Forward thinking
Branding and graphic design
for the experience industry

Advertising vs. Branding

The word "advertising" as we knew it is demonstrably on its way to being added to the endangered species (words?) list. Sure, advertising still exists and it is arguably one of the most effective ways of brand promotion, however advertisements no longer stand alone and are now part of strategic marketing mission companies today refer to as "brand positioning" or "branding". Fewer than 10 years ago, advertising was the term which businesses used when referring to communicating their goods or services to the public. Indeed, businesses advertised on billboards, magazines, newspapers, television, radio, and virtually any other tool they could. Their hope was that these advertisements would capture consumer interest, who in turn would buy their product or services. To this day, this goal remains the same. The approach, however, has since greatly changed. In the "advertising" era, companies tended to be a bit heedless in terms of bringing forward the brand behind the product or to communicating the brand story or the lifestyle which it evokes 21st century.

Broadly speaking, this shift occurred because competition today is as fierce as ever. Consumers are faced with countless businesses offering frighteningly similar products and services. Companies aim now at differentiating what they offer from their competitors. Instead of showing consumers what they had to offer, businesses today highlight what makes their offerings unique. Whereas advertising for the most part was a reactive process, meaning that it began after a good or service was conceived, branding is a proactive one which often is the first step in product development. Advertising offered consumers the products they needed, while branding attempts to explain to them why they need the product. A perfect example of a successful product

branding is the launch of the iPad. As it was introduced, the late Steve Jobs, co-founder and former CEO of Apple, explained to consumers why the iPad would be useful, which in turn created the "want", later becoming a "need", and now is arguably a "can't live without".

The past decade has been revolutionary in terms of communication technology. An entirely new culture of communicating has emerged thanks to the introduction of social media, as well as the increasing popularity of blogging, video sharing, and online messaging. Businesses haven't been shy tapping into these networks. Nor have they been in building personal connections with their customers. Previously, the spotlight was on the product and not the company. Today, parent companies want to build direct relationships with their customers. By communicating their history, values, and commitments, businesses hope to build consumer loyalty and awareness. This is particularly evident in the case of cross-brand loyalty programs, an example in lodging being the Starwood Preferred Guests program, offering rewards to guests who frequently stay at hotels within the Starwood family of brands.

INSIDE-OUT

Maintaining consistency in imagery and positioning has become a growing challenge. Business, culture, and technologies are constantly changing, so it is vital for the hospitality industry to stay relevant by understanding what sets them apart and what their audience find meaningful. Visual marketing helps ensure that brands are connected to that world.

Successful Branding Basics

Brand Identity

"Good branding influences customer perception in the experience industry though its links to our emotional self and our five senses", comments Ines Klemm, Principal of Latrace GmbH in Zurich which

"Find the story in the product, and present it in a simple and intelligent way." Menu covers designed by PSD for Boulud Sud, Chef Daniel Boulud's new restaurant featuring cuisine influenced by the Mediterranean. The Boulud Sud logo was inspired by an olive oil stain. Boulud Sud is located across from Lincoln Center in New York City. Courtesy of Patricia Spencer Design.

is an interior design, color coaching, and hospitality concepts firm. Establishing a strong corporate identity is the first essential step in successful branding. This means developing a strategic platform for the long-term, which will serve as a foundation for any corporate communication. A successful corporate identity begins with innovation and execution. The innovation phase involves developing a unique logo and core communication instruments. Execution means maintaining strict standards and guidelines to ensuring that they are sustained over time. Maintaining a controlled corporate image is just as, if not more, important as making a positive appearance in person. For many customers, the first contact they make with companies is in fact not with one of their employees, it is with some part of their marketing program. "You only have one chance to make a first impression, so you might as well do it right the first time", says Patricia Spencer, founder, principal, and creative director of Patricia Spencer Design – PSD, a New York City based design firm founded in 1995, who rosters an impressive and eclectic array of

clients, the majority being hotels, restaurants, and food specialty stores. Over the past 30 years, Spencer has built an internationally acclaimed reputation as a leader in hospitality graphic design. Prior to founding PSD, Spencer owned PBA Advertising and Design in Australia, which specialized in the beauty and fashion industries, after serving as International Art Director for Estée Lauder Companies, Inc.

In-room collateral (special case study)

Steven Wynn, the owner/developer of the Wynn Las Vegas Resort and Casino, hired Susan Slover and Rosemary Kuropat, owners of slover [AND] company, a brand development and marketing firm in New York, to develop their comprehensive branding and identity program. Among the most distinctive brand applications developed by Slover was the snack program offered in the guestrooms, which itself established a new standard in hotel "minibar" offerings. Replacing over-priced drugstore candies with gourmet snacks, Wynn's in-room offerings have a distinctly gourmet presence, thanks to the branded packaging and distinctive copy tone developed by Slover. Kuropat says that in-room amenities are an opportunity for brand presence. She advises, "hotels tend to take one of two tracks: either bring in a market brand and benefit from the 'equity rub off' or to develop their own collections, as part of the burnishing of their brand." Wynn, of course, chose the latter.

Web-design and e-marketing According to Professor W. Macy Marvel, an Ivy League-educated economics lecturer at EHL, "if a website is too complicated, it takes a long time to open which can be frustrating – navigation should be quick, easy, and straightforward." Marvel adds that "music [on websites] can be tiresome and offensive; musical taste is a very personal thing." Websites should be as user-friendly as possible, allowing visitors to find what they need easily. When developing a website, is important to develop platforms which can be viewed both on computer monitors as well as on cell phones and tablet devices. While Flash animation adds excitement to any webpage, it is important to bear in mind the fact that flash animation is not presently available on most Smartphones or PDA's. E-mail newsletters and

"The most important way companies can differentiate themselves from their competitors is good design." Patricia Spencer is founder, principal, and creative director of Patricia Spencer Design – PSD. Over the past 30 years, Spencer has built an internationally acclaimed reputation as a leader in hospitality graphic design. Courtesy of Noah Fecks.

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other electronic marketing must also adhere to the branding standards and must be aligned as closely as possible with the design of the company's website.

Social media and new media technologies

"Facebook and Twitter are necessary for the interactive world we live in, which is why we incorporate social media into all of our website design" says Spencer. Interactive media is often the best way to build a reliable bond between the brand and the consumer. Spencer adds "We recognize social media as a crucial means for communicating brand identity and values, as well as for driving promotions and gathering measurable customer feedback." Corporate Twitter accounts should feature backgrounds which are designed in alignment with established brand guidelines. Facebook pages, although not customizable, should be kept as clean as possible, with professional imagery which showcases of the venue or product. Profile pictures are also an ideal place for branded graphics.

Green graphic design

Evenson Design Group (EDG), located in Culver City, California, has been in business well over 30 years. Its principal, Stan Evenson says on his website that, "about three or four years ago, I had an epiphany: was what I do for a living is part of the problem and I wanted to be part of the solution." The problem is the fact that logging and paper industries clear natural forests at a rate of 20 soccer fields per second, or that paper represents approximately 40 % of solid wastes in landfills across the world, much attention is given to reimagining conventional wisdom and developing sustainable practices. Today, EDG's mission is to 'develop sustainable design for conscientious living'.

Once upon a time, the only environmental concern most hotels had was the unnecessary washing of towels. Placed in each guest bathroom, a small card would gently ask guests to consider re-hanging their towels so as to not wastefully use chemicals. Although it would be wonderful to say that these hotels were environmentally ahead of their time, it would not be a stretch to assume that their motive was to reduce their laundry expenses rather than to help sustain the planet.

Today, much has changed. Consumer environmental awareness has been on the rise, and so has corporate social responsibility (CSR). Politicians are extending tax breaks or other monetary incentives to businesses that reduce their carbon footprints. Unfortunately, despite this progress, using sustainable materials to print marketing materials can be a challenge. There is of course the issue of cost. Many graphics professionals, including Kuropat, argue that it is hard to get their clients to afford plastic or paper recycled materials. Kuropat pointed out that some papers on the market, such as FiberStone®, claim to be "green", because they are paperless, and added that, "instead of cutting down trees, which are renewable, they're grinding down mountains, which aren't."

There is also the controversy with respect to the amount of energy and electricity consumed server farms around the world, mostly owned by major firms such as Microsoft and Google, which power websites. The overall sedentary lifestyle that working on a computer brings with it contributes to the increasing global obesity rate. Because of these factors, Kuropat believes that there is no clearly defined way forward in terms of selecting sustainable materials. The consensus currently appears to be that the best packaging is reusable. Given, however, the variance and dependability of recycling programs from place to place, materials intended to be recycled or reused most likely will not meet their intended purpose. Kuropat summarizes that the realistic approach to take, given that printed materials will continue to be widely used, is reducing the amount of packaging that is produced. Eco2Initiative associate Ugo Toselli agrees with Kuropat. He says that, ultimately, "green marketers are... marketers."

Spencer, who remains optimistic, shares that customers enjoy knowing that companies are willing to make the effort and use sustainable and reusable materials whenever possible. Customers appreciate difference, and companies that chose to use products which are sustainably speaking, an improvement from their traditional counterparts (such as soy-based inks and recyclable or bio-degradable papers), show an admirable attention to detail. Says Spencer, "We like to think green".

Brock Archer Karahan

Sources

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