

BRANDING GUIDE

A PRIMER FOR CREATING AND LEVERAGING
A POWERFUL BRAND



TOP ADVISOR
MARKETING

BRANDING GUIDE

OVERVIEW

A primer, by definition, contains elementary principles on how to accomplish something. This branding guide is no exception. In the following pages you will learn the basic principles of branding: what a brand is, what it isn't, how to create one and how to leverage your brand to increase referrals and attract more ideal clients. This guide was created for financial advisors interested in maximizing the return on their marketing efforts. The guide is a useful "How To" guide for moving forward and making the right lasting impression.

WHAT IS A BRAND?

BRANDING DEFINED

There is a general misconception about the very definition of "Brand". The Dictionary of Business and Management defines a brand as: "a name, sign or symbol used to identify items or services of sellers and to differentiate them from goods of competitors." Wikipedia defines brand as "a collection of images and ideas representing an economic producer; more specifically, it refers to the concrete symbols such as a name, logo, slogan, and design scheme." We believe these definitions to be classic yet dated and ultimately wrong.

Branding is NOT just:

- A trademark
- A product or service
- A name, logo or slogan
- A brochure or ad campaign

The meaning of "Brand" has evolved significantly over the last decade or so to mean much more than a logo, symbol or design. Brand has evolved to represent your company in a much more holistic view. Today, your brand means the message you provide and the value you deliver.

Brand is about the overall customer experience. Taking that point one step further; your brand is not what you say you are, your brand is what your clients say you are. Your brand is the reputation you build with your clients and potential clients on every contact; whether that contact be direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional.

Brand is not first impression or introduction to who you are —

A brand is a collection of impressions and experiences on a consistent and continual basis that engrain a clear picture of who you are , what you do and how people will benefit from working with you.

Tom Peters may have said it best when he said:

“We persist in seeing the brand as the external image of a company. Instead, we must learn that branding goes straight to the heart of an enterprise. The bottom line? Effective branding is as much INTERNAL as external. Branding is ultimately nothing more and nothing less than heart. It’s about passion. It’s about what’s inside you and your company.”

SECRETS OF A SUCCESSFUL BRAND

The truth is, every person and every business has a brand – like it or not. Your Brand is who you represent to your target client on every contact whether that be face to face, voice to voice or bit to bit.

A successful brand will have the following characteristics:

- **Unique** – it sets you apart
- **Defined** – it is specific
- **Consistent** – it happens all the time, not just once
- **Emotion-Based** – it’s about feelings and emotions
- **Integrated** – it all ties together
- **Everywhere** – it’s every point of contact you have with your audience

YOUR INITIAL BRAND TEST

Here is a simple test for your current brand. Given your brand is what clients and prospects say about you, take a moment to write down what your best clients would “say” or “think” about you.

We will refer to this simple test later in the guide so please take a moment to complete it now. At this point, if you don't know what your clients would say, it is a clear indication you need to work on your brand but nevertheless, take your best guess based on what you think they "should" be saying about you.

BRAND MUST-HAVE

We touched briefly on this in the above section on the Secrets of a Successful Brand but we did not want to make too light of a point on the first item which states that a brand must be "Unique".

Today's marketplace has a surplus of:

- Similar financial firms
- Employing similar advisors
- With similar titles
- Implementing similar philosophies
- Coming up with similar investment strategies
- Producing similar results
- Offering similar services
- With similar prices
- And similar quality

Good brands help cut through the clutter of sameness and give clients a choice value 'different' and 'better'.

Let's go back to the initial brand test you just completed above (if you have not done so, please complete that now before moving on).

If you said your clients would say: you are honest, you can be trusted, you have their best interests in mind, you don't just worry about commissions, you are knowledgeable, you take care of them, you give them the time they need -- then you are in good company. Ninety-nine percent of financial advisors define themselves as "unique" in these same terms. The obvious conclusion is that defining your brand in the same terms as everyone else is missing the point of the number one requirement of a successful brand - that requirement being, uniqueness.

*Business success these days is all about the art of brand building.
If you aren't a brand, you're a commodity.*

- Philip Kotler

WHY YOU NEED A BRAND

If you are not yet convinced, here are some of the proven benefits of building and nourishing a successful brand.

- The process of branding provides clarity and focus
- Influence client loyalty - “clarity breeds confidence”
- Gain a competitive advantage – stand out from the crowd
- Focus on helping your clients BUY vs helping you SELL
- Motivate and inspire both your team and your clients
- A powerful brand inspires people to want to work with you and refer you to ideal prospects

HOW TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL BRAND

Creating your brand involves introspective thought into your purpose, your values and your passions. It also involves looking at market opportunities that fit those values and then firmly planting your flag in the ground to proclaim yourself as a provider of unique services within that opportunity. In creating your brand, you need to identify very specifically the types of clients you want to attract and then ensure your defined “uniqueness” has easily recognizable value to that audience. Let’s start off with another test and we’ll provide an exercise to evaluate and fine tune your work later.

For now, see if you can create one or two sentences that outline your unique service and who you deliver that to. Take a couple of minutes - it will be worth it later when we get to some more specific detail on how to create a successful brand.

We'll revisit the above exercise later. Let's move in now to some specific questions that help build your brand. Feel free to use this as a workbook or simply as a thought provoking guide on what it takes to create your brand.

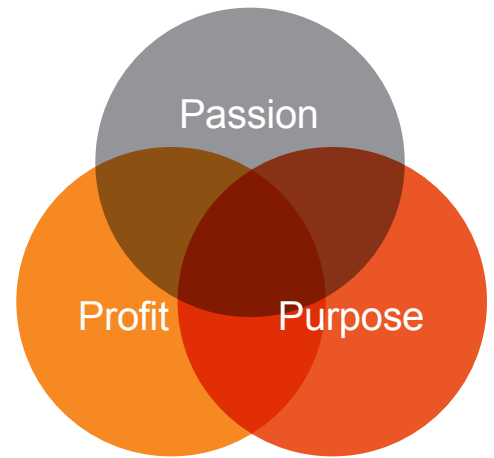
DEFINE YOUR SWEETSPOT

Jim Collins in Good to Great defines the Sweetspot as the intersection between a person's passions, their purpose and the opportunity to make money while performing tasks within these.

Purpose: (What can you be the best in the world at?)

Profit: (What drives your economic engine?)

Passion: (What are you deeply passionate about?)



WHY DO YOU DO IT? – WHAT DRIVES YOU? – WHAT IS YOUR PASSION?

DEFINE YOUR OPPORTUNITY

What service opportunities exist within these passions?

WHO YOU ARE - WHAT YOU DO - HOW YOU ARE DIFFERENT

Who are you? – Define your role.

What do you do? – What are you or your firm good at doing?

Who do you prefer to do it for? What is your ideal client profile?

How do you do it? – What is the financial planning process you take your clients through? (6 maximum)

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What makes you different? – What is your unique strength?

How do your ideal clients benefit from your uniqueness?

YOUR BRAND:

Revisit your initial brand statement now and refine it to ensure it has elements of all of the above questions. In a few sentences, your brand statement should outline what you are passionate about, what you do, how you do it, who you do it for and the benefit your clients receive from working with you. As outlined above, ensure your brand statement outlines a unique value to your ideal clients.

COMMON BRANDING PITFALLS:

Developing a compelling, sustainable brand is not easy. If it were, everyone would have one. Here are some of the most common pitfalls or traps people fall into when working on their brands. It is worth a moment to understand the common mistakes and how to avoid them.

Believing your brand is unique when it isn't.

Question yourself with "Is it really Unique?" before finalizing. Research your intended brand on the web and seek the advice of others.

Having a defined uniqueness that doesn't resonate with your ideal client/audience.

Always take the time to consider and define your ideal client/audience before you start building your brand.

Thinking "marketing copy" is more important than the message.

Less copy is almost always more powerful when it comes to telling your brand story. Keep your story clear, concise and relevant.

A brand that only describes what you do and how you do it.

Your brand, especially your tagline, should express a benefit to your ideal client. At minimum, your brand should intrigue your ideal clients into considering how you might be of benefit to them.

Being self-centered with your brand.

It's not about you. It's about your audience. Your story only matters when people understand how it's going to help them.

HOW TO BE YOUR BRAND :

Now that you have a brand statement, it's important to recall that the definition of your brand is not just what you say about yourself. Your brand is what your clients or prospects say about you.

Unfortunately, many business professionals focus their initial branding efforts and budget on marketing material, such as a web site, logo or brochure that documents their image, but that should be the second step. There's a more important place to focus initial efforts.

Before trying to market your image—your brand—you must ensure that your current and future clients will, in fact, experience the brand that you've presented to them. Therefore, the first step should focus on ensuring that your clients' personal experiences are in line with your brand.

Being your brand may be the single most important part of your brand. Your clients and future clients must understand and experience your brand, first hand. No marketing will ever make up for poor experiences or lack of value in your practice.

It's also important to build a brand that has longevity and can be fulfilled both now and in the future. Your brand should consider your long-term strengths as opposed to shortterm opportunities or short-term niche markets. Branding works best for professionals who are well established and can support and nurture their brand. Once you've established your true long-term strengths, you can begin to ensure you have experiences with your clients that effectively build on your strengths and your brand.

NURTURING YOUR BRAND :

No primer on branding would be complete without a reminder that creating your brand is only the beginning. Promoting, nurturing, and sustaining your brand is critical to ongoing success. Creating your brand statement simply opens the door to nurturing your brand and leveraging it. Here is a test you should apply now and regularly throughout your career to decide if you have the right brand and if you are maximizing your brand to achieve success.

ARE YOU NURTURING YOUR BRAND?

YES NO

- Can you state your three most relevant and compelling brand attributes (adjectives that describe you)?
- Do you know what clients, peers and employees would say is your greatest strength?
- Do your self-perceptions differ from the perceptions of those around you?
- When people introduce you, do they use the same words to describe you?
- Can you clearly articulate what differentiates you from others in your field?
- Do you have a current brand positioning statement that describes: what you offer, for whom, how you are different and what that difference means?
- Can you clearly describe your ideal client?
- Does your web site effectively project your brand?
- Is your brand consistent through all of your marketing material? (web site, brochures, invitations, business cards, stationary, standard e-mail template, on-brand voice-mail message, etc.)
- Do you mark every project with your personal brand (every meeting, report, etc.)?
- Does your personal appearance/style reflect who you are, your brand, and is it appropriate for your ideal audience?
- Does your office/work environment communicate your brand – express what is unique about you?
- Do you convey an image in your community and industry that is consistent with your brand?
- Is the 'client experience' consistent with your brand promise?