5 Branding Mistakes No Startup Can Afford to Make

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Mistakes are common in the business world. After all, failure often teaches us more about ourselves than success. However, all mistakes are not created equal. When startups make mistakes, the repercussions are often much more serious than if, say, an established business with a loyal audience makes a mistake.

When an established business makes a mistake, they have **brand** equity built up. While the mistake may be exposed on a bigger stage, they've done enough good - sold enough products, forged enough relationships, proven their worth, etc. -- to survive the storm, and move on. A mature business' preexisting reputation serves as its safety.

The same can't be said of a startup. When a startup makes a mistake, there's nothing to fall back on. For many customers and individuals in the marketplace, the mistake is the only thing they know about the company. Unfortunately, this often spells disaster and stunts growth before it can even start.

When it comes to **branding**, startups have to be very careful. One **branding** mistake can derail your entire plan and seriously damage your chances of success. That's why we've compiled a list of the most costly **branding** mistakes startups make and will provide some pointers on how to avoid them at all costs.

1. You fail to identify a target market.

There's a lot of experimenting going on in startups. Instead of a long-term vision, there's often a "wait and see" attitude during a **brand**'s infancy. This is natural and necessary, but you have to be very careful. Just because you're waiting to see how customers respond to your product before making a decision on how to proceed, doesn't mean you can afford to develop a **brand** without a target market.

In order to gain visibility and hone your messaging, you must [identify a target market] from the very start. You cannot be everything to everyone, and an attempt to do this will leave you with a watered-down **brand** that nobody connects with.

2. You ignore value in employees.

Startups need to have control over their **branding** efforts, but this doesn't mean you have to handle everything from within a corporate silo. Believe it or not, one of your best resources is your staff of employees. You don't want to ignore this value or place restrictions on how employees use **social** media.

"People today trust person-to-person communication and tend to ignore direct **advertising** by **brands**," Renuka Rana says. "Thus, personal consulting takes priority over corporate communications. By letting your employees be on **social** media, you are initiating a fleet of small personal **brands** to help in your business **branding**."

3. You try to blend in.

The entire purpose of **branding** is to give your business an identity that separates itself from the competition and engages with customers in a way that they perceive as relevant and enjoyable. Unfortunately, it's all-too common to see startups ignore originality.

"As a **design**er, I have two tools available to me to create a **brand**: text and treatment. I **design** both of these things exclusively for each client," Robin Hercia, senior **design**er at AWMYL **design** studio, says. "I rework some aspect of the lettering on a client's project so that it is unique to that client. It's no longer a typeface that's available for purchase, it has become their's. Same goes for the treatment. I create textures, shadows and shading by hand, knowing that no computer could ever generate it. In the end, the **branding** stands out and can't be lost in a sea of similar corporate identities, which happens, and for a business is very dangerous."

Being the same as the competition does you no good. Startups are supposed to be unique and different. If you're presenting customers with the same **branding** messages as established competitors, what reason do they have for choosing your products?

4. You deviate from the brand.

Ideally, every company should have a set of **brand** guidelines that they use to direct decision making and shape messaging. While these rules don't lock you in, they certainly should influence the choices you make. Deviating too far from your **brand**'s guidelines - especially early in your startup's life cycle -- can be devastating.

For example, let's say you've decided that the three main colors your **brand** will use in all **digital** advertisements are green, white and yellow. You consistently use these colors for months, but then one day decide that you want to come out with an ad that's blue and red.

This is a relatively minor issue - especially for an isolated ad -- but it exposes a bigger problem. You're risking confusing customers, diluting your message and diminishing any **brand** equity you have already established. The goal is to develop a unified **brand** identity. Even one deviation can hurt you.

5. You make visible mistakes on social media.

The same thing that makes **social** media such an effective **branding** tool also makes it a dangerous resource under certain circumstances. I'm talking about visibility, of course. While startups welcome the visibility that **social** media provides, making a mistake or faux pas on such a grand stage can ultimately prove to be extremely costly.

There's two massive mistakes you must avoid.

1. Never pick a fight.
2. Avoid going off **brand**.

The first mistake is pretty straightforward. Fights with customers on **social** media are public, and it always makes the **brand** look bad. The second mistake refers to the temptation for a **brand** to speak out on some political or **social** issue that has nothing to do with the **brand**’s overall message. This example from the NYPD is the perfect example of how nothing good can come from going off topic.

In order to avoid common mistakes, you need to establish some **social** media guidelines, and develop a method for keeping people accountable. It’s best to always have two sets of eyes review anything that’s being posted.

Make smart choices.

Branding and **marketing -** by their very nature -- aren’t safe or cautious aspects of running of business. You often have to take risks in order to stand out and earn the right to be heard. However, it’s imperative that you take calculated risks and avoid rocking the boat too much before you’ve claimed some space in the marketplace.

Overall, avoid the dangerous mistakes other startups have, and continue to make, and you’ll be fine.

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