

1 INTRODUCTION

When I was in high school and college, my parents ran a permanent booth at an indoor flea market in a small town in Southwestern Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh. Although there was no internet back then, I remember helping them come up with ways to design the advertisements they'd place in the local newspaper. It was my first glimpse of the challenges small businesses faced when trying to market themselves.

I suppose my experience working with their business helped to make me a firm believer in the importance of small businesses for towns and communities. I saw my parents, and the others who set up at the flea market, fashion a community that supported each other and that contributed to the local economy at a time when many large, blue-collar employers were laying off employees.

I've long championed the "shop local" concept and prefer to patronize small shops over global mega-retailers. I like being able to meet the people who own the businesses where I spend my money. And I appreciate the fact that when I support a local business, my money is feeding back into the local economy, since the business owner lives nearby.

Working with my parents, I also came to understand how difficult it is to figure out how to market your business when you're caught up in all of the day-to-day chaos of actually running it. And I learned all

of this before the internet came along and brought with it a new way to reach customers. Before everyone started talking about social media, brand images, and influencers.

Fast forward a little more than fifteen years to when I launched my own editorial consulting business. In my work as a writer and editor for small businesses and nonprofits, I began to notice a recurring issue many of them had: consistency (well, a lack of it). Whether the problem was referring to their business by different names on their website or using different fonts for each new brochure they created, all of the issues boiled down to consistency. In my emails with clients, I noticed myself repeatedly asking questions like, “What is your exact tagline?” or “Where can I find your mission statement?” or “What font did you use last time on your brochure?”

As you might imagine, a lot of time is wasted finding the answers to questions like that. I knew there had to be a better way. What I began to do for my clients was to create style guides for their texts – so that I would not have to waste their time (and my own) – asking them the same questions over and over again.

In my work to keep clients consistent, I realized that copy editing and branding go hand in hand. The former is absolutely crucial to the latter. A small business can’t establish a brand image if they never describe what they do the same way twice. In this age, there are lots of places both on- and off-line where you have to make sure you’re repeating key words and phrases that will work to establish your company’s brand image. Think of it this way: a brand image is simply the way you make sure your potential customers remember you.

The idea of creating a brand image for a business is something that terrifies a lot of small business owners. And if it doesn’t terrify them, it makes them sigh and roll their eyes. They think about the branding that big businesses do and say to themselves, “But I’m too small to do stuff like that.” Does that describe you? Well, I’m here to give you a plan to create your brand image with an easy-to-use

template that will serve as a cheat sheet for the way you talk about your company. A cheat sheet that will serve as the key to establishing and maintaining your brand image.

It doesn't matter how old your business is – just out of the starting gate or celebrating 20 years or more. Staying consistent is not just good for making yourself recognizable as a brand. Having a guide that can keep you consistent will save you and your staff time and energy as you create new marketing materials or develop new content for your website and social media. And who doesn't like saving time and energy?

I hope this collection of actionable tips and worksheets helps you bring your small business up to a new level of visibility!

Bernadette Geyer
Geyer Editorial Services

2 WHAT IS BRANDING?

Before we jump into the “How” of staying consistent with your brand, we need to look at the “What” and “Why” of it. What do I mean when I talk about branding? Why is it something that small businesses should care about? Let’s first look at the “What” of it.

What Is Branding?

Branding is the act of establishing and maintaining a “brand image” for your company. What is a “brand image” you ask? Your brand image is how others see your company. Your brand image is formed by everything you do and create – from your visual graphics and the look of your marketing materials, to texts your potential clients read in print or online, to the way you interact with current, past, and potential customers, and even by the types of events you sponsor or participate in.

Let’s do a little exercise here. Think about your website, shop, and social media. If you organize events, think about those and the way you promote the events. Now, take out a sheet of paper for a little exercise, in which I want you to be completely honest. When you look at the above ways in which you promote your business – from a current or prospective client’s viewpoint – what is your response to these questions?

1. What do your clients think of when they think about your company? (2-3 sentences)
2. What sorts of adjectives spring to their minds?
3. Are there any phrases you can think of that would come to their minds regarding your service or product?
4. How does a current or potential customer feel after attending one of your events?
5. How does your customer feel after using your product or service?

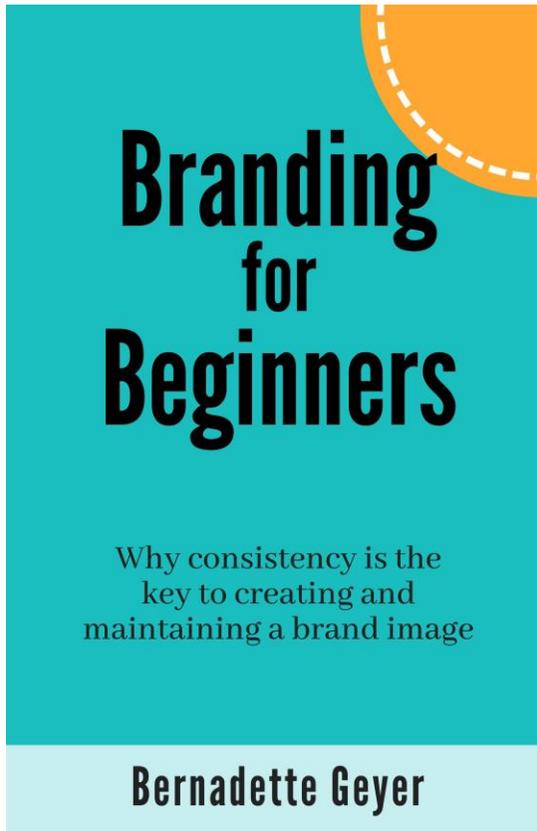
Next, think about your own ideal image of your company, its services, and/or its products. Go through and answer the above questions by honestly thinking of YOUR ideal image of your business. What image do you WANT to give? When you are finished doing that, compare the responses. Are there any places where there is a difference between the responses? Is there anywhere that the image your client/customer sees may be different from the image you are trying to project?

This brings us to our next topic.

Why Is Branding Important?

Many businesses think they are too small to worry about branding. This is just not true. You are never too small – or too new – to work on branding for your company. But why? If you are not active in establishing and maintaining your brand image, then you have little to no control over what others think about your business.

The first reason to care about maintaining your own brand image is to consciously take control over what others think about your business. Remember the exercise above? Did you see any places where there were differences between the responses? Without a clear idea of what YOU want others to think about your company, your customers may be influenced by what your competitors say about ...



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