

Build Your Brand by Separating It From Product

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Sometimes the hardest thing—conceptually—for marketers to do is to separate their brand from their product.

"Product is king."

"All people really care about is the product."

"Price and product—that's it."

"Our brand is our product—they're one in the same."

I've heard it all before, and from some very successful people. But it's all an illusion. None of it is true.

When people choose **brands**, they are projecting an extension of themselves onto the **brand**. The **brand** augments their identity, just as their choice of friends, music, and fashion does.

Consumers will literally brand themselves by identifying with your **brand**. It's personal. It's emotional.

Here's what a brand really does

To develop a **brand**, you need to understand how it works and what it does. You need to separate your **brand** from your product, and think of it as its own entity.

- A brand is a promise of quality, values, virtues, and consistency.
- A brand has a voice, style, persona, soundtrack, and vibe.
- A brand tells you to expect to pay more or expect to pay less.
- It creates preference based on how it's presented.
- A brand can be fashionable, and it can fall out of fashion.
- A brand needs to be supported and nurtured.
- A brand can be sold separately from a product, and licensed to be associated with other products.

- A successful brand can launch a failed product and survive.

In contrast, products are goods. Quite often, a product is manufactured by a company that is different from the brand. **Kraft** doesn't make its own cheese. The **Ford Fusion** is really a **Mazda 6**. **Nike** licenses its brand name out to many manufacturers.

Brands are bought and sold separately from manufacturing facilities. Different brands often sell the same product with far different results.

It's true that brand attributes should be consistent with and supported by the attributes of the **product** it's attached to, but the **brand** has its own distinct role and identity.

Here are some of the exercises we go through when developing brand positioning and messaging. Give these five a try.

1. Develop customer personas

To develop a brand that will be meaningful to your consumers, you need to understand who your consumers are, what they're seeking, and why they're seeking it.

We recommend using consumer personas in planning. Through formal and informal research, marketers should develop profiles of consumers that include physical and emotional needs as well as their influencers, sources of **information**, and **media** and product consumption patterns.

Most likely, a matrix of several types of customers will gravitate to your brand out of a sense of need and preference.

Building your **brand** for success involves a constant effort to reinforce the attributes of the brand that meet the emotional needs of the consumer.

2. Develop your brand's persona

Create your **brand's** persona; in other words, describe it as a person. Think of how your **brand** may be perceived today and how you would like it to be perceived. This exercise enables you to see the brand in a more conceptual way. Challenge yourself to identify applicable traits.

Here are some thought-starters:

- Masculine or feminine?
- Age?
- Conservative or risk-taker?
- Sense of humor?
- Authoritative or social?
- What brands are its friends?
- How does the brand differ from its competition?
- Then, list your brand's promises to the consumer:

- What do you stand for?
- What do you deliver?
- What are your guarantees to the consumer (implied or real)?

Summarize your answers into one generalized and simple promise.

Now, identify your product's attributes and deliverables.

List your product's attributes:

- What does it do?
- How does it do it?
- What is it made of?

List your product's deliverables: Because of what the product does, what does the consumer receive?

3. Arrive at an ultimate consumer benefit by reconnecting brand and product

Connect the product's deliverables and the brand's promise. That intersect defines the benefit to your customer from experiencing your brand and using your **product**. That benefit is also your point of differentiation, and it will allow you to develop creative campaigns that the consumer connects to and finds meaningful.

A few examples:

- **Coca-Cola** makes you happy/smile.
- **Volvo** makes you feel safe and secure behind the wheel.
- **Harley-Davidson** lets you become a free spirit.

4. Get a partner to help

Sometimes, it takes a third party, such as a good agency, to come in to your business and help you separate your **brand** from your product.

An experienced hand can see the dynamics of your **brand** in the larger picture and lead you down the right path. Corporate marketing managers often get so wrapped up in the details of management that they need outside perspective to maintain a clear view of their situation.