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### Branding: The Right Approach to your Business March 9, 2011

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**A strong brand is invaluable to your business and it is much more than just a logo and a website, it is your *personality* and your *equity*.** I recently interviewed branding expert **Denise Lee Yohn**, who has been a consulting partner with world-class brands such as Sony, Frito-Lay, Burger King, and New Balance. Denise has been inspiring and teaching companies how to *operationalize* and leverage brands as a tool for managing and growing their businesses for over 20 years. In this article we discuss how to *Achieve Business Success through Your Branding* by identifying four essential areas to focus on when *operationalizing* your brand.

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World-class brands including Sony, Frito-Lay, Burger King, and New Balance have called on Denise, an established speaker, author, and consulting partner.



#### 1. CREATE UNDERSTANDING OF BRAND IDENTITY

*What does the term “brand identity” typically mean to most people?*

**Denise:** Company leaders and business owners seeking to maximize their brand impact often consider *brand identity* as the “usual suspects”—their logo, advertising and PR. But these items only express the brand, they are merely the “message of the company.” What is not so obvious, yet essential to the growth of a business is how you build a successful

brand identity through customer experiences.

**Ask Yourself: Are there disconnects between our brand vision and the actual customer experience? How can we create a truly unique customer experience?** Consider the brands that people admire, whether it be Apple, Starbucks or Nike, when you talk with the customers about what makes those brands so special, it's not the logo, not the name, not even the cool advertising...it's the unique customer experience in combination with the way they present products.

## 2. IDENTIFY BRAND PERSONALITY

*What is "brand personality"? How should we define it?*

**Denise:** *Brand personality* is very much like a person's personality. It will have personality attributes that define how a brand talks, communicates and relates to other people. The best way for you to identify your *brand personality* is to be true to yourself and at the same time find a target audience who will value and connect with your unique personality.

**Ask Yourself: At what points do we connect with people? Who are those people? What is the nature of our relationships?** A brand personality like Kodak or Hallmark is seen as *sincere* and *family oriented*, while BMW and Mercedes are seen as *wealthy* and *classy*. **What is your brand personality?**

## 3. BUILD YOUR BRAND EQUITY

*What is "brand equity"? How do we build it?*

**Denise:** *Brand equity* in the most basic way is similar to a bank. *Brand equity* is your bank to draw upon to get more *pricing power* (you're able to charge more for the same thing because of your brand), *loyalty* and repeat purchase (the cost to advertise is less with repeat business). And like any bank you can have positive or negative equity.

**These are three main ways to building positive brand equity:**

1. **Target audience relevancy** - a particular group needs to value it, it needs to make a difference to them, they must be willing to pay money or invest time in it.
2. **Offer a uniqueness** - so many business owners say "we provide great customer service." That is just not enough, everyone says that...you need to have key areas that separate you from everyone else.
3. **Offer something beyond the product or service you're delivering** - Starbucks doesn't just pour a good cup of coffee, customers are buying more than the coffee, it's the experience and connection with the brand they are selling.

**Ask Yourself: Who values what we offer? What is truly unique? How can we gain our customers' trust? What are we offering above and beyond?** Apple has built enormous amounts of positive *brand equity* in recent years, proven by the fact that they can charge a lot more money for essentially the same basic product in terms of functionality. Apple has successfully created a “cachet” or “status” building enough positive *brand equity* that customers are more forgiving and tolerant of any mistakes that happen.

While an example of a negative *brand equity* is the well-known BP oil spill, which has had a negative impact on consumer sentiment and a detrimental impact on its relationships with suppliers. BP's *brand equity* has even been damaged at the “internal” organization level as well with memos advising employees not to wear the company logo in public settings. Remember establishing a good *brand personality* means staying true to oneself, and with the damage to BP's *brand equity* it is not a surprising fate for a brand that “claimed” it was green and who promised to pump oil safely.

#### 4. CRAFT A BRAND STRATEGY *and then position that for the core of your brand*

**Denise:** There are two parts to *brand strategy*. The first part is *brand identity*, the “what” of your brand (i.e. Southwest = fun). The second part is *competitive positioning*, the “how” of your brand (i.e. Starbucks = the coffee experience, a culture separate from work and home, a gathering point for like-minded people). You must drive brand values and strategy in everything your company does. So when implementing your brand you must make sure to create internal systems to show your team how to “live” your *brand identity*, deliver brand value and build positive *brand equity*. Ignite the passion in your team and show them how they personally impact the brand.

**IMPORTANT:** *You can't do everything, so pick things you know you need to be competitive on and make sure you are. Then pick one to two things you can do really well and design your business around those.*

**Ask Yourself: What do we want to be known for? What is the unique value we offer to people? How are we positioned differently?** Southwest Airlines has been strategic at identifying what are the things they are going to compete on and what are the things they are going to excel in. Their *brand identity* is *no frills, low fare, FUN airline*. One of Southwest's main competitive positioning mottos is “*feel free to move about the country*,” by originally not having a main hub so they were not restricted to a particular region allowing them to offer the convenience of many destinations.

We hope we've broadened your view and understanding of *branding* and you can see it as a key approach to your business success. **Your brand must be represented in everything you do by everyone involved in your business.** Having a thorough, objective understanding of **how your brand is currently performing** in the market—and why—provides you with a reality check and helps you build a direction for building *positive brand equity*.

- *Susie S. Japs, Success Consultant & OD Strategist*

Operationalize your brand with Denise at [www.deniseleeyohn.com](http://www.deniseleeyohn.com)

*Share Your Knowledge: What are your favorite brands and why?*