

Your Brilliant Brand

Module 5: *The Brand At Work* Transcript

Welcome to module five of ***Your Brilliant Brand***. We're calling this The Brand at Work because this is where we implement all the thinking we've done up to now, all the underground principles that we've been developing that establish the foundations of the brand. Now, we're going to build it and make it visible in the world.

You remember we showed an image of an iceberg to establish the very important point that most of the brand lies beneath the surface. Why? Because the brand is that spontaneous, mostly subconscious response that the customer or prospect has to your name. And brand strategy is all about cultivating the optimum response in the hearts and minds of our brand audience.

Well, at some point, all of this needs to become visible. We need to be able to show the brand in a way that expresses that foundation that we've laid in the earlier work, and that's what we're going to be looking at now. At last we come to that point where most people think the brand starts, including the logo. I'm going to be talking here about what I call brand signatures. These are the visible signs of the brand, and the logo, of course, is the most familiar and the most prominent of those signatures.

Now, a couple of things about logos - the purpose of the logo is to invest your name with an appropriate visual personality, to give it character in a way that it imprints itself easily on the mind and in a way that makes it memorable and distinct from other names in your market space. The logo in itself, of course, has a color scheme, and that color scheme is more than just for the logo. It's for your entire brand. The colors of the brand are like the colors of a football team or of a nation. They are the characteristic colors by which we identify that brand. And color is an extraordinarily effective form of brand signature. Here's why: colors carry strong emotions.

If you think for a moment of cool blues and grays and imagine that color scheme for a children's product. It'd be strange, wouldn't it? Or if you saw funny pink, and bright greens and zany yellows and saw that for a serious corporate technical brand, that would be strange too. The colors need to be appropriate to the personality of the brand, to the emotional texture of the brand.

Let's take a fictional company, AlphaBeta, which offers outsource help for small businesses.

We chose these very warm, friendly, sunny colors because we want to create a feeling of welcome. We want to make this whole business of outsourcing your business feel accessible and easy.

Now, a less commonly attended to brand signature is the type style, the font that you choose to write your text in. To begin with, there's a value and consistency in how you write, how you show text, whether it's in a brochure, a letter, a website or whatever because that gives part of the coherence and the cogency to the brand that we're going to be talking about a little later. Well, what about the character of the type style itself? This, again, should express the personality of the brand. Some fonts are very severe and strict and structured. Some are very playful and silly and fun. This one that we chose for AlphaBeta has something of that warm, round, open quality that we chose in the colors.

Finally, of course, there's the tagline, which in a sense you might say, well, that's not really a visual signature, but conventionally the tagline is always part of the logo block. It always shows up with the logo. So we're going to include it here as a brand signature. Now, a word about taglines because I see many of my clients sweating and struggling over trying to create a cool tagline - the purpose of the tagline is to communicate the singular idea, the core of the brand, what is this brand all about. The tone of the tagline also needs to be appropriate for the brand, and generally speaking, taglines should be written in simple language, the kind of language you would use if you're actually talking to someone.

The third thing is don't try to be smart and clever. It's very satisfying if you can come up with this witty play on words, but that's not the place to begin. And there's a great danger that in focusing on verbal dexterity, you will actually cloud the message - much better to be quite straightforward. I've written a few taglines which I'm proud of because I think they're smart and neat and playful, but what really matters to me when I'm composing a tagline is that it gets the message across. Remember that instant in time in which the brand is communicated, we need to catch attention and deliver the message in a nanosecond.

So let's review here what the function of the brand signatures are.

First of all, the function of the logo is to make the name memorable. We want to imprint your name in a positive way on the minds of your brand audience.

Secondly, the brand signatures should reinforce and enrich the personality, the character, the tone of the brand.

And thirdly, your brand signatures should help you stand out in the market, stand out with the distinction that's appropriate, a difference that actually is seen as positive and appropriate to what your brand is all about.

So what is the secret to great brand design? Well, it's everything we've covered up to now.

The secret to great brand design is to first build a strong brand strategy before you even think about logos and colors and taglines.

It boils down to the brand triangle. The audience is the base of the triangle, what do they care about; the product on one side - what's special, what's unique about your product or service that matches what your audience cares about; and thirdly the competitive space - what's missing in the branding space. When you know those three parameters, those three

dimensions, you can find that sweet spot in the middle. And that will drive not only your singular idea, not only the brand profile, but also the visual expression of the brand in the brand signatures.

All of that will give you the basis to write a strong design brief: the instructions for creating the visual dimension of your brand..

Now, a design brief should be written whether or not you do the design yourself or you outsource it to an expert graphic designer. Either way, you need to write down, to make absolutely clear what is the purpose and function of the design in relation to your brand strategy. If you don't, here's what happens. You'll drag your team into endless discussions based purely on taste - I like blue. No, I like orange. I like yellow. I like this type style. I prefer that font. That isn't a sound way to develop the design for your brand. You need to have the strategic foundations and write your brief out of those foundations.

So we have an action step in the workbook to help you do that.

Let's assume you've done that action step.

We're going to go on to talk about the all-important theme of brand discipline. Remember that this whole story began with a discussion of the environment in which your brand will show up, the mental environment, that is, which we described as an ADD culture - cluttered, distracted, overcrowded. It's very hard for you to make yourself visible and memorable within that environment, and the only way you can do that is through what we call focus.

Now, how do you maintain focus? Through brand discipline. The moment you allow your brand to get blurry, it'll get forgotten. It'll vanish into the surrounding noise. So what does it take to impose discipline on your brand?

There are three essentials that you need to be watching not just when you set up your brand but week after week, month after month, year after year.

The first essential is quality. You must insist on a level of quality in the way that the brand is communicated, whether that's quality in the design, in the printing, in the language, in the packaging. Whatever expresses your brand, there's a quality dimension that you need to protect that's appropriate to your brand.

The next essential is what we call congruency, and what we mean here is simply that everything that you do to express your brand should match the values and purpose and character of your brand as you've defined it in your brand strategy. Imagine a serious business like, say, a funeral business or a company that looks after people's money suddenly sending out a greetings card that has a silly joke on it. That would NOT be congruent. Conversely, a brand that's cool and hip and fun would be out of congruency if it published a newspaper ad that was very boring and corporate and serious. So your brand expression needs always to be congruent with the concept and character of your brand.

And thirdly, of course, there's consistency. Whatever you do with your brand, whatever you settle on as true and accurate and effective in expressing your brand, you need to stick to it. Don't let anybody mess with your logo, with your colors, with your typeface but also don't let them compromise the tone and the character and the behavior of your company because all of that is an expression of the brand. Never let your brand change except from a strategic decision. Don't let it change on a whim or because somebody somewhere has a bright idea and decides to try it out. Every change you make in the communication of your brand should be based on the brand triangle, on the your brand strategy you have decided on. And unless there's a reason for a change, there is a tremendous value in consistent repetition of your brand expression. Why? Again because of that cluttered ADD environment. Consistency gives you the laser focus that can cut through steel.

Well, all these things sound like great principles, but how are you actually going to implement them?

In my experience, the only way you can possibly do that is to appoint what I call a brand guardian. That might be you yourself or it might be someone else in your company. Whoever it is needs to be really passionate about the brand, really needs to understand the value of the brand and how it is that bond that builds the buying decision, how the brand impacts the bottom line and the destiny of your firm.

The brand guardian has the job of watching out not only for the little, microscopic details of the logo size or the type style and those important details that maintain consistency but also for the tone and the character of how the company is showing itself, how the firm as a whole and the people within it are communicating to the outside world what this enterprise is all about. The brand guardian should therefore conduct a regular review of the brand. The frequency of your brand review is of course up to you with the frequency. Once a month will be ideal. Less than once a quarter to me is much too little attention to the brand. The thing is that the brand after a while becomes part of the company unconscious. You just start taking it for granted and you forget that people are having this gut response, this instantaneous feeling whether they're newcomers to your company or people who've been around it for a long time. And you need to be watching what it is that you do that stimulates the most positive response that people can have to your product or company name.

So that brings us to the end of this module, and you can do the action step where we review the key points. And you can identify any questions you have and any points where you feel you might need to look for outside help. And when you've done that, we can go on to the sixth and last module in *Your Brilliant Brand*, which is all about bringing your brand online.

Jon