

with columnist **Robert Ciccone**

Perception is reality in branding

Whether you know it or not, your company has a brand already. The question is: *is it working for you or against you?* People already perceive you as *something*; the question is, what?

Your brand is not your logo; it's much more. Your brand is also not found in the physical attributes of your products. Your brand is how other people see your business. It is the *perception* of your company, products and services as seen through the eyes of your target marketplace. It is the perception that there is no company, product or service quite like yours. Branding takes your image, values, and philosophies and connects them with your logo, products and services.

Your brand is tied to the emotional reaction people have when they think about your products. Let's say your child wants a "cool" bike, but as a parent, you want it to be safe, too.

You're at the store and see a bike you think your child might like. How would you describe it? You might say that it has two wheels, a banana seat and a basket; it's red, and there are streamers on the handle-

bars. So ... what do you think about this bike? A bike is a bike is a bike, right? But what if I told you this bike was designed and engineered by top technicians at Volvo... *now* what is your perception? Is it still "just a bike?" Or is it now the *safest* bike you could buy for your child?

I know Volvo doesn't make bikes ... but what if they *did*? As a concerned parent, wouldn't that make you pause for a moment when comparing a Volvo bike to another brand? The Volvo brand equals "safety" in the minds of consumers, whether it's a car ... or a bicycle.

How do you go about creating *your* brand? First, be clear on what you are in business to do; on what you stand for. What is your company's role in the world, in your marketplace, in your community? What function do your products or services fulfill for your customers? How do they make life better?

Be clear on your vision for your business, on who you want to be and where you want to go. Know and articulate the values under which your business operates. Once you're clear on these things, your business must *live* them, consistently and over time.

Brands are not just something you

Reduce Your Carbon Footprint

- Help others do the same
- Earn free gasoline
- Leaders wanted

www.reducemycarbonfootprint.ca

Dreams grow here

If you're a natural entrepreneur with a need to be your own boss, and you have a disability, then you should talk to us. If you're committed to business planning, the Vancity Advice and Business Loans for Entrepreneurs with Disabilities (ABLED) program can help you by:

- connecting you with business mentoring resources
- providing micro-loans for start-up capital, expansion loans and lines of credit

Visit us at vancity.com/abled or call 604.709.6965.

Vancity



Western Economic
Diversification Canada

Diversification de l'économie
de l'Ouest Canada

Starting a New Business?

You need to promote, sell, attract customers, and create a professional image!



Logo Design

+



Professional Website

+



Business Cards

Get everything you need.

Only \$999!

*compare to \$5,000

Focus on your business. Let us do the rest!

Call Us Today! 604.408.0914 *Save an additional \$50 | 'Mention Make It Business'

webkrave
www.webkrave.com

think about in marketing meetings; brands are the essence of the company itself. Everything that happens in your business has to tie into the brand.

Branding isn't just the job of your marketing department; it is the responsibility of every employee from the CEO to the workers on the assembly line. Everything you do and how you walk the talk all help to build your brand!

How do you bring your brand to life? You do it by creating a buzz about your business, and that starts with a unique story or innovation. The story or innovation generates some interest where the market notices it, and where customers are excited about it and tell their friends. By walking your talk and living your values, you generate that "news-worthiness" you need to get people talking about you, and this becomes your brand.

Your brand is really created not through your direct efforts, but through third parties: those who talk about you. The money and energy you put into marketing and advertising is how you *maintain* the brand once it has already been created, but you cannot *create* a brand through ad-

vertising. Advertising dollars didn't create the perception of "safety" for Volvo. The Volvo brand was created over time, through good public relations and word-of-mouth about the company and its safety-conscious cars.

The function of marketing is, then, to bring the brand to life once it has been established. Marketing tells your unique story. It shows off your products or services in a way that helps you maintain your special brand.

So 2008 is a brand new year ... and what is *your* brand? If it's not clear, maybe it's high time you focused on creating one. Then put your marketing efforts into making sure other people know what your brand is all about.

Robert Ciccone is the president and founder of Success Unlimited Sales and Marketing Group (www.susmg.com). He is also the creator of the Marketing for Profit Program, a three-part results program that provides the marketing systems, tools and ongoing support to help participants effectively build, manage and operate a profitable business (www.susmg.com/MarketingForProfit). Robert can be reached at 604-535-2111 or rob@susmg.com.

PAYING TOO MUCH FOR OFFICE FURNITURE OR EQUIPMENT?

Save thousands on great-looking, high-quality, new & used office furniture or equipment



More than 10,000 square feet of new and used desks, chairs, file cabinets, boardroom tables, panel systems, bookcases, whiteboards. Also copiers, faxes, printers with full service contracts. We sell, rent or lease.

OFFICEWISE SOLUTIONS: 604-681-4800

14 West 7th Avenue (at Ontario) Vancouver, BC

WHY SO MANY BUSINESSES ARE SWITCHING TO SHAW DIGITAL PHONE



SOHO DIGITAL PHONE LITE

This plan is the perfect feature-packed SOHO phone service for the light long-distance user.

- > Voicemail, Call Waiting, Call Display, Call Forward, 3-Way Calling, Call Return, and Anonymous and Selective Call Blocking.
- > Anytime calling at 4¢ per minute within Canada, the U.S. and to 50 countries in the U.K., Europe, Asia Pacific, and South America.
- > Access to Shaw International Direct - competitive rates to countries such as India and the Philippines.
- > Complimentary Installation†

\$19⁹⁵ PER MONTH
SOHO DIGITAL PHONE LITE

SOHO DIGITAL PHONE

This plan is the perfect feature-packed SOHO phone service for the light long-distance user.

- > Voicemail, Call Waiting, Call Display, Call Forward, 3-Way Calling, Call Return, and Anonymous and Selective Call Blocking.
- > Anytime calling at 4¢ per minute within Canada, the U.S. and to 50 countries in the U.K., Europe, Asia Pacific, and South America.
- > Access to Shaw International Direct - competitive rates to countries such as India and the Philippines.
- > Complimentary Installation†

\$35⁰⁰ PER MONTH
SOHO DIGITAL PHONE

Also Included:

- > 1000 minutes per month of long-distance calling within Canada and the U.S.
- > Distinctive Ring

THE BETTER BUSINESS PHONE EXPERIENCE

Shaw's phone service offers you convenient features and great savings. Switching has never been easier. You keep your existing phone, fax, and phone jacks, and you can even keep your existing number.

Call today and get the first month free! For information on additional Shaw business products and to book your installation **CALL 604-629-4049**

24/7/365SERVICE

SHAW

PEOPLE POWERED

Offer subject to change without notice. Shaw products and services are subject to Terms of Service as occasionally amended. Visit SHAW.CA for more details. *Beginning in month four, customers pay \$55 per month; price represents costs per line. ** Beginning in month four, customers pay \$35 per month; price represents costs per line. †Installations at on-net commercial locations or residential addresses.