
- » Take another look at your website, sales brochures and other marketing materials for updates

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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