

# Building Brand Equity

Building Brand Equity...through Client Experience.

For professionals, your “brand” is your reputation. Unlike product brands like “Pepsi” and “Coke,” professional service branding is a delicate process of creating positive prospect and client experiences. The slow way to build brand equity is to do it one client at a time through referrals and word-of-mouth. The faster way is to extend that experience through the use of media. Social media gives you multiple outlets for self-expression, extending the brand experience through online text, graphics, video and interactive discussion on social media and social bookmarking sites. PR and publicity in many forms gives prospects the experience of your expertise, your style and public persona.

Video on your website takes your prospect one step closer to doing business with you. They can get to know you *before* they actually meet with you in person or by phone.

So how can you successfully build your brand equity?

## FIRST, PICK YOUR PROSPECT.

**First, pick your prospect** or client, by that I mean profile them. Who are they, physically, intellectually, emotionally? Where are they located? What do they believe? What are their problems? No matter how hard you try, you will never be able to solve everyone’s problems or serve everyone’s needs. Narrowing your focus can make branding more efficient and effective. Target, target, target.

## SECOND, HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Identify the problems you solve for this audience and the value you can provide to them. When choosing professionals, people choose those who they can trust to solve their problems.

### **THIRD, WHAT MAKES YOU DIFFERENT?**

Never assume you have no competition. Your prospects will always find an alternative solution or advisor. If you can't solve their problem at a price that's affordable and in the required timeframe, then someone else will. So you must answer the question: "Why choose you?" Are you smarter, more qualified, better versed in local issues, connected to other experts in the field, easy to reach, more empathetic, more affordable, more accessible? More what? Or do you have a better or unique solution to the prospects' problems? Do you have a better understanding of the issues? Do you have a unique approach? Do you have relevant experience?

### **FOURTH: MAKE IT MEMORABLE.**

Have you ever met someone at an event or meeting who really impressed you? What made them stand out in the crowd? Was it what they wore, how they spoke, or what they said? A prospect's experience with you has simply got to be memorable! Be creative. Find a way to leave them with a distinct impression of your value. Some ideas: help them. Offer an important resource, tool, website, or a referral. Be invaluable. Be remarkable in some way so that you get their attention and plant some intrigue. Make them want to "google" you as soon as they get their iPad in hand.

### **FIFTH: BUILD BRAND EQUITY WITH SUBSEQUENT "ENCOUNTERS."**

Continue to build brand equity—by mail, by email, by social media, by phone....and by adding another distinction to your brand experience with each encounter.

One more important point: the "you" and "your" in this post must encompass everyone who represents your firm. Never remember to market internally before you take your show on the road. Your associates and support staff can either undermine your branding efforts or reinforce your brand, building that equity at every client encounter. ■