

Guide: Branding & promotions

Your branding and promotional efforts make up a large part of your marketing and are important to get right. This guide focuses on the subject of branding and promotional efforts which promote your business in general.

Specific parts of your promotions such as advertising and direct marketing will be dealt with in further guides, as they are intricate subject areas.

Branding in the 21st Century

Branding is more than just a clever logo and a selection of colours.

Once a term that referred to a hot iron mark used to signify cattle ownership, 'brand' is now a term which encompasses all the graphic elements, language, customer service and many intangible elements of a company, product or service.

Branding in its current form has been around since the industrial revolution and perhaps even earlier.

Brand recognition

Brand recognition is the holy grail which many companies strive for.

It's the concept of your brand being instantly recognisable.

Examples of easily recognised global brands:

- Coca-Cola (Product)
- Nike (Company)
- David Beckham (Person)

Brand identity

Your brand identity is the personality your brand conveys. For example:

- Sophisticated, mature
- Youthful, fun
- Cool, designer
- Technological, modern

Brand elements

Most brands have certain key graphic elements which support their brand. Sometimes logo elements become so well recognised within their fields that they can substitute for the brand name. For example:

- Apple's 'apple'
- Huffer's three circles
- Chanel's 'C' logo

Some brands may stick with their name as the logo and simply change and refine it every few years.

Common elements used to create brand identity include:

- Name
- Logo
- Colours
- Images

- Slogans and bylines

As you are developing your brand, make sure that all of these elements are cohesive and will work alone or together.

Re-branding

If your business has been established for some time, or if you have purchased an existing business, you may wish to consider rebranding, especially if you don't think your current brand conveys what you are about.

There are two approaches to this: gradual or a complete rebrand.

If you are taking a gradual approach, map out how your branding will change over the time span between now and when you want to have your new branding in place.

If you are doing a complete rebrand, you may want to consider an official re-launch so that your existing customers are well aware that you are still the same, but are doing new and exciting things. You do not want your clients to get a fright.

Expert help

You may have an idea of what you want to do, or you may have no clue where to start.

A marketing company can help you with this process, and the money you spend on doing it once and doing it right may pay off in the long run.

If you don't know who to talk to, ask a few business owners whose branding you like, who they used. The yellow pages can only go so far in this case, and happy clients will be the best judge.

Ensure you take a look at the marketing company's portfolio. Ask to talk to previous clients and ask them how they found the process.

Most important of all ensure you get a good idea of the process and how much it is likely to cost, before you start.

Promotional collateral

Promotional collateral is the blanket term for all the printed and branded bits and bobs you use to promote your business in general.

This can include general advertising, however in this guide we will talk simply about general collateral.

Collateral

A business is likely to have various types of collateral, including:

- Business cards
- Brochures and flyers
- Website
- Pens and other giveaways
- Gifts

Business Cards

For many businesses, business cards will be one of the most commonly used pieces of promotional collateral.

Often a person may keep a business card just because they like it, so it is important that your business card contains all the necessary information, conveys your brand and also looks great.

Ensure you include:

- Name

- Logo & colours
- Business name (if the logo is not sufficient)
- Phone number
- Email address
- Website
- Physical address (if you rely on walk-in customers)

Some information no longer considered as important:

- Fax number
- Postal address
- Company name

Some elements can be important for some businesses, but considered unstylish for others. A photo is a must for a real estate agent, but is seen as crass for other professions.

There are many elements which cost more, but can make your business cards look interesting:

- Embossing
- Spot printing — using special inks e.g. metallic, neon, pastel
- Hot foiling — adding metallic foil
- Die cutting — e.g. rounded corners or cut-outs
- Flocking — velvet effect
- Different materials — plastic, wood, even metal

Who should have them?

Keep in mind that not all team members will require business cards, so focus your efforts on those who really need them.

Consider printing generic cards or another sort of collateral for when a customer needs to take something away e.g. a product name and price.

Brochures and flyers

Standard brochure sizes are generally made from an A4 sheet, double sided and folded into thirds. Some larger brochures may be A3 folded in half.

Brochures are great for giving customers as a takeaway, especially when you have lots of information to convey e.g. product specifications or services.

Don't print too many brochures if you are in a growth phase, as by the time you are halfway through them they are out of date. Consider having small runs printed.

If you don't have so much information, but you want something for clients to take away, consider printing a postcard or DLE sized card with your contact details and a list of core products/services, or focus on a new product.

Flyers are often cheaper when printed in house and can be great for showcasing and keeping up to date with new products or services.

These can be included in bags with purchases, handed out at a front counter, or distributed with a mailbox drop.

Website

In this day and age, your website will be one of your greatest assets, so ensure you devote some time to planning and setting it up.

A domain name or URL (e.g. www.domainname.co.nz) costs under \$50 per year to register and many domain name companies will give you a single page site for free.

It is important you list your contact details and information about your company even if you only have a reserved domain name and not a full website.

A web design company can help you set up a full website when you are ready. Again, make sure that your branding is consistent.

Don't limit yourself. See if the web design company offers e-marketing and make sure that you can upgrade your website to include e-commerce if you need to.

Shop around for ideas before you see a web developer so that you have a clear idea of what you want, and are not pigeonholed by the developer's own style.

<http://webdesignledger.com> is a great resource for gathering ideas. Even if the websites and ideas you see are fancy and expensive, a web design company can suggest simpler alternatives if necessary.

Pens and giveaways

Think carefully before you get into branding pens and other giveaways.

Although everyone likes a nice pen, getting into branded items can be a real drain on your cash flow.

Make sure that if you undertake an exercise that it has a purpose.

For example:

- Pens: For new clients, expos and trade events
- Pads: For conference events
- Calendars: As client gifts
- Other novelty items: For events, as client gifts etc.

Remember the more you order, the less they will cost, so be sure of your branding before you start and order bulk quantities. Think about using them across two purposes e.g. for a seminar and in new client packs.

Media Releases

'Promotions' is a blanket term given to the exercise of promoting your business in general.

As opposed to advertising and selling, promotion is generally about making the world aware of your business and service in a less direct manner.

Promotion includes becoming involved in your community, letting them know who you are and networking.

Media Releases

A media release is a promotional piece written as a news article which you provide to media and news agencies.

The main aim of a media release is to get media agencies interested in your news, just like they would be in any news.

If you have just launched a new and exciting service or made a significant newsworthy change, then write a media release and let your local media know.

Make sure your media release also includes the official details such as date and contact details — and ensure you are available to take calls and queries after it has gone out.

How to write a media release

First and foremost remember that it's a story — you want journalists and readers to be interested and intrigued.

The media may not be interested in your business, but they may be very interested if you are using a new technology, or a revolutionary method, or importing something unique.

Tailor your release to the publication you want to use it. Use their own house style. Your story will be more likely to be picked up if you make it easy for them.

Think of the 'Reverse Pyramid' when you set your story up. Keep the top half brief and add more detail as you go along.

Your headline is the most important part — not only for grabbing the readers, but for interesting the journalists who select the stories.

Focus on the newsworthy 'story' and then fill in the background detail.

The other details of your business can be peppered throughout e.g.: Mrs Jones says ABC Ltd are very excited about the revolutionary \$10 million machine installed in their Victoria Street premises as it's the first of its kind in the southern hemisphere.

If you are not much of a writer enlist the help of someone who is. Remember that journalists are professional writers — you need to impress them.

Structure

Your article must have a beginning, middle and end. Include the 5 W's (remember them from school?) — Who, what, when, where and why.

Keep your article brief using one or two sentence paragraphs. Keep the sentences brief and avoid using jargon or overly complicated terms.

Structure:

- Include: 'Press Release'
- Headline or Title in bold/caps
- Opening sentence says what the release is about
- Second paragraph elaborates — include a quote and some 'brow-raising' points
- Third and subsequent paragraphs should deliver facts
- Make it clear where the release finishes by putting ### or ENDS
- Finish with a line offering more information or an interview with contact details
- Put all your 'boilerplate' information at the end — company background, disclaimers, etc
- Use hyperlinks to link to other information e.g. products, website, earlier initiatives.

Key things to remember:

- Sum up your key message in the first sentence
- Leave the less important details to the end. If the media agency is going to shorten your article they may just cut off the last paragraphs
- Include quotes to keep it human and interesting
- Write no more than a page. If journalists are interested, they'll contact you
- Make sure your media contact is on the first page. Background detail can be on the second page
- Ensure you have permission of any involved parties

Make sure someone else proofs your release before it goes anywhere

Sending out your media release

Keep in touch with your local news desk editors and build a rapport.

Get your timing right: if you can, wait until the related issue is hot. If your media release is about an issue currently in the media, send it out as soon as possible.

Call the news desk editor of the publication and give them a 30 second heads-up about your article. Intrigue them.

Follow up your call by sending your media release by email and put it in the body of the email. In some cases you may need to use a PDF with hyperlinks:

- Use your headline as the subject line of your email
- Type ### or ENDS centered under the last line to denote the end of the release
- Also attach an interesting related photo if you have one

Possible contacts include your release to your local paper, online news service, radio and TV station. Industry-specific websites and magazines may also be interested.

A newspaper may not include the article in the actual printed paper, but may include it on their website, so keep your eyes open over the following weeks and even google yourself to see who has picked it up.

Using social media

If you have a social media platform e.g. a facebook product/service page, consider posting a mini-media release. Keep this release to 25 words or less.

The update you post on your wall should be bite-size and follow the AIDA principle:

- A = Attention
- I = Interest
- D = Desire
- A = Action

Make sure you capture the attention of your audience, pique their interest, appeal to their desires and call them to action.

Direct them to a portal or website for maximum results.

Promotional Events & Sponsorship

Events and sponsorship are a great way to put your name out there.

Trade events can get your foot in the door to an existing market. Sales events can drum up interest from prospective and existing customers and sponsorship can keep your name out in the community and associated with goodwill.

Trade events

Trade events are a great way to gauge interest in a new product or service before you truly go to market.

At trade events you can take pre-orders based on a prototype or you can sell pre-made stock.

Trade events are generally aimed at wholesalers so are great for manufacturers and distributors.

Example trade events:

- National Agricultural Fieldays
- New Zealand Gift and Homeware Fair
- EMEX New Zealand (Engineering, Machinery and Electronics)
- Fine Food New Zealand
- Transport and Heavy Equipment Expo

Also think about trade stands at annual conferences for related fields e.g. SOLGM Annual conference — this gives exposure to all of New Zealand's local councils all at once.

Lifestyle expos

Lifestyle expos are another great way to promote your business.

Lifestyle expos are very much like trade events but are often geared towards the general public. Some cross

the borderline e.g. Fieldays

There are many expos around which are target market specific and will help you get your name out there as well as gauging public interest.

Both products and services can benefit from being shown at an expo — but it's all about how you frame them and how you set up your stand.

If you represent a lawn mowing franchise, you could simply give turf maintenance advice and information while handing out cards and flyers with a free pen. This is truly a promotional rather than sales exercise.

If you sell products it is a great opportunity for customers to try before they buy, and not only are you promoting your business but you might actually sell some product at the same time.

Example lifestyle expos:

- National Agricultural Fieldays
- The Green Living Show & New Zealand Organic Expo
- Women's Lifestyle Expo
- Home Show
- Boat, Fishing & Leisure Shows
- Big Boys' Toys

Some expos such as the Women's Lifestyle Expo and various boat and home shows are set up in regional centres and often involve lower costs than expos in Auckland.

Sponsoring events

Event sponsorship is a fantastic way to target your promotional efforts.

Sponsoring another organisation's annual conference or event is a great way to promote your name to their client base and help make new contacts.

When you sponsor a business event you will often have the opportunity to distribute promotional material and even have a stand. Depending on your level of sponsorship, you may also have the opportunity to speak at the event.

Sponsoring community events is an excellent way to put your name out there and also foster goodwill.

Think about your target market. Will they attend sports tournaments, gallery openings or school plays?

Approach these events like the business person you are – think about where your logo will be exposed, where your contact details will be listed and if there is any opportunity to distribute your promotional collateral.

Networking

Networking is the subtle art of talking to the right people about the right things. As opposed to creating or joining a business 'network' which is a formalised group.

Trade events and expos are great places to network with other business owners, whereas conferences are good for networking with prospective customers.

If you're a business owner, then almost any situation that involves other people is a networking opportunity.

Networking, whether formal or informal, helps promote your business the old-fashioned way — by word of mouth.

Good old-fashioned networking

If you are attending an event, start talking to the people around you and find out what they do.

Even if it's a child's school play, remember that parents are people too and when you're not wearing your mum, dad, auntie or uncle hat you are a business person and you can talk to other business people or prospective customers about business.

Sports clubs, RSAs, and Citizens and Cosmopolitan clubs are also a very productive way to meet new business contacts or customers.

Networking without the cringe factor

If going to a business networking event sounds like the worst possible punishment to you, try out these tips to make your business networking experience worthwhile and enjoyable:

- Set some goals before you go, for example, *I'm going to make four new contacts tonight*, and make that happen. If you can, select a few people in advance to whom you'll introduce yourself
- Be forthright in introducing yourself and stay away from the usual boring questions. Ask something interesting like, *what has been your biggest business achievement this year?* And make sure you give out your business card
- Don't monopolise anyone's time. If you have a quick but meaningful conversation and then move on politely, not only will you achieve your goal faster but you can leave sooner!
- Focus on what you can do to help your new contacts and when you return to the office the next day, make sure you follow up your conversation with an email thanking them for taking the time to speak with you. This will help continue the relationship past the event
- Most of all, smile, remain positive and don't complain about the event, parking, the weather or the food. Just focus on achieving your goal and enjoying yourself

Follow up

If you meet a like-minded business person, put aside your embarrassment or shyness and foster the relationship.

All it takes is a quick email the next day to say 'hi, I really enjoyed meeting you'.

See if they're keen to meet up for a drink every now and then to exchange ideas.

Business people with complementary businesses are the best people to talk to — they won't be afraid you are stealing their ideas and they may even be open to a joint venture in future.

Formal business networks

There are many national business networks set up to help connect businesses. If you are interested in finding like-minded business people you may like to consider joining a business network.

Examples include:

- BNI New Zealand
- Her Business
- Sustainable Business Network

Although the primary focus of these groups is often business development and mentoring, just being on their books and attending events will help build up awareness of your business.

Many fields may have an association which runs events and also keeps business people in touch such as a local retailers' group or manufacturers' group.

You could also consider setting up your own network with like-minded business people.

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