

Branding

What is it Really?

Let's start with what branding is not. Branding, or at least good branding, is not just artwork, logos, slogans or taglines. It is about a promise. Every great brand makes a promise. Most people volunteer for organizations or buy from businesses based on promises.

A promise is what we at Nehemiah Communications call the "value proposition." The use of the word "value" comes from the world of finance. Stocks are often divided into two groups, growth stocks and value stocks. Growth stocks are solid investments that perform as expected. Value stocks are ones perceived to be "on sale." Their prices do not seem to reflect their potential. When people perceive value, they believe that—whatever the costs in time and money—it is worth what they will be getting back. Value ties costs to worth, but it does not mean the lowest price wins out. For example, someone might decide to buy a sports coat at a high-end men's store because the quality and style are superior to the lower-cost alternative.

The same is true in other markets. The value proposition in selling a Ford Escort is very different from one for selling a Lincoln Town Car. The problem with most marketing plans, however, is that they are patterned after ones of similar businesses that may or may not have the same value proposition.

To establish an effective value proposition, you need to focus on what sets you apart. How are you different? Why should people work with you as opposed to your competitors? These are the critical questions in identifying your brand. When there is a solid value proposition and all of the marketing elements support that proposition, then you will see the name of the organization associated with the service or product it renders. For instance, do you ask for a resealable bag or for a Ziploc® bag? Do you ask for a photo static image of a document or for a Xerox® copy? Each of these products has developed a very distinct value proposition.

Chain operations can further strengthen their value propositions; for example, as part of their value proposition, they can give a consistent look, feel and layout to the individual stores in the chain. They do this by providing a consistent layout and

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look. When people are able to find what they are looking for quickly, customers save time, and this adds value to their shopping experiences.

Names, logos, slogans, artwork and copy should all support and become identified with your chosen value position. Once the brand and its elements are developed, the critical issue is to make sure that they are consistently presented. Every letter and every piece of artwork should tie together so that every item has the same basic feel to it. This consistency is done to associate the look or brand with the promise.

What is your organization's value proposition? To whom are you marketing it? That is your brand. If your brand lacks clarity, Nehemiah Communications can help.

