

Why branding really matters

 By [James Maposa](#)

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I recently met up with an entrepreneur friend to discuss some of the good things that I was working on from a brand development and optimisation point of view. In our conversation, she mentioned that she was not convinced that branding was as important as I made it out to be, particularly for startup businesses such as herself where every dollar earned counted and needed to be used wisely.



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With this in mind, she felt that branding was thus a luxury and in other cases a grudge purchase which felt like paying taxes or your insurance. She then went on to challenge me to prove how important branding was from a tangible returns perspective. Without me being able to show her the tangible returns, she'd rather spend her hard earned on other aspects of her business such as salaries and operating stock. I accepted her challenge with my focus on addressing the importance of brand from a practical standpoint.

Essentially as a strategist, I think of my clients' brands as assets. Something the business owns and exploits to generate revenue for the company. So, when I sit down with a client who wants to develop their brand, I first ask to review their business strategy. After reviewing their business strategy, I ask them to tell me how they think branding will contribute to them reaching their set target. This exercise is aimed at quantifying how hard they want their developed brand to work for them to deliver the return they're looking for. In addition to how hard they want their brand to work for them, the next thing I ask them is how they see their business in ten or twenty years' time; not just from a corporate standpoint but from the perspective of the customer. What must the customer be saying about your business and brand without being prompted. This gives me an indication of what they want their customer promise to be over the longer-term and how branding will help them deliver on their promise.

Defining a target market

In addition to asking the above two questions, the next thing I focus on is who the business' intended target market will be. Defining a target market enables me to know how best to express the merits of the business and brand to an audience who will easily buy into what we're selling from a promise and relationship viewpoint. It is important for me to profile this target audience to understand whether what we want them to buy into aligns with their value systems over the longer term. This speaks to a brand's authenticity. Speaking to the audience in a way that the audience wants to be spoken to. This has a significant impact on your customer acquisition costs over time and if your business is true to your cause, reduces them

even further through this target audience staying in a relationship for longer with you to become advocates for you. This advocacy grows your customer base for free and thus contributes to your top- and bottom-line.

Understanding the customer experience

After understanding your core audience and their behaviours, wants and needs, I then focus on understanding your customer journey. This exercise is focused on defining the ideal customer experience for your core- and non-core customers. By defining the ideal customer experience, we are able to determine where branding can be leveraged to deliver maximum returns across the customer journey for your business. Understanding the customer experience enables us to fully exploit your brand to enhance the experience, making interactions memorable; so much that they'll want to come back for and even tell others about the same.



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During its early years, everyone spoke about the Wakaberry experience – product and service. I knew little about the brand but based on what I heard from their initial set of customers, I was sold and decided to also give it a try. It wasn't on their name that I got sold. It was more how their customers felt which made me feel like I was missing out on something life changing. For moments to be that memorable, one has to understand how best to interact with their customers across respective journeys in an equity building manner.

Focussing on the employees

I then focus on the employees. The employee focus is aimed at understanding why they work for your business and how we can get them to buy in to a purpose for the organisation that goes over and beyond cutting a pay cheque at the end of the month. Your employees are your business and brand's ambassadors. Because of this, it is important for you to have a level of internal alignment that celebrates your business' existence; including how it will change the world through the customers it serves.

Your employees should enable the delivery of experiences that show the customer that you're always thinking of them first and whatever product or service you're offering is delivered to make their lives better. They should interact with customers in a way that has them feeling that they've gained more than they have lost through paying for your product or service. This again is delivered through branding, leveraging it as a motivator or inspiration for your employees and the interactions they have with your customers.

Putting a brand strategy together

After developing an informed understanding of your business, I am able to put an enabling brand strategy together. A brand strategy that leverages your business strategy to define your organisational purpose, values, positioning, personality and essence. The strategy also outlines proxies we will leverage to assess progress. Proxies we can focus on including unaided and aided revenue and profitability growth (without brand support vs with brand support). In addition, we can also work with other proxies such as customer acquisition costs, customer loyalty periods and customer retention rates. In addition, staff recruitment costs and retention rates can also serve as employee brand proxies.



Developing a brand strategy

James Maposa 29 Nov 2016



Through the use of these proxies, we are able to determine over time whether our developed and implemented strategy is delivering value through being an enabling asset. Tracking can take place on a monthly or a quarterly basis post implementation of the developed strategy. This will enable us to detect problems sooner and implement correcting measures that ensure we are able to deliver on our business mandate consistently over time.

The developed brand strategy also informs how the brand is expressed from a visual and communication standpoint. Although a sizeable amount of money will be spent on design of your brand at inception, it benefits you over the longer term through minimal corrections from an evolution standpoint. Through the development of an enabling business strategy, your brand is designed with the future in mind and instead of being revised within a space of three to five years, you remain with the same design and visual expression for much longer. This contributes to your heritage and legacy, something you can also exploit when the time comes.

The brand strategy is also referenced to develop on brand messaging and tonality themes that make it easier for your business to manage its advertising spend. Through the developed framework, you're able to easily brief your internal and external advertising teams who have a better understanding for what and how you want to communicate. This greatly reduces cost through minimised reverts and over time producing advertisements that stretch for longer from a campaign standpoint.

In conclusion, building strong brands is a long-term process that requires a lot of thought and planning from a future-fit standpoint. Tangibility is established through the use of proxies which are monitored on a continuous basis to inform gaps and opportunities for your business and brand in relation to ever changing market trends. An informed understanding of your business strategy and customer needs and wants is critical to building a strong brand. This understanding is leveraged to build a strategy that ensures your brand's authenticity when communicating and interfacing with your core audience. Lastly, a strong brand is built from within. Understanding your business is understanding your employees; including the building of an on-brand culture that enables them to build equity through each and every customer interaction. Tangibility is thus delivered through not only meeting but exceeding your set business targets, using brand as both an enabler and a platform to continue to grow and progress.

ABOUT JAMES MAPOSA

Maposa is the founder and managing director of Birguid, a research and advisory company. Maposa has 15 years work experience, mostly spent in research and strategy consulting. Maposa is passionate about socio-economic development, business growth and continuity.

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