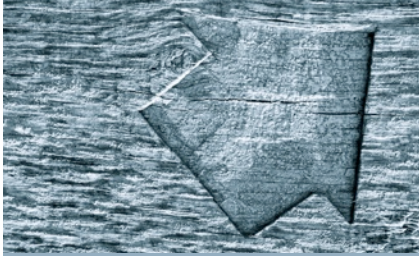


# Be A Genius...



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It's All About You...Sort Of

## The Small Business Brand

Lead Story

### What is a Brand?

What is a brand? How can it help my marketing and more importantly, my sales? Why does it matter? What do I have to do to have a good brand?

These are common questions. Branding has been in the spotlight for many years and remains a hot topic. But what is a brand? Many would answer that question by giving an example of a logo, ad or slogan.

- ◆ The Target "bullseye"
- ◆ I'm lovin' it (McDonalds)
- ◆ The Mercedes "peace-thingy" logo
- ◆ The Yankees NY (sorry Mets fans)

The above were answers given when I asked about famous brands while taking a management team through a rebranding effort. In reality, the identity graphic, the slogan, the logo, or insignia...none of these are "The Brand". The brand is bigger and different than just a logo or graphic element.

So what is the brand? Let's take a look at one of our examples. Target stores are more than the bullseye logo. They are known for good prices and selection. Their own brands of merchandise. Clean, bright stores. Cool commercials with that funny dog.

All of these things are attributes, elements of the Target brand. Some are elements of their marketing communications. Others are not. And there are many more attributes not listed here.

The attributes that make up a brand are legion. It really is the amalgamation of

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From the Coach

### Creating a Brand...

I often hear and read about the concept of creating a brand. When I see this turn of phrase it makes me think of the internet boom era. In that heady time many companies thought their entire business plan could revolve around creating a brand image that would draw people to use their internet offering. Crazy ads ran during the Super Bowl, wild creative and logos, artsy landing pages. It was fun! Yet at its core it seemed contrived.

In the end, a real value proposition was required, and in many cases all that was created was an image...not a brand.

You can't really "create" a brand using ads and logos and spokesmodels. That is part of the equation, especially for larger

### What is Our Brand?

- ◆ Our logo
- ◆ Our slogan
- ◆ Our "look"
- ◆ Our colors

companies. But it isn't all of it. Coke has a great brand that is brought to market by the shape of its bottle, its color red, its fun commercials and its logo.

Yet Coke's brand has so many more ingredients that matter to the successful capturing and retaining of its customers...it's history, it's people, it's

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## SO ASK!

Each month we record a podcast answering questions.

So ask! Identify yourself, but be assured your name will not be used in the podcast. We will acknowledge receipt of your email and may respond directly. If the question is such that its answer would be of interest to others, it will probably be addressed in the podcast as well.

So ask! Your question need not be on this month's subject, although we hope this content causes a question or two on the subject!

So Ask!  
genius@geniusmarketing.com

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culture, it's use of data, it's product development process,...

Now since the logo is fun, the colors are fun, the commercials are fun, we need to be aware and make sure we focus on those other important areas that help us BUILD the brand. I hope the information in this publication helps you think about your organization and how to develop a brand that increases in equity and value. And, I hope you have fun, too!

**Stephen L. Eckert**  
**The Marketing Coach**

### Points to Consider:

- ♦ Are your communications trying to create an image that does not accurately reflect the organization?
- ♦ Does your marketing capture the attributes and experience that really matter to the prospect and customer?
- ♦ Do you use varying communications (i.e. website, brochure, direct mail, ads, etc.) and the advantages of each media to communicate brand attributes?

### Perception and Perspective

## Prospects' Viewpoint Affects Brand Perception

The organizational brand is almost personal. It's unique to the organization because of the people, processes, culture, products, and go-to-market strategies that are uniquely of that organization. Companies that understand that their brand is their organization and vice-versa guard their brand diligently, making sure that what is presented to the prospect and customer reflects the particular attributes that make up the value proposition. Even "laid back" Jimmy Buffett is absolutely shark-like when it comes to the brand elements that make up his beach persona, citing the importance of his brand on a 60 minutes interview and backing it up by launching lawsuits against trademark infringements over the past few years.

The Brand is worth considering, having a plan to build and communicate it, and worth guarding.

Still, there are attributes of a brand that cannot be controlled. For instance, public and professional response to the

organization and its offerings is beyond the control of the organization. Media, publicity, the internet bloggers and YouTube video responders, review sites, complaint sites...these elements exist and affect the brand and the way people perceive it.

Beyond these potentially negative elements, the perception of the brand is the number one attribute that can't be controlled. For the prospect and customer perception of the brand is owned by those individuals. All the communications elements talked about throughout this newsletter are focused on creating, changing or maintaining/enhancing those individual perceptions. Yet individual perspectives greatly affect perception of the brand.

An example: New York City has a brand. Even saying the name elicits images, thoughts, and connotations that reflect experiences of some attributes of the city. Here are some base attributes:

- ♦ Large
- ♦ Diverse
- ♦ Busy with activity

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## THE BRAND QUIZ

### HOW DO YOU STACK UP?

The following “Quiz” will help start to uncover attributes of the brand and elements that communicate the brand. Take it yourself, or craft it into an informal research project, asking the brand’s constituents: employees, suppliers, prospects and customers.

What words or phrase best reflects the main idea or essence of the organization?

What picture or image comes to mind when you think of the organization?

Who embodies what the organization stands for? If no one person comes to mind, what would that person be like? What traits in members of the organization fit what the organization stands for?

On a scale with “price” on one end and “value” on the other, where does our \_\_\_\_\_ products (services) fit? (Prompt: towards one end, in the middle?)

On a scale with “value” on one end and “quality” on the other, where does our \_\_\_\_\_ products (services) fit? (Prompt: towards one end, in the middle?)

What communications or parts of these materials (i.e. website, brochure, direct mail, ads, etc.) reflect well what the company stands for? What attributes of the organization or the product (service) are missing?



### Continued from page 1

the elements that make up the customers’ experience and the prospects’ enticement.

As we consider how to present our brand in our marketing, we need to be aware of what we’re working on and how it relates to making sales.

### The Brand Starts with People

Your organizational brand begins with people. This is true with very large corporations and even more true the smaller the organization. Who comes up with products and services to deliver? People. Who sets the vision for an organization? People. Who interacts with customers? People. Who makes an organization what it is? People. The people are the starting point for any brand.

It may seem in large organizations that a single person could not affect the brand. They can. Persons throughout the organization affect the brand. Let’s take a look at two sports

**The Brand is the amalgamation of attributes which make up the customer’s experience and the prospect’s enticement.**

organizations, the Dallas Cowboys and the Pittsburgh Steelers. Their owners obviously affect their brands by who they are and how they manage. Jerry Jones and Dan Rooney have helped build powerful organizations (and brands). Employees of the team reinforce that brand. That’s why fans might see a college or free-agent player and say that player wouldn’t be a good “fit” with one team or the other. Not because they are bad athletes, but because they don’t have the persona that fits with the essence, or the brand, of that team.

Organizations have an identity because of their owners, the people that owner hires and the philosophy for running the organization. Truly, the essence of the organization, the brand, moves from the leadership through the employees to the prospect and customer.

The smaller the organization, the more people are the brand. A consumer product company, say producing toothpaste, relies more on marketing communications, packaging and other non-personal brand elements to carry the brand attributes to the prospect and customer. Yet the person who sells the toothpaste to store buyers and (even more so) the customer service phone representative also make up the brand.

Continued on page 4



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### Brand Veracity

If people make up the brand, obviously hiring is important. It is also critical that the brand flow out of the owner or management team. Organizations run based on the way they are set up to run. People, both employees and customers are attracted to companies that hold values similar to their own and have a mission in which they can believe. Making a promise and delivering on that promise is one big step in that process. People don't like phonies, hypocrites or liars. The best organizations have a vision set from the top that is further enhanced by its employees. The brand is built through the consistent delivery of the essence of who and what the organization is at its core and how it will deliver on its value proposition.

### Communicating the Brand

So both internally and externally the brand must be communicated in a way that reflects the amalgamation of brand attributes. All materials that reach the audience are part of the branding...the communicating of the brand. From the packaging to the ads to the web to the direct sales pitch, all of these elements need accurately portray the brand to the prospect and customer. Not only is the message of the ad important, but where it is placed matters, too. If my brand is upscale, traditional and conservative, I probably don't want to be in a publication or on a website that serves motorcycle riders. No disrespect to bikers, but they have chosen an activity (or lifestyle)...you might even say a personal brand...that is on purpose not traditional or conservative. (Although those cruising bikes are upscale when you look at the price!)

The point is that where the ads are placed makes a difference. The message, the price, the distribution channel...all of these elements both communicate and affect the perception of the brand. Pricing communicates the brand. Discounting communicates the brand. Delivery method communicates the brand. And on and on...

All these elements must reflect accurately the attributes of the brand. If they don't, they are either negatively affecting the brand, or aren't accurately communicating the brand. An example: the CEO as pitch man. It is powerful when the owner or top manager makes the brand claim (and then lives up to it) him/herself. It can be overdone; we sometimes tire of seeing CEO's making a pitch on TV and it certainly isn't necessary. If management is used in communications, those communications and their message must "jive" with the CEO. If we personally knew the owner or management of an organization and we saw them in ads for the product or service, we should recognize some consistency between the two. In the same manner, choosing a celebrity spokesperson is paramount to tying the organizational brand to the personal brand of that spokesperson.

### What's Your Organization's Brand?

As you are thinking about your brand, it is important to remember this: your organization has a brand, whether you know it or not. A perception exists in the marketplace that "is" your brand. If that perception and what the organization is really about and trying to do don't jive, then there is work to be done. The brand must be better communicated and the promise it

**See the table on page 6 for more on attributes and elements of a brand**

makes must be delivered. It takes time, but consistent brands have the most loyal customers.

### Points to Consider

- ♦ What is your organization's brand? (See the quiz on page 2 for more insight)
- ♦ How are you communicating your brand?
- ♦ Do those elements (whether people, communications or online) reflect what the company is about?
- ♦ Is the prospect's knowledge of the customer experience during the buying process accurately communicating the customer experience?

### WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT BRAND ELEMENT?

A friend was attracted to an eyeglass retailer by their advertising. The ads were slick, attractive and communicated the expertise of the staff. She was very pleased with the store that also exuded the same message. She was waited on promptly, and was ready to buy, but the price seemed higher than she thought it should be. When she commented on this, although she was still motivated to buy, the response she received was "I hear that a lot, but that's the price." In sort of a "take it or leave it" way.

That clerk probably heard the high price comment often, because if it was my friend's perception, it was probably a lot of people's perception. Somewhere along the way, the company didn't tell their story well enough (a story of supreme quality and therefore premium pricing); or they missed on their pricing. It happens.

Either way, the sale was lost, the prospect was motivated to tell me the story, and probably that clerk was further empowered to agree with prospects and blame the store for the high pricing. And the brand was devalued.

In a smaller business, and especially a service business, people are almost always the most important element in the brand because people make up so much of the customer experience.

## The Geek Ambassador Carry Over Visual Branding to your Online Marketing Campaign

When using online social marketing to establish your brand, it is important to use consistent visuals to gain brand recognition. In the case of Starbucks Coffee, the white cup with brown insulator wrap is instantly recognizable. Is the staff of Scrubs drinking Starbucks Coffee in this scene?

No, but looking at the white cup with brown wrapper instantly evokes the impression of Starbucks Coffee.

The funny thing is, that Starbucks primarily uses their logo, not their cups in their advertising, but you see people on the street every day carrying their Starbucks cups and even if they are just carrying a white cup with a brown wrapper, it's easy to automatically associate it with Starbucks and think of their product. Starbucks has been using the same white cup with brown wrapper for years and people have come to rely on that as a message for Starbucks Coffee. Keep your packaging and online visuals consistent to help gain recognition for your brand.

The same idea applies to the image of white earbuds evoking the idea of Apple's iPod. Do other portable MP3

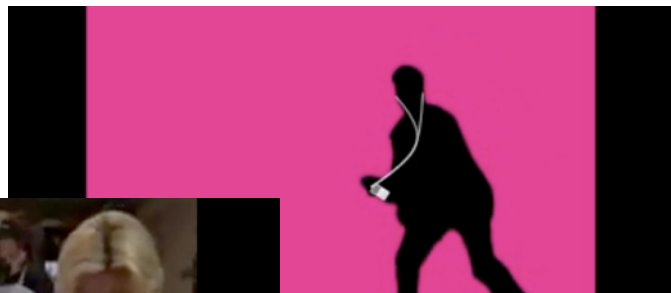
players come with earbuds? Of course they do, but the use of the shadow image with highlighted white earbuds has become synonymous with the iPod specifically. If you think about it, you see people every day walking, jogging or shopping while listening to their MP3 players and the only part of the MP3 player that is visible are the earbuds. The



MP3 player is stashed away in their pocket, purse or briefcase.

When developing their iPod product, Apple understood that it was unlikely that the iPod would be seen when people were using it, so in order to develop something that was marketable, Apple was sure to make the earbuds white and then Apple integrated this image in all of the advertisements for the iPod. That way, whenever you see anyone with white earbuds, you automatically think of Apple's iPod even if the person is listening to another MP3 player.

Developing a consistent image for your company to use in print media, on the web and on the street is very important. You want people to think of your product first, even if they see someone carrying a competitors' product. What image can you use to improve



recognition of your product and evoke thoughts of your product in the head of your audience? What image is going to make your brand the brand associated with the product or service that you sell? This is the image that you want to put in front of your television, print and street audience and especially your internet audience.

**Jennifer Stockdale**  
**The Geek Ambassador**

### Points to Consider

- ♦ Visuals are powerful brand elements, especially online. What images are you using?
- ♦ How can you create imagery that embodies your brand and can be delivered on and offline?

## THE GEEK AMBASSADOR

### WEB MARKETING SIMPLIFIED

The Geek Ambassador is partnering with the Marketing Coach to simplify the learning curve and help implement web strategies. Whether you need advice and creative ideas that you can implement yourself, or help executing online promotions, The Geek Ambassador can deliver. Plus, in conjunction with the Marketing Coach, you can be sure your on and offline marketing delivers an integrated, solid message.

If you'd like to integrate new web tools like social networking to your marketing plan, email [genius@geniusmarketing.com](mailto:genius@geniusmarketing.com).



## Attributes & Elements

## Capturing & Communicating the Brand

<b>Price</b>	Pricing strategy is usually based on financial models, but is also one of the attributes that communicate value to the consumer. A low price can boost perceived value, or reinforce perception of low quality. Deep discounting can have a similar effect.
<b>Positioning</b>	Organizational and product positioning means placing the product along the consumers' value/price continuum. Think about car nameplates - Lexus - high, Yugo - low.
<b>Perceived Value</b>	Somewhat controlled by consumers and prospects based on the value they place on your brand attributes...but base attributes can be big drivers of PV. (See page 3 on perception and perspective for more.)
<b>True Value</b>	All products have a "real" value in the marketplace; simply stated, how much you can "get" for your product or service. Sometimes resale is a good indicator of TV - what would your product go for on eBay? While the organizational brand can be devalued, true value often will remain relatively constant.
<b>Experience</b>	The experience of buying and using the product...and experience after the sale (service, etc). From the first impression to the end of the product's usable life...yup, everything.
<b>Perspective</b>	Prospects' and customers' perspective affects their perception of a brand. (See page 3 on perception and perspective for more.)
<b>Delivery System</b>	Packaging of the product, where the product is purchased, how the service provider is dressed and acts, how the building looks, etc. All these affect the brand.
<b>Quality</b>	Perhaps the most obvious on the list, quality dictates much about the brand. A strategic decision - at what quality level is the product/service most profitable and still an asset to the brand?
<b>Communications</b>	Marketing communications (ads, direct mail, etc.), sales pitch and presentation materials, online presence, how the phone is answered, how the invoice is worded...every "customer touch" the organization delivers.
<b>Identity</b>	The logo, the mascot, the slogan, the tagline, the graphics. The identity is important because it is ubiquitous.
<b>Message</b>	What we say - yes, meaning good grammar and no typos, but also how we capture our mission, our organizational essence, who we are and why we are in business...and don't forget the unique selling proposition.
<b>Call To Action</b>	Think "ACT IN THE NEXT 10 MINUTES AND WE'LL DOUBLE THE OFFER!" versus "Thanks for taking the time to talk, give me a call to get a quote." There are many ways to ask for the business.
<b>Media</b>	The ones we choose (high end direct mail vs. spam email) and those we don't (newspaper reviews, bloggers, viral YouTube episodes). All affect our brand...even if we aren't the authors of the information.

Continued from page 2

For many, these are positives. Here is how one person articulated these thoughts. She is a business woman who is well traveled.

Large: "The size provides opportunities that exist nowhere else."

Diverse: "The diversity affords engagement with multiple cultures and peoples."

Busy with activity: "There is always something going on, a sense of excitement matched few places in the world."

From another perspective, these same attributes are seen as negative. Here is the responses from a man who is from a small community and not fond of travel.

Large: "The traffic must be awful. Take hours to get anywhere."

Diverse: "I'm more comfortable where I know the people and the area."

Busy with activity: "It's crazy. People are running around all the time."

From these two perspectives come

**Base Attributes are those things that no one, even negative critics can deny. New York is large, diverse and busy. Other attributes only exist because of the perspective of the viewer.**

very different perceptions about New York. Perhaps all of the statements are true! It is how these people see the brand.

So the base attributes (large, diverse, busy) are true to both viewers, but their perceptions vary greatly and their reaction would be quite different if exposed to an opportunity to travel to New York.

So what? How should this affect thinking about the organizational brand? It is relevant in a couple ways. First, we must understand our organizational brand in order to inform our choices of target audiences. And/or we must be

aware of perception when building our case for our products in the marketplace.

Back to New York...if we were marketing travel to the city, we might want to develop a profile of the first person to define a target audience. We could then communicate the attributes of the city that would engage such a person and entice them to experience the city again.

However, the second person might make a great target audience, too. After all, they agree with our base attributes (large, diverse, busy), but we could entice them by changing their perception and engaging their perspective. Group travel with clear explanation of how the group will move around the city, perhaps highlighting the guides that will navigate to create familiarity and trust.

The takeaway is this: perspective affects perception. We need to understand our brand and build on the reality of what it is and represents. We must be cognizant of differing

perspectives; no brand or organization is all things to all people. However by understanding perceptions of the brand we can build out a message and tactics that

deliver the brand and its value proposition in a way that it engages within the target audience's perception.

#### Points to Consider

- ♦ What is the perception of your brand?
- ♦ What are the base attributes that no one would deny, but may illicit different perceptions based on the viewers perspective?
- ♦ Do you understand the perspectives of your target audiences? Are these integrated with messaging and tactics choices?

## GENIUS MARKETING BLOG

### FROM THE ARCHIVES

I am involved with a group of residents and business owners in the town in which I live. Our goal is to better our community. With the economic slowdown and transitions in how people shop and live, there are storefronts on main street that are empty. There are homes that have been on the market for quite a while.

I, of course, am involved with the marketing and communications committee. As we started the process of thinking about what the marketing for our town should be, we ran into a problem that is not uncommon. Everybody wanted a logo.

Logos and similar identity items are a part of marketing. You see logos everywhere. They represent companies, charities, teams, every type of organization and product. They are so ubiquitous that the assumption can be drawn that a logo is the first thing you need to market whatever it is you're marketing.

But it's not. In fact, the logo and other identity elements (at least in my process) are fairly far downstream. A lot of understanding must come before the logo. And a logo and "brand" are not the same thing.

I teach that the brand is the essence of the organization. It is important to truly understand what makes the organization (or town in this case) unique. What makes it tick? What is appealing about it? Who is attracted to this appeal? And many other questions and analyses need to occur....

For the full blog and other entries, visit

[www.geniusmarketing.com](http://www.geniusmarketing.com)

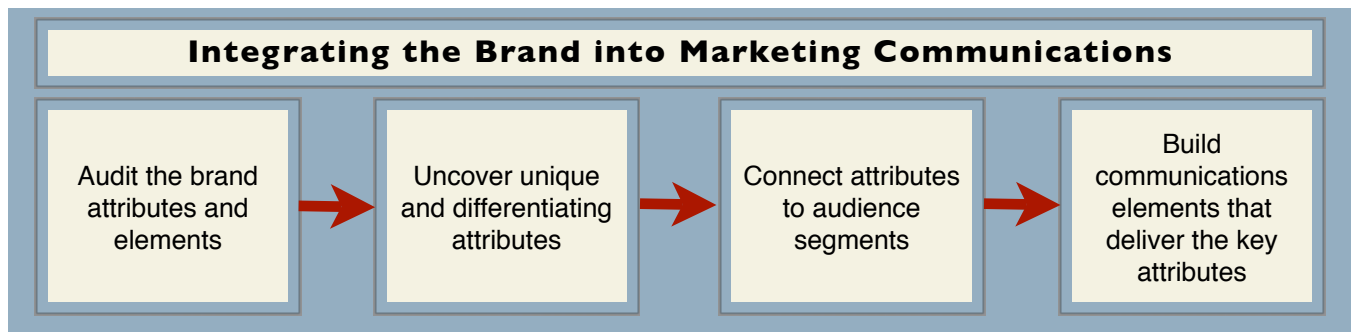
### Homework: Moving to Action

## Consider Your Brand and Develop a Plan to Build and Sustain It

At the end of each article were Points to Consider regarding the particular subject covered. Those questions along with the Brand Quiz (page 3) create your homework regarding the organizational brand. Once you've worked through the questions, work through the following process. If you have questions as you

work on it, please email them to [genius@geniusmarketing.com](mailto:genius@geniusmarketing.com). We will be glad to clear up questions. If you need more help, let us know. Perhaps we can craft a small coaching program to work through the issues, or bring together the services you need to get the work done. Let us know!

1. Work through the questions and quiz yourself and others about the organization.
2. Brainstorm brand attributes of the organization.  
Write them all down or on a whiteboard. Everything you can think of without judging them. Just write them.
3. Rank these attributes with two "scores": unique vs. commodity, important vs. nice to have (from prospect/customer perspective).  
If you like charting, use a four-quadrant, x/y axis chart to graphically represent the ranking.
4. Choose the top attributes based on uniqueness and importance.
5. List all of the ways your brand is communicated. Include both materials (website, brochure) and human (sales script, voicemail message). Further note where top attributes are communicated.
6. Do they jive? Compare the top attributes and the communications...
7. How often are your top attributes being communicated? Are you telling your brand story well?



### NEXT ISSUE

#### MARKETING/SALES PROCESS

Understanding from where sales come; How to build the connective processes between marketing and sales disciplines; Integrating financial and strategic goals; Columns from the Marketing Coach and Geek Ambassador



# Be A Genius...

## GENIUS MARKETING

### HELPING ORGANIZATIONS BECOME BETTER MARKETERS

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### Need More Help?

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Our team of coaches, consultants and service providers can help if you find you need extra hands or some additional strategy work. From planning to research to implementation services including

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