

Brand Building Lessons Learned At Spark.Me Conference

mattlambert.me/brand-building-lessons-learned-at-spark-me-conference

Work

On my birthday in 2015, I found myself walking on stage at the Spark.me Conference in Budva, Montenegro. A few months prior, I had applied to be an official blogger (I also had purchased a ticket because I didn't expect to be accepted as a blogger) at a conference I had never attended and only learned about the prior year. I had met some of the organizers over the preceding months, yet there I was receiving a cake and being wished "Happy Birthday!" in spectacular fashion.



I fell in love with a brand because I realized quickly, the people behind it **CARE**.

What is the Spark.me Conference?

The conference describes itself as **“one of the most carefully curated business/internet conferences in Southeast Europe.”**

Spark.me has been organized each year since 2013 as part of the Corporate Social Responsibility program of Domain.ME.

While it may not be the biggest conference, I am certain it is one of the most intimate conferences allowing the participants close access and networking opportunities with leaders, pioneers, and top thinkers in the realms of marketing, tech, startups, and entrepreneurship.

(You may also find an astronaut or cyborg roaming around...)

Since I love this brand(-ed event), here are a few brand building lessons I learned over the 4 years of attending the conference.

Be personable.

“We can’t love a logo. We love a person.” Mark Schaefer



Brand building is founded on connection and relationships with our audience. We tell stories that allow people to love and trust our brands. Mark Schaefer, a globally recognized top marketing strategist and speaker, spoke in 2018 about the need for brands to become more personable to succeed in their marketing. Mark spoke about the decline of mass marketing content centered around the digital identity of a company.

Instead, brands must focus on the community that they are building. **Brands must give their customers and audience a story to tell and an experience to share.** User generated content and community shared content are some of the best brand building resources out there. It is up to businesses and companies to activate the potential of their audience.

Set yourself apart.

“What are you known for?” Mark Schaefer

During Mark’s talk in 2018, he spoke a bit on personal branding, but hit points that I believe can extend into our businesses. In fact, it is an age old branding lesson. The need to be known for something. The need to differentiate.

Whether it is a personal brand we are building or our business brand, **we need to carefully consider what we want to be known for**. Is it already saturated with content, or is there a market to saturate? We find our niche, and focus there with persistence to make our brand known.

Look Inside.

“It’s a lot easier to change what you say about yourself than changing yourself.” Denise Lee Yohn



Self assessment can be difficult for anyone especially businesses and organizations that see something going wrong, but not sure what it is. Denise Lee Yohn, a brand building expert, recognized that **strong, healthy brands are strong and healthy internally first.**

“Good brands start from within.” Denise Lee Yohn

The priority of businesses in developing the far reaching brand must be building something special and strong within their own ranks prior to looking outward. Creating hero stories for the employees creates a greater opportunity for hero stories for the customers. In fact, brands have a strong reach because they have strong employee engagement with their brand.

Start at the core.

“Brand values = meaning” Peter Kim



In 2017, Peter Kim, VP of Digital Consumer Engagement at The LEGO Group, spoke about the story and essence of the LEGO brand, and more importantly how great brands make things awesome. They do this by pursuing brand values which bring meaning into the lives of the employee and consumer.

Much like Denise’s reminder that amazing brands begin from within, Peter emphasized that **amazing brands are so because of their values and the meaning those values bring.** “In the case of the LEGO Group, their mission is to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow. Everything they do goes back to children and how to support the children.”

Collaborate with your community.

Timo Vuorensola, a Finnish filmmaker well known for films such as Iron Sky and Iron Sky: The Coming Race, has also become known for his achievements in crowdsourcing and crowdfunding his work. During his talk, he discussed both areas heavily and how he was able to leverage the help of the community that bought into his ideas to create something special.



For brands, the ability to not only engage them as an audience, but then go deeper by collaborating with them moves them into actually being a community. **Communities much like families are not necessarily born but forged over time.**

As a brand how do you collaborate with your community to create greater success and draw them deeper into your brand story?

Be mindful of the process.

“Show up! Follow up! Close!” Steli Efti



To say Steli Efti is high energy is an understatement, but with that energy he can deliver so much value in such a short time. He has been launching companies and building brands since the age of 17. He is currently the CEO of [Close.io](https://close.io).

In 2015, Steli forced his audience to think about the basics. He challenged those around him by acknowledging the solutions to their problems are known, but not convenient. In the end, solutions are left undone.

One challenge brands face is consistency and follow through. Steli points out that when startups and brands **show up, follow up, and deliver**, they will win. It's a day to day process, but it forces consistency by the brand. In today's media savvy world that disseminates information quickly, being inconsistent once can kill the brand.

Spark.me 2019

This year the organizing team has already made some exciting announcements! 2018 saw the conference surpass new heights in participants and interest. This year the conference will move to a larger venue in [Porto Montenegro](https://www.portomontenegro.com) in Tivat!

The Spark.me conference is not only about the keynotes and speakers. It also includes being a part of a transformative and engaging community. [Tickets have gone on sale](https://www.spark.me/tickets). I recommend grabbing your friends, team, or business partners and become a part of the community in 2019!

Experience Spark.me and experience Montenegro!

(For tips about what to explore in Montenegro in May check out my post [here](#). And let me know you're coming.)

by [Matt](#)

Tags: [#SparkMe](#), [brand](#), [Brand building](#), [Conference](#), [Marketing](#), [Montenegro](#), [Porto Montenegro](#), [Tech](#)

Share this entry