

A SECRET RECIPE FOR SUCCESSFUL START UP BRANDING



Many startups today are born out of the ideation and passion of their owners with the implicit impression that they have the ultimate unique idea that will blow the consumers' mind away. The reality is - they don't. Ideas are a dime a dozen, make that two dozens, and consumers are more fickle today than ever before.

"It appears that the growth of small businesses will continue to progress in 2014 as small businesses have generated more than 65% of the new jobs created in the U.S. since 1996"



So how will you make an impact in a world of consumerism, startup boom, and technological zoom?



While the majority of startup owners have some idea of branding, their approaches and strategies are pretty fuzzy. As a startup owner, you don't stand a chance against competitors, big or small, if you don't brand effectively because:

"90% of new products fail"

- Steve Blank & Bob Dorf



Branding has become a key recipe for success in today's marketplace where products not only have to fight for entries but also for survival; that is why it has become such a buzz word nowadays. A simple blaring announcement of a product's launch no longer suffice; instead a recipe for branding strategy is required, preferably implemented right from the start.

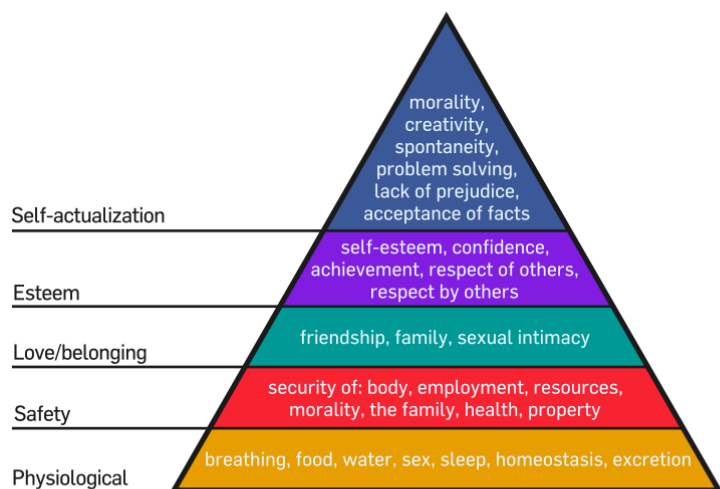


WHY STARTUPS NEED TO BRAND

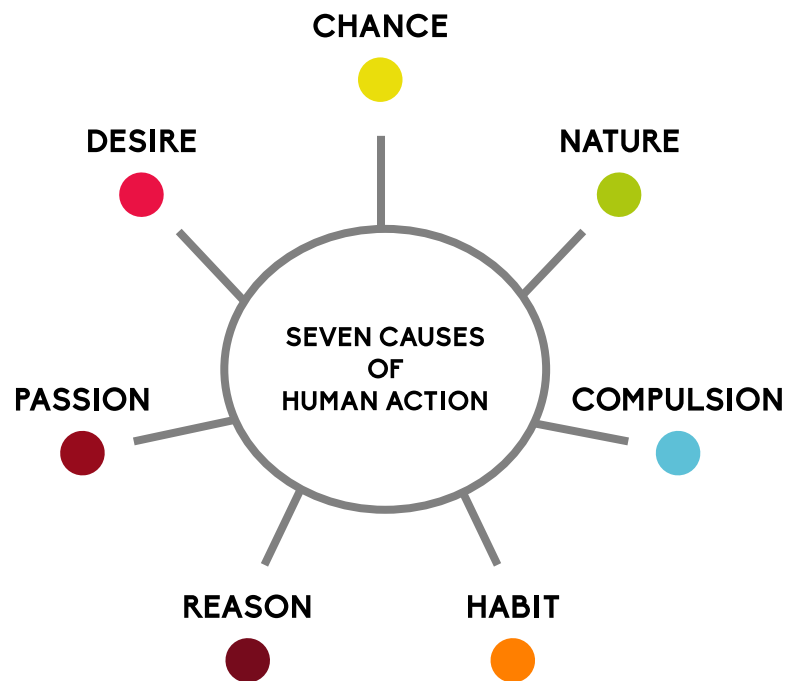
One of the ways startups can get noticed, stand out of the crowd and beat competition is by implementing branding strategies which have proven to work.

But before we attempt to understand why branding is essential for startups, we need to understand human psychology towards it.

When it comes to consumer behavior, theories like **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** and the **Seven Causes of Human Action** by **Aristotle** can be directly applied for coming up with a successful branding strategy. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, as you progress into the higher stages of human needs, desires become more emotional as opposed to just being about survival.



So unless you understand human psychology and develop marketing collaterals which address these needs, your brand will fail miserably in the competitive market.



Likewise, when you talk about **Aristotle's Seven Causes of Human Action**, you know that you must leave nothing to chance and ensure that you target your customers according to their human and environmental nature.

With these theories in mind, now we come to understand why branding works and is essential for startups to successfully launch into the world of business.

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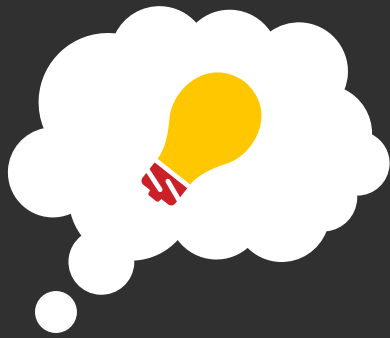
trust and loyalty

People are judgmental by nature. They have opinions, views and preferences. Branding is about making that first impression on your potential customers by appealing to their judgment. Considering the fact that **the majority** of people judge you within the first **twentieth of a second**, having a positive first impression will most likely appeal to their loyalty towards your product, hopefully for a long time, if not for a lifetime.

advocacy

Human beings are social creatures; they like to interact with each other. Branding is really about communicating your message, and getting people to spread through word of mouth. The aim is to effectively launch your product into the marketplace. One notable startup which has effectively used advocacy in branding is **Pinterest**.

The reason why Pinterest has become a successful brand is due to the word of mouth advocacy of the platform among its users who've come to rely on the DIY solutions posted there.



Today, marketers will testify to the fact that conversations about a brand have more lasting impact on consumers than a mere advertisement on a billboard, a banner ad or a television commercial. In this sense, branding your startup with help initiate conversations and advocacy.



WHAT'S YOUR BRAND'S BIG IDEA?



consistency

People by nature become attached to things they love. Branding helps create this attachment which has been dubbed as “lovemarks”. A lovemark is a marketing concept of creating brands that people become emotionally attached with and love because they (brands) have always been consistent in giving their customers what they want. It’s a term coined by Kevin Roberts in 2004, the then CEO of **Saatchi & Saatchi** advertising agency giant. To make your idea a loved one, startups need to scheme to establish emotional connection between the product and the customer consistently.



Though there are plenty of examples of brands that use lovemarks, one of the most prominent ones today are **Coca-Cola** and **Apple** products. In one of their recent initiatives, Coca-Cola connects laborers working in the United Arab of Emirates with their loved ones by providing phone booths at various localities. The program is dubbed ‘Hello Happiness’ and grants a 3 minute free international call when you drop in a Coca-Cola bottle cap. Now that’s creating consistency in being a lovemark.

The IKEA logo is displayed in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters on a dark blue rectangular background. The logo is positioned on the left side of the page, within a vertical band that also contains a light green section above and below the blue one.

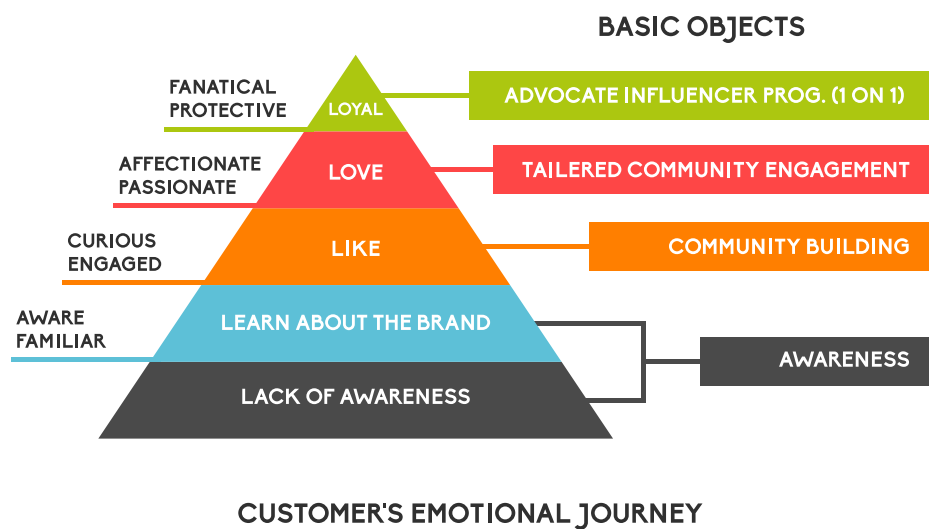
authenticity

People are born honest. Over time this trait may dwindle, and we learn how to lie, but essentially we are all honest, and expect the same from our environment. This is true for companies as well. Customers do not like to be associated with, much less purchase from companies which do not keep their promises. Successful brands are those that meet up with this expectation and remain true to their consumers, time and again. The authenticity of their products can never be a point of compromise through copying, inferior quality production, or even doing something socially unacceptable.

Ikea for example has been a brand which has always been known to produce quality products and functional furniture which are original, unique and comfortable at a cheap price – everything their young customers need.

competitive advantage

One of the most important reasons for branding is having a distinctive and competitive advantage over rivals. Many startups are under the impression that if they are small they don't have a chance to compete against multinational corporations with large pools of resources. That is true to some extent but core competitive advantage today still remains with companies which can differentiate their products from others whether through brand identification or brand experience.

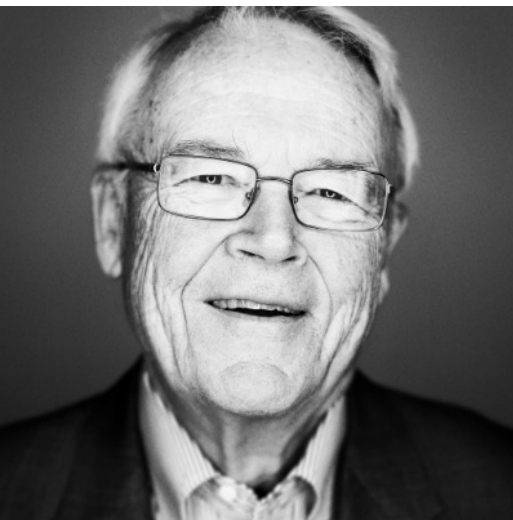


So now that you have the “why”, let's come to the “how” of successful startup branding.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESSFUL STARTUP BRANDING

Before we begin with the adoption of branding, let's understand what we mean by it. According to *Entrepreneur* magazine, branding is:

"The marketing practice of creating a name, symbol or design that identifies and differentiates a product from other products."



How do these fit into the grand scheme of branding? According to **David Aaker's** marketing model, brand equity is the sum of brand awareness, brand loyalty and brand associations, and at the center of all these is the brand identity.

Branding in this sense is both a visual and an experiential practice. When you brand, you promise to deliver on that promise whether in the form of quality products, consistent service or innovative ideas. Your startup should brand right from the beginning. Given these ideologies, here's the recipe to successfully brand your startup right from the beginning:

1. defining your brand

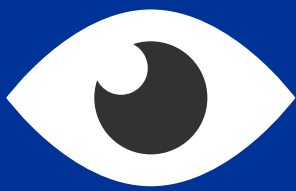
To begin with, the branding process starts with a definition of your brand. In this definition you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What is your company's mission?
- What do your products or services offer?
- How do customers and prospects associate with your company?
- What qualities do you want them to remember when they consume your product?

Defining your brand entails spending a chunk of your time in researching about the needs and habits of current as well as future customers. Remember, your focus should be finding out as much about them and not just implementing what you think you know about them. Use the wide range of tools and programs available online, run analytics and find out as much as you can about the likes and dislikes of your target audience.

2. creating a difference

Differentiation or **being authentic** in branding means the big idea that separates your product from the crowd. Brand differentiation is as critical as **consistency** and hence it should start from the business' infancy.



vision - the big idea

Once you have a clear vision for your startup, it's time to think of the big idea; after all, it's what makes it different from the plethora of other generic products isn't it? So consider, what's your big idea that will differentiate you from the others; what's so special about your startup brand that will be worth the time of the customers. Elements of uniqueness like cheapness, quality, special material, customer service expertise, user experience, an extraordinary promise, or exceptional beautiful products which can be found nowhere in the market are some aspects to consider.

values

Consider this scenario, when a mother goes to a supermarket with rows upon rows of products on offer, how will yours stand out from the crowd. Differentiation for difference's sake does not work effectively according to [Mark Di Somma](#). In his article "[Questioning the Quest for Brand Differentiation](#)" Di Somma writes that,

"differentiation should be based on elements that appeal to the consumers instantly and make their heart beat go faster."

Your brand should be able to:

- Fascinate, surprise, delight or love the product enough to buy it
- Induce positive (or negative) user experience that they will remember it the next time they see it
- Create channel of familiarity or divergence from other products to make choice easier
- Generate interest whether to try it, give opinion or endorse the product
- Adopt pricing strategy that will commiserate with the target audience

All in all your brand should provide some kind of tangible or intangible value that no one is offering, or at least offering it in a different manner.

3. creating a brand identity

Now that you have your vision, mission and values in place it's time to identify it. In branding terms a brand identity is defined as the outward visual representation of what your business is all about. Whatever it means to the owner, and what he/she wants to communicate to the consumers should be presented in a graphical emblem that would help the customers have a mental visual of the brand when they think of those qualities. A brand identity is thus a fundamental symbol that would sum up the brand's message, differentiate it among competitors, and act as a communicative display about the brand.

brand design

Among a startup's launch processes, brand identity design is perhaps one of the most crucial steps. After all it is the outer wear that will present your company. Just like an employer decides your fate by judging what you've worn to a job interview, customers make their decision about your brand within a few seconds' glance at your brand identity.

It's therefore worth investing time and money in creating a **visual identity that would communicate your brand values, promise and vision**. It's not only about a graphic that will act as a face for your company. In fact a brand identity (or a logo) have multifaceted considerations. From the symbol, fonts, and colors to the tagline, placement of your company name and graphic elements all contribute towards creating a brand mark for your startup. What you are aiming for is a brand mark that is trendy yet timeless to last for a considerable duration of time. It should follow but does not become obscure in the industry category that your startup operates in. And finally, it should be simple (or illustrative) enough to be used in all sorts of medium to represent your business.



brand personality

Just as people recognize and remember you by your face, voice and how you interact with them, a brand needs to have a personality, a face to go by. So how do you go about building your brand personality?

Start by defining the personality traits of your business. For instance, while toyshops and kid's garment stores have an air of friendliness and humor, corporate firms or lawyers offices will focus on professionalism and expertise. The point is, whatever the characteristics of the personality, they should be in-line and appropriate according to the kind of products and services which you are selling. Alternatively, if the business is driven by a well-known personality, like [Richard Branson](#) of [Virgin](#), it can also reflect their characteristics.



4. personalizing the brand identity

Because your brand is something that consumers need to identify and associate with, it's crucial that you add the element of personalization. Now contrary to common belief of small companies, personalization is more than just external; it's about portraying your business as a living entity.

brand connection

Making a mark on the market and connecting with people should be one of your primary goals in branding. Unless you have attributes and qualities which draw in customers, you won't be able to succeed as a business. A perfect example of the way connecting with your target audience can have a positive outcome is [Apple, Inc.](#) Though the company started off as a computer manufacturer, their strategy for the iPod identity branding has proven that connecting with your customers directly and appealing to their emotions can be highly rewarding.

How can your startup capitalize on this? There are hundreds, if not thousands of businesses that have failed miserably simply because they are disconnected from their customers. This may have been due to lack of well-trained customer services staff or simply because they have not learned to listen to their customers, thereby not able to deliver on the brand promise.

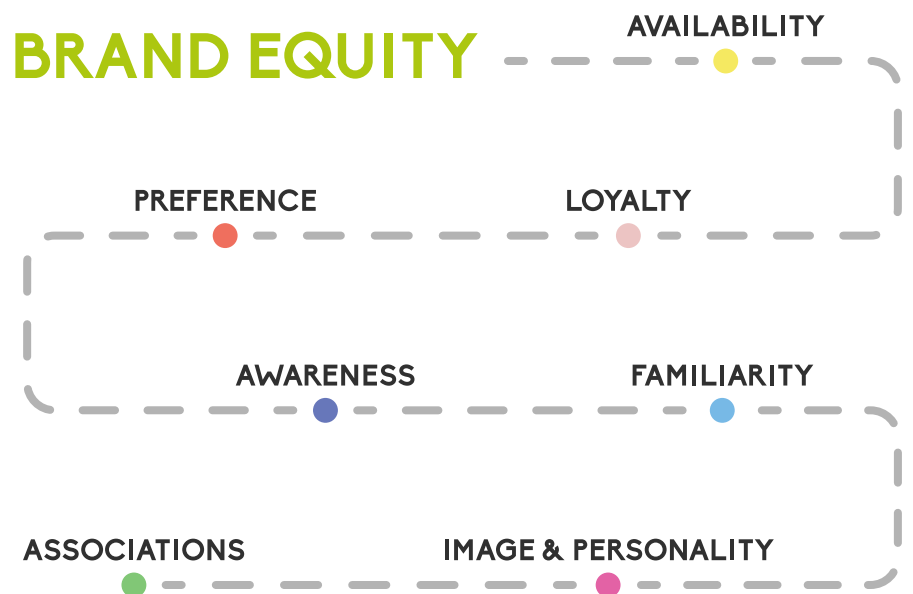
brand attitude

At the end of the day your brand personality will establish your brand attitude or rather direct your audience to develop an attitude towards your brand. How you cultivate brand attitude requires knowledge of how consumers perceive your brand through market research, and using that knowledge to create strategies for creating a positive brand attitude.

Care needs to be taken when creating a strategy for developing positive brand attitude. The aim should be to help solidify and increase brand recognition and motivate attachment rather than simply evoking emotions towards your brand. The more difficult attitudes your brand is able to overcome, the easier it is to create positive associations and brand loyalty.

5. building your brand equity

Once you have successfully thought of the promise for your customers, you have to start working on the crucial brand components. For this, you will first need to find out how you can correctly communicate your message. There are a few things which you can try to build your brand equity from the ground up:



brand awareness

Much like the word branding, you will hear quite a lot of people talking about 'brand values'. As an entrepreneur, you must understand that the values of your business are the essentials that your company stands for. When communicating these values, you can either tell your target audience about them implicitly or explicitly. However, thinking of these values and differentiating them may be challenging because almost all companies want the same kind of value and it is not easy to communicate them in the right way. It is up to you to make your brand unique. How do we do that, especially for a startup which has no historical basis to fall on to?

One of the most successful strategies or methods in brand awareness creation nowadays is storytelling. Storytelling is all about telling customers where you are coming from, what you do, and how you are connected with them. You can tell your story to your target audience and show the human side of your business through various mediums like print, broadcast, social media, and online media. The majority of brands now understand the influential power of brand storytelling, which is why millions of dollars are being spent on this technique nowadays.

brand association

Once your brand name is out there, it's time to project your visual identity, and engage your audience to interact with your brand. Most organizations find it lucrative to establish an excellent customer contact point where anyone can come up and ask any question regarding your brand. In this type of contact point a startup can make sure it benefits from the interaction by:

- Providing opportunities to escalate word of mouth publicity
- Appealing to the audience with visually beautiful displays
- Sending out free samples for quality checks of product
- Reinforcing the brand promise at every point of contact
- Creating desirability of the product in the customer's life
- And sending out a consistent message about your brand

Overall, it's the brand experience that you want to capitalize on so that your audience will always have a positive association with your brand identity.



brand loyalty

Brand loyalty requires a positive perception of brand quality which comes from having credibility. In simple terms, brand credibility shows your authority over the domain that your business operates in. Your business may not be a multi-national corporation or a large retail chain but it has a command over an industry niche that others may not excel in. If you excel in personal interaction by delivering exceptional customer service, flaunt it. If your product is about organic foods from a particular region, let people know about its specialness. Think [The Body Shop](#) and [Askinosie Chocolate](#). The key is to establish a reputé among customers and prospects, to develop trust so much so that they will always be loyal to you when referring to someone else, and in adverse situations defend your brand.

Once you gain their trust, developing a strategy to engage loyal customers becomes much easier. Long term loyalty programs like coupons, subscribers list, bonus points, and loyalty cards are some of the tools that could be used to measure the level of loyalty your customers have with your brand. Moreover, to ensure they will always endorse their loyalty to your brand, deliver on the promise you have made with them time and again. In other words, make your brand a **lovemark**.

TO SUM IT ALL

Branding is an ongoing process which needs to be analyzed and altered every step of the way. The only way you can make it valuable is if you make brand associations connect with the customers on an emotional level and on a regular basis. Your brand is the protective armor that your business wears to survive in the competitive world. Failure to make your brand interesting and inviting will eventually put your business at risk, and it may have to join the thousands of startups which have died tragic deaths.

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ABOUT THE COMPANY

ZillionDesigns is a graphic design agency which offers an efficient and outstanding crowdsourcing platform for graphic designers and companies to meet branding needs. The company offers logo design, blog templates, stationery design, marketing material, website design and development, as well as search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine ranking.



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