



Brand Strategy: The 6 Key Elements

By Mandy Movahhed | April 11, 2016

Many people inside and outside the B2B world believe that brand strategy is not as important for B2B companies, and that branding is something that only B2C companies need to worry about. Nothing could be farther from the truth. **McKinsey & Company recently wrote in Forbes** magazine that some of the most successful B2B companies have as much or more of their company assets tied up in goodwill and other intangible assets—better known as their “brand”—as B2C branding giants like Procter and Gamble.

What is a Brand, Anyway?

The word “brand” isn’t always well understood. Some people use the term interchangeably with “company” as a kind of shorthand term. A “brand” is actually something very specific. It is, in essence, a promise to the buyer about the kind of product or experience they are purchasing, and how they will feel when they use it. Coca-Cola is a well-known brand name. Coke’s brand tells you what to expect from the experience of drinking a Coke and

differentiates it from similar products. The phrase “have a Coke and a smile” defines the Coke brand in the minds of many consumers as an experience that will make them happy.

Why is Brand Strategy Important?

Strong brands don't just happen. They are usually the results of a long-term strategy that guides how a company does business and is tightly bound to its understanding of customer needs. Why is having a solid brand strategy important in B2B? According to McKinsey, it is because the brand serves as a kind of shorthand for decision-makers, just as it does for consumers, but the stakes for B2B are often much higher. If a consumer chooses the wrong brand of toothpaste, they can always buy a new tube if the product doesn't work out. But in B2B, choosing the wrong products can have disastrous consequences. For example, if a manufacturer purchases poor quality components for the products it manufactures, it could cost the trust of not only B2B buyers, but also end consumers. In short, a strong brand gives the B2B customer confidence to move forward with a purchase decision.

According to [Harvard Business Review](#), building a solid brand benefits B2B companies three ways:

- It is an economical means of addressing customer concerns at scale.
- It prevents ad hoc marketing efforts that result in unclear messaging.
- It allows B2B marketers to increase margins and build loyalty with their own customer base and protects them from competition.

Building Your Brand: 6 Key Elements

So clearly, it is important to have a solid strategy in place to guide your brand. As you look at building your brand, there are six key elements to consider.

1. TARGET AUDIENCE.

In B2C, the target audience or market for your brand is the person who is most likely to buy your product. In B2B, your target audience is still the most likely buyer for your product or service, but because the nature of the purchasing process is more complex in B2B, you'll need to be looking not just at which companies are likely to buy from you, but at who within those companies is going to make those decisions. Is it a purchasing manager, a department manager, or a team of executives? Depending on the value of your products, the decision might have multiple influencers and decision-makers. You'll need messaging that speaks to all of them.

2. BRAND PROMISE.

The brand promise is the message that speaks to your target audience. It tells them what to expect from purchasing your product.

3. BRAND PERCEPTION

You'll want to take a look at what the perception of your brand has been in the past, what it is now, and what you want it to be in the future. One way to do this is to survey your current customers to find out what they think of your brand. Do your target customers know your brand? What do they think of you? What do you *want* them to think of you? Understanding how your brand is perceived is especially important if you are looking to change your business strategy: maybe you're looking to enter new markets, or you've been known as the low price provider in the past, and you are looking to move up market.

4. BRAND VALUES

Clearly define what guides your company's decision-making. These are the core values that your brand seeks to embody.

5. BRAND VOICE

How does your brand "speak?" What is its personality? Is it buttoned down and serious, or more playful and fun? The answer to these questions will depend the audience you are trying to engage, and there should be a fit between your audience and the voice you use to speak to them.

6. BRAND POSITIONING

Brand positioning is defined as the position that a brand holds (or wants to hold) in the mind of the customer. It can usually be boiled down into a one or two sentence "positioning statement" that defines the target audience, who the brand competes against, the benefits of using it, and a statement of proof for the brand promise. It tells you what the brand's position in the market is relative to its competitors, and what sets it apart from the rest. There are many components that make up a brand, including logos and packaging, brand equity (which is the value of perceptions and expectations about your brand), and the brand persona or voice. Your brand strategy is an essential tool to developing these elements so that they work together in the minds of purchasers to give them confidence when considering making a purchase. What is your company doing to develop its brand strategy? We'd love to hear about it in the comments.