

STOP BUSTING YOUR BRAND

**FIVE CHANGES YOU MUST MAKE TO FIX
YOUR BRAND AND DRIVE ROI**

- MARC STOIBER



INTRO- DUCTION

A brand is your greatest sales tool. It's also an awesome recruiting, innovation and operations tool. If you love metaphors, a great brand is like the bow of a ship - it points the way forward, and pulls all other parts of the company along in its wake.

I've been building brands for nearly 30 years. Everything from monster multinationals to scrappy startups. I really love entrepreneurial brands. Entrepreneurs get do or die, they make bold decisions, and they really, really love to sell.

So while this book is valuable to *anyone* building a brand, it will be of *particular* value to entrepreneurs.

Stop Busting Your Brand is a compilation of five mistakes I see SME brand stewards – from founders to folks who got stuck doing marketing at their company – make *all the time*.

The mistakes are so obvious you'll laugh.

Don't laugh. Instead, sit back and think – is there any chance *you* could be making these mistakes? If you are, you're leaving money on the table.

A CONFESSION

If you recognize yourself making some – or all – of the brand mistakes on the following pages, take heart. I've made them all, too.

Here's an example.

What I do best is take overcomplicated brands and simplify them. Invariably, *simpler* translates into *more powerful*.

Funny thing is, I didn't always know that simplifying was my superpower. I needed to hear it from a former boss, and several clients.

Even after they'd told me, it took a lot of pushing and prodding from trusted colleagues before I made *simple brand* the focus of my offering.

They were right. I discovered that a lot of companies were looking for a simpler, more powerful brand.

Cha-ching.

So if you think you're making some of the brand mistakes I describe in this book, do what I did. Grab someone you trust, and ask them if it's true.

Heck, you can even ask me.

Let's start, shall we?

The very simple cover of my book Didn't See It Coming. A great designer (and outsider to my company) came up with it, not me. It's proof that great things happen when someone with fresh eyes takes a fresh look at your brand.



BRAND BUSTER 1:

YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE

WHAT AM I TALKING ABOUT?

I'm talking about *not* understanding the personality behind your product...and most important, not understanding how your personality is *different* from all the other personalities pitching products just like yours to overwhelmed, apathetic consumers.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Long before you can ever sell people on the rational benefits of your product, you need to convince them that you're *trustworthy*. And people trust people, not things.

Don't believe me? Ask yourself, when was the last time you ever trusted someone you couldn't get a gut feel for? Never. Would you buy something from that person? Never.

You need to understand your brand personality. More important, you need everyone in your organization to understand your brand personality. And you need to make sure every piece of communication you put out there (from tweet to elevator chat) reflects that personality to outsiders.

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU HAVE THIS PROBLEM?

Gather your top folks around a table. Give them each a pack of post-it notes and a sharpie. Have them write five words that describe your brand personality *without showing anyone else*. Then have them do the same for your top three competitors.

Now hang all the post-it notes on the wall, mixing them up so there's no clear delineation between the *us* and *them* notes.

Is it a confused mess? It usually is.

**HOW DO YOU FIX IT?**

If you don't know who you are, you need to ask.

The folks who *love your product* see something magical that they're willing to shell out money for. So ask ten of those people to describe the personality of your brand. What they think you do best, and not-so-well. What sort of a feeling they get when they think of your brand vs. competitor brands.

Now repeat this process with ten people who have *switched from your product* to a competitor's, or who would *never consider buying your product*.

What you'll discover is that people often like a part of your brand that *you gloss over*. They may also tell you that your product is superior to the competition in *ways you never imagined*. *You like us because we fit in your pocket? Seriously?*

Enlightening, isn't it?

This exercise is incredibly powerful, because it forces you to *see yourself as others do*. It's the same reason folks hire personal coaches, why husbands ask wives to pick out their tie, and why women are so loyal to their stylists. People *who aren't you* have incredible insight into your personality.

NOT SURE IF YOU HAVE THIS PROBLEM?

Call me at 250-588-4170. Describe yourself to me in under a minute. Then describe your business to me in under a minute. Finally, describe your competitors in under a minute. I'll bet a nickel I can tell you if you have a brand personality that has a chance of standing out with consumers.

BRAND BUSTER 2:

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU DO BEST

WHAT AM I TALKING ABOUT?

TiVo was a brilliant innovation when it came out in 1999. It provided an on-screen guide of TV shows, and allowed you to record shows – or entire seasons – at the touch of a button. It let you search for shows based on things like director or actors. It had personal photo viewing, music offerings, and online scheduling features.

The only problem was, nobody understood what TiVo's Unique Selling Proposition was. *What was the one thing it did better than anybody else?*

As a result, nobody knew if TiVo was *exactly* the product they needed. Sales languished for years.

Chances are, your company does one thing best.

And yet, you offer an array of services. Or a binder of products with less-than-spectacular sales.

Your inability to edit is hurting you.

*Introducing TiVo,
the world's most
phenomenal...uhhh...*



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Two reasons.

First, you're *diluting your efforts* and using your resources inefficiently. Hiring too many people to produce stuff or services that don't sell. Holding expensive inventory. Using more warehouse or retail space than you need.

Second, consumers *don't have the mental bandwidth* to try and find your one great product or service if it's wrapped in a snarl of lesser offerings. So they just move on to something simpler and more clear... offered up by your competitor.

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU HAVE THIS PROBLEM?

Do you have *one product* or service that accounts for a *disproportionately high amount of your revenue*?

If so, do you have more than three other products or services you're offering?

If so, you have this problem.

HOW DO YOU FIX IT?

This isn't as simple as just cutting out all your underperforming products or services. What if your brand was built on one of those products, and people have come to recognize that as your hallmark?

Think of Land Rover – they still sell the boxy Defender, even though sales barely justify it. But that’s the model the world recognizes them for. It’s their *soul*.

Instead, you need to analyze what your brand attributes are, and understand which of those attributes are *not represented* in your star product. Then, you need to figure out a way to strengthen your star by aligning it better with your attributes.

For example, Land Rover’s star performers are the Range Rover and Discovery. But you can see nods to their rugged ethos everywhere – from their website to James Bond product placement.

Once you have a firm grasp on the brand values and products your consumers are buying, you need to begin *weaning them away* from the underperforming products or services in your roster. You may never be able to completely drop a line (for example, electronics companies still make vacuum tubes for guitar amplifiers and high end audio, despite tube technology being outdated and ridiculously niche), but with every pruning, your brand proposition will become clearer – and your sales will become easier.

NOT SURE IF YOU HAVE THIS PROBLEM?

Write me an email at marc@marcstoiber.com. In one sentence, describe what you do best. Then give me your three top competitors’ names. If I can’t find areas of overlap, repetition or confusion, I’ll eat my hat.

BRAND BUSTER 3:

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE WORTH

WHAT AM I TALKING ABOUT?

One of my clients sells a very technical piece of software. His user audience is a niche group of engineers in the power utility space.

Originally, this software was bought by the engineers themselves, not their bosses. It needed to be cheap enough to put on a credit card and expensed.

Today, however, it's procurement agents at the massive utilities doing the buying. My client's product is actually hindered by its low price – to procurement agents, low price is a sign of product inferiority.

This example reflects just one way your pricing may be hurting your brand. There are multiple ways of pricing – cost-plus, commodity, value, subscription, etc etc. Landing on the right one is a delicate operation that needs to be constantly revisited.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Your price tells me *everything* about your brand. Is it luxury or commodity? Is it a one-off transaction (software sale), or an ongoing relationship (SaaS)? You get the picture.

Most of us price *reactively*. We believe we need to be in the same zone as our competitors. But when we think of prices as a rational issue, we neglect the massive brand statement our price makes.

Brands are about *standing out* with attributes that are important to consumers. Determining what your consumer values – high value at high price, commodity at low price, or something in between – is critical to creating a competitive brand.



Pricing matters

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU HAVE THIS PROBLEM?

If you *aren't making money*, or you aren't making enough money, chances are you have this problem. Certainly, there can be a number of reasons for your lacklustre financial performance – but bad pricing strategy is a usual suspect.

HOW DO YOU FIX IT?

Start by checking out your more successful competitors. What pricing model are they using? Are they dramatically undercutting you, then winning back money with add-ons? Are they using a subscription model while you're one-off pricing? Are they lowballing because they've cut features? Are they offering freemiums to build a sense of reciprocity with consumers before hitting them with a higher priced main offering?

Now, it's time for a bit of brand soul-searching. Do you want to lump yourself in with these competitors, or can you find a niche market to be the sole supplier to? Do you want your brand perception to be luxury, or economy? Fully featured or a la carte?

It's a puzzle with dozens of pieces that *you need to experiment with*. My advice is to A/B test prices, as well as pricing models. The beauty of digital marketing today is that you can conduct these A/B tests with a minimum of fuss, hone in on the strategy that seems to be ringing the bell, and run with that.

But that's only half the job. Once you've found a price that seems to resonate with your consumers, find out *why*. Clearly, they see something in your brand that justifies what you're charging. What is it, and how can you amplify that to appeal to more people who may share these values.

Remember, the job here is to *understand* what makes your consumer smile, and buy. The wrong price is friction that slows down purchase. Your job is to eliminate the friction and make the sale – in a way that reinforces your brand, and your bottom line.

NOT SURE IF YOU HAVE THIS PROBLEM?

Call me at 250-588-4170. In under a minute, describe what you believe your brand stands for. Then, in under a minute, describe how you price and sell what you do. I'll bet I can provide a thought on an alternate pricing strategy that might just better reinforce your brand promise.

BRAND BUSTER 4:

YOU DON'T KNOW WHO'S BUYING

WHAT AM I TALKING ABOUT?

When we won the Bud Light business, one of the first orders of business was to try and understand the Bud Light drinker.

Instead of trotting out reams of research (“Our target is a 35 year old male with 2.5 children living in the suburbs with his first wife”), the Bud Light folks told us about Bob.

Bob used to love Bud. At college, he and his frat buddies would chug a dozen Bud each on a Friday night, furiously fist-bumping in their backwards baseball hats. Life was good.

Now, things have changed. Bob married his college sweetheart. All his frat buddies are married, too. Massive parties (and hangovers) are a no go, because Bob's 4 year old wants to play at 7am Saturday morning. Golf is the only buddy time Bob gets, if the chores are done.

Bob drinks Bud Light now. He can have a few after a round of golf with his friends. Drinking Bud Light allows Bob drive home after golf, stay in his current pant size, and not get any grief from his wife for irresponsible behaviour. Although he still wistfully looks back at his college days, Bud Lite is a bit of connective thread that reminds him that life is still good.

This story triggered one of the greatest campaigns I've ever been involved in. We *knew* Bob, and we knew what sort of brand messaging would appeal to him.

Can you define your target like that? Most brand stewards can't.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

If you don't know who you're selling to, you won't be able to sell to them.

This may sound inane, but go beyond the cliché, and you find a profound truth. You may understand your target as a *statistic*, but you know him / her as a *person*?

Definitely not Bob



HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU HAVE THIS PROBLEM?

Write your own story of Bob.

Ask your colleagues to give you the names of ten customers who fit this description perfectly.

If they can't, or their 'fit' only works on some of the personality traits you wrote about, you have this problem.

HOW DO YOU FIX IT?

Find the people who buy your product or service religiously. *Meet them.* Take them to lunch. Ask about their lives, their relationships, where they come from, what they love and hate. Find out what makes them tick.

Inevitably, you'll begin to see how your product or service *fits into their life*. And more important, why your competitors' offerings don't.

You may be the CEO of a larger company, and feel your schedule doesn't allow for this. You couldn't be more wrong. *The more your corporate bureaucracy shields you from your consumer, the more you need to get out and meet your fans and haters.*

One of the best ways I know – man the service hotline a few times a week. There simply is no way to get to know your buyer better than to listen to their complaints, and help solve their problems.

Then, to take us right back to the start of this section, write the story of Bob. Chances are, you'll be hitting on some real truths this time.

NOT SURE IF YOU HAVE THIS PROBLEM?

Send me an email at marc@marcstoiber.com. In that email, in under 150 words, describe your customer like Bud did. Then show me one piece of communication you've done in the past 6 months. I can tell you if the two line up.

BRAND BUSTER 5:

YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO TALK TO THEM

WHAT AM I TALKING ABOUT?

In my time as a copywriter, I sold diet bars to brides-to-be, I sold cognac to social climbers, I sold upmarket skincare to middle-aged Asian ladies, I sold you name it to you know who.

But dammit, I couldn't sell groceries if my life depended on it.

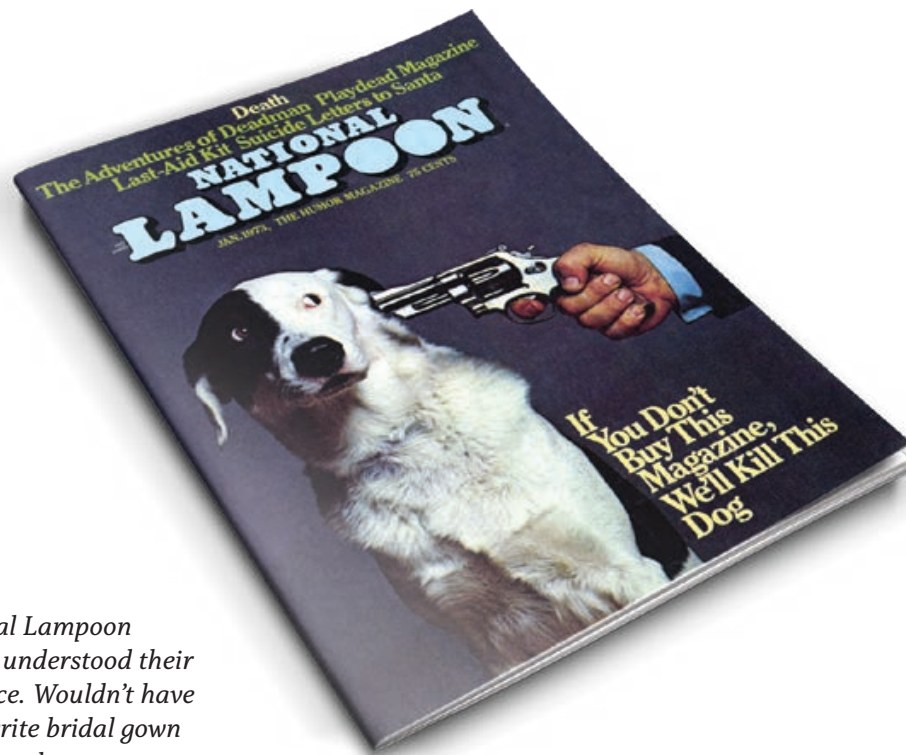
My grocery ads never cut through like those of the other writers I worked with. No idea why.

The lesson: your brand is a person, with very distinct personality traits. As a writer, I simply couldn't become the grocery person.

So, if *your brand* approached a consumer, how would it address them to instantly build rapport and establish a social bond?

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

As I've mentioned before, sales aren't made by rattling off rational features and benefits. They're made by *establishing social rapport and trust*. If you don't speak your consumer's language, using the inflections they use, your trust is blown. Your brand isn't legit. No sale.



National Lampoon writers understood their audience. Wouldn't have them write bridal gown ads, though.

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU HAVE THIS PROBLEM?

It's tricky. Say you're the founder of your company. You're probably convinced you *know* how to talk to your customers. Who's going to tell you that isn't true?

Say you're a marketer tasked with writing the copy for your company's brand. You've interviewed dozens of customers. You feel you *get* them. Who's going to say that you don't?

We're in the realm of psychology here. You can't learn the right way in a manual. In other words, even if your customers feel your communication style isn't legit, they might not be able to verbalize *why*.

That's because the part of our brain in charge of emotional responses is not in charge of communication. When we hear people say they feel a reaction *in their gut*, they're speaking a powerful truth. And their response will dictate their behaviour.

When in doubt, though, *check your brand language* against the language your top three competitors use. If yours is *dramatically* different, it could be a good sign – consumers may love your zig-when-they-zag attitude. Or, your language may be completely missing the mark. But the issue deserves investigation.

HOW DO YOU FIX IT?

Like most matters of psychology, there is no substitute for testing.

I'm not talking about focus groups, either. There's simply *no worse way* of determining people's emotional responses than putting them in a stuffy room together with stale sandwiches and warm Fanta, and asking them what's on their mind.

The testing I'm talking about is *A/B copy testing*, to see which triggers intuitively work with your consumers. Or doing *search term testing* to see which questions they most often ask about products like yours. Or even checking *how experts speak* to them in the category your brand lives in.

It isn't cut and dried. In fact, you never really get to perfect. People are strange and wonderful, and their trigger points wax and wane. The good news is, your competitors are in the same boat. You don't need to get to perfect – you just need to be a bit better than your competitor.

NOT SURE IF YOU HAVE THIS PROBLEM?

Sorry. No quick phone call or email exchange between us will provide the answers you're looking for. I need to talk to the people you're talking to, then look at how you're communicating with them, to get to insights that will help you. But hey, that's what the next section is for.

CLOSING THOUGHT:

**TALKING
MISTAKES IS OK.
TALKING
SOLUTIONS
IS BETTER.**

Throughout this little book I've offered up the opportunity to have a quick chat or email exchange, in order to give your brand a sniff test.

That may help confirm your suspicions about brand mistakes you may be making. But it won't provide solutions.

If you'd like to dig into things a bit more, we might be able to actually map out a course of action that works for your brand. The template for a solution, that is.

The way to make that happen is by booking a one-hour call with me. Just click the link to my calendar on the landing page you downloaded this book from. No obligation, no pressure, just the potential for getting past brand problems to brand solutions.

MARC STOIBER

Marc Stoiber is a creative strategist,
entrepreneur, and writer.

At previous points in his life, he's been
VP Green Innovation at Maddock Douglas,
Founder of Change Advertising,
National Creative Director of Grey Canada,
Creative Director of DDB Toronto, and
Copywriter at BBDO Dusseldorf and Grey Hong Kong.
His first writing job was translating a kung fu movie.
Really.

He writes on brand innovation for Huffington Post,
Fast Company, GreenBiz and Sustainable Life Media.

He also speaks on the subject from coast to coast, and
has been featured at TEDx. He can be reached at:

marc@marcstoiber.com

250-588-4170