BRANDING, DIFFERENTIATION, CORPORATE IDENTITY AND POSITIONING DEFINED

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Even among the business savvy, it's not at all uncommon for these marketing terms to be thrown around almost interchangeably, when they actually mean very different things and play very different roles in business development and promotion. So we thought it was high time to clear it up and help you know and understand the difference so you can be better informed buyers and users of marketing, design and branding services.

Corporate Identity

Corporate Identity is the combination of a company's logo, including the logo visual and typestyle, and the tagline or definition statement used with your logo that communicates a three or four word message about what you do or how you do it.

A Brand

Your corporate identity is not your brand. A brand is the idea behind a company's identity, the impression people have of you. A brand is what you stand for, believe in, behave like, and how you are perceived by those that conduct business with you or otherwise experience interaction with you. It's the collective sum of who you are as an organization.

A brand takes time to build, because it's defined by what others think about you, and such impressions (be they positive or negative) take time to form and build.

Differentiation

What differentiates you is not your logo, tagline or slogan or what your website looks like. Your differentiation is what you offer or do that sets you apart from other companies similar to you. For professional services businesses, which is our area of specialization, it is usually a minor characteristic that a company embraces as its signature difference. Without an obvious or expressed and declared differentiation, it can be difficult for potential customers to detect how you are different and even harder for them to choose you as their preference.

Branding

Branding is the process through which design and marketing professionals and firms help companies determine who they are and communicate about it. It is the process of crafting messages and communications materials that will help to form the impressions people will have about your company — the process of developing consistently applied communications that express who your company is at its core. Branding is rarely a destination. It is nearly always an ongoing process that evolves as a company evolves and grows.

Positioning

Positioning refers to where you stack up within your industry, relative to your competitors. Branders like us use positioning strategy as a way to tell customers what you are better at than the others. Your differentiation (see above) is a function of your positioning strategy. If you know how you are different from your competitors, you can tell potential customers what your position in the industry is relative to them. This is very helpful information for customers to have. It’s one of the key ways they evaluate you; customers will assign a position to you in their minds even if you don’t tell them your thoughts on the matter.

Bringing it all together

Now that we’ve spelled out what all the terms mean, it makes perfect sense, right? Well, often, no. The things that go into branding and marketing are subtle and interrelated just like the muscles in your body are interrelated. They each affect the other and when one isn’t working right, the other ones have to compensate. So don’t worry if there’s still some fuzziness about it for you. As long as you’re working on it and trying to communicate as clearly as you can, you’re working the right direction.

Recently, we created a visual element to accompany these terms. See it **here**.

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