

Chapter

3

Branding

Why the Obsession With Brands?

It seems we are firmly entrenched in the age of the brand or, as marketing guru Scott Bedbury calls it, “a new brand world.” It’s become fashionable to focus on brand image, brand character, brand values, brand management, integrated brand promotion, brand equity, and brand blah, blah, blah. Some ad agencies have even changed their identities to become brand consultants.

Some people theorize the proliferation of ad messages makes it impossible to remember detailed product information. People are lucky to remember a few select brand names. In addition, some people see a shift from information to images, so the brand symbol is more important than the product itself. Another explanation is that we’ve always stressed brand names, only now we’re a lot more sophisticated in managing their deeper meaning for the consumer. In fact, Marty Neumeier says, “A brand is not what you say it is. It’s what they say it is.”¹ Enter the consumer. Today more than ever consumers’ interactions with a brand are critical. And managing those interactions is at the heart of branding.

Before you start supporting a brand, you first have to understand what a brand is and what it does. Many authors have their own ideas about brands, and they’re all good. We’ve summarized them into two main thoughts:

What it is: A brand is a promise. It’s shorthand for all the product’s attributes, good and bad.

What it does: A brand makes the promise personal by conveying the product’s personality, which reflects on the people who buy the product. It’s really all about relationships.

Luke Sullivan expands those thoughts when he says, “A brand isn’t just a name on the box. It isn’t the thing in the box either. A brand is the sum total of all the emotions, thoughts, images, history, possibilities and gossip that exist in the marketplace about a certain company.”² If you think he’s exaggerating a bit, consider the fact that brands (at least those with positive images) are assets, sometimes worth billions of dollars to a company. Some companies protect their brands like a

Words of Wisdom

“Tiffany’s blue box is a slogan without words.”⁴

—Seth Godin