Branded Websites: The Best Thing You Can Do for Your Business

A White Paper from Katalyst Creative Group
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Every company needs a website, but the really successful sites are usually well branded.

- What does that mean?
- What are some guidelines to branding a site?
- What tools are available to do so?
- How do you tie it all together to create a successful branding of your company?

We’ll attempt to answer these questions and hope it will help you understand how a great online presence is essential to growing any business into a great brand.
What does it mean to brand?

It’s a common misperception that a logo or an identity is a brand. A logo is really more like a nametag for an organization or a product. It’s a graphic representation meant to convey the essence of a brand.

An identity is formed by the logo and its application, i.e. the elements used by the company such as stationary, signage, vehicle graphics, uniforms, etc. An identity system is a comprehensive plan for how the logo and all of the elements get used to create an experience of a brand.

By creating a well-designed identity system, we begin to create a visual voice for a company. But a brand is so much more than the visual.

Your brand is not what you say it is; it’s what everyone else says it is. So, it's everything about you – your quality, service, value, as well as your integrity, your work ethic, authority, what you stand for – everything that can possibly contribute to the way your company is perceived.

Brands happen; great brands are created

The public will form their opinions whether you take the steps to define your brand or not. Creating a great brand requires you make the investments needed to develop a visual voice that is consistent with who you are. Define it, control it, shape your brand and then expose it. If you can differentiate your company, be relevant, and control the public’s experience, you’ll sell the company as a whole and not just your product or service.

The benefits reaped from branding are numerous. Here are just a few:

- Helps you gain sales and market share through familiarity and trust
- Results in future and current customers remembering your company name
- Differentiates you and clarifies your position in the marketplace
- Builds loyalty and enthusiasm
- Allows you to charge a premium price
- Aligns your visual identity and public perception with your vision, mission, strategic priorities, and internal culture
- Creates expectation and communicates a promise of value
The best reasons to brand

The process of creating a brand requires you to examine who you are and why you do what you do. It is deeply introspective and yet requires that you look at the world around with new and unique perspectives. This can only be a healthy process.

Scott Bedbury expresses perhaps the best reason to brand in his book, *A New Brand World*. He wrote, “The challenge of being seen, heard, and remembered – not to mention desired and respected – amid the evolving chaos of change will not just test but will bring out the best in every one of us.”

So how do we brand a website?

By now it should be clear that when we talk about branding website, we mean much more than creating a logo and look. A branded website gives a clear picture of your company through the information that’s presented, the way it’s presented, and the user experience of the site.

A branded website gives your organization a great foundation for an online presence, a platform from which to communicate everything you do, everything you stand for. It’s the place where you can tell your story and engage your customers. The process of developing and creating your branded website can be the best thing you do for your business.
A website provides the opportunity to communicate a lot about a company. While products and services may be the first things that come to your mind, the essential components are actually:

• Personality
• Overall Feel and Experience
• Consistency
• Quality Content

### Express Your Brand’s Personality

Your brand should communicate what’s different about your company. To develop your brand essence, conduct an analysis internally. Analyze customers, competitors, and trends in the industry you are in.

• How are you perceived? What are you great at?
• How are you different?
• What do you do? Is the purpose clear?
• Why does it matter?

Once you know the answers, you’ll be ready to develop your mission statement and state your values. Be sure to avoid using phrases like “what sets us apart is…” or “we are different from our competitors because…” You don’t need to use these not-so-subtle hints if your message makes you distinctive.

Then develop a logo design, tagline, messaging, and the copy for your website that expresses your unique personality. This is where you’ll begin to find and create a “visual voice” that is focused and targeted.
Create an Overall Feel and Experience

Your visual voice will inform the graphic design of the site itself. The overall feel should be consistent with the brand personality. The details of the site will contribute to the experience as well. The graphic designer will look at the usability, functionality and navigation.

A user-friendly site will have balance - a clear prioritization of information, clear hierarchical communication. The color palette and balanced use of color will support the brand and again express personality and perhaps convey a theme and/or emotion.

Make sure that the use of the logo and tagline are effective. They should be appropriately placed and sized. And, be sure to include a clear call to action.

Be Consistent to Achieve an Expectation

You want to be sure to convey that your organization is professional and credible. Therefore, throughout the site, it’s important to consistently use quality images, quality copy, and attention to detail in the way it’s put together.

There are other important aspects of the site to consider as well.

- Is the site functioning properly?
- Are there any broken links?
- Are there any grammatical or typographical errors?
- Are we providing outdated information?
- Do we have browser compatibility issues? (You need to be sure your site works properly with Firefox, Chrome, Safari, and Internet Explorer.)

By being consistent… continually consistent, you create a uniform expectation.
Provide Quality Content

While you may be able to provide a huge amount of content, there are a few items that really need to be part of your branded site. Make sure these items are accurate and well written.

In your About Us or Company section give details to establish trust and transparency. Include who the principals are, who is on your team, or who your partners are. Make sure that where and how to contact you is clear and easy to locate. Also include your mission and values to create loyalty.

Provide some history about the company. Do you have an interesting heritage? Is there a compelling story to tell? This is a great place to engage your audience, give them something that’s perhaps more intimate than the rest of the site.

Make sure there’s a clear way to get in touch with your customer service. The way your brand is experienced has much to do with how your customers feel when they interact with you. Direct them to get the help they need.

Publish news. Keep your audience updated and informed. Whether you have news items about your company and what it’s been up to or industry news, it’s important to keep the site up-to-date and fresh.

And last but certainly not least, give some educational content. If possible, write content that establishes thought leadership for your brand.

Remember, all of these components – personality, overall feel and experience, consistency, and quality content – work in concert to create an online experience for your users. This online experience is your branded website.
A Few Available Tools for Branding Your Website

In creating a branded website, there are a few things like your logo, tagline, and a call-to-action that need to be incorporated. But there are a few other things you may not have thought too much about. Choose an effective domain name, use a website email address, create a favicon, include social media links, use tools to streamline your customer’s process of doing business with you, and start a blog. Use these tools to employ consistency and repetition in branding your company through your website.

Crafting a Logo for Your Brand

The logo is essential to any brand and is a key element in your website. Consider hiring a designer to not only design a great logo but to also develop your identity system. By making that initial investment, you’ll create a cohesive visual voice and begin to establish control over your brand.

There’s so much more to logo development but we’ll save that for another time. Right now I just want to stress the use of that logo in your website and other places it will appear online. If you don’t already have one, make sure it is designed and crafted to display well on screen.

Develop Variations for Your Logo

Your identity system should include variations for your logo. You’ll need versions that will work in horizontal and square applications, especially for use in social media sites. If you haven’t made the investment in a professionally developed identity system, make sure that you’ve defined these versions ahead of time. You don’t want to create a situation where your logo has been used in so many ways that it gets confusing not only for your audience, but also for you to manage.

Include a Tagline

Your tagline is another tool you should incorporate into your website. A tagline takes up such a small amount of real estate on a website but can pack a big punch. A good tagline is a short phrase that conveys what you offer - a great tagline can connect with your audience and inspire them to take action.
And Don’t Forget Call-to-Action Buttons

A call-to-action button is another important tool to add to your online branded experience. Well designed call-to-action buttons can be really effective in getting your users to see their way through the site and ultimately motivate them to do what you want them to do next. Choose your action words with the user in mind. For instance, if you want them to request an estimate, “Get a quote” would be an appropriate button. Be strategic about where you put these buttons and how prominent on the page they are.

Favicons for Branding

Favicons are the tiny icons seen beside your website url at the very top of the page. They are also seen when your readers bookmark your site. If possible, this icon should be the same as, or part of your logo. But keep in mind that they are very tiny and need to be created specifically to work at that size. The favicon is just another opportunity to make a visual association with your brand. Repetition is good. It helps people remember.

Domain Names Matters

Your domain name also plays an important role in your branding strategy. Generally your domain name should be the same as your brand name. Including your industry in the domain name could also be helpful, like bobsprinting.com.

Branded Emails

It is more professional to use @mywebsite email than a @gmail or other free email service. Why not take advantage of the opportunity to spread your website address every time you send an email? Include a link to your website in your signature. You can also include your logo in your signature.

Brand Your Social Media Spaces

Your website should include links to the social media sites you use. Brand those spaces as well - repeat, repeat. For instance, develop a branded fan page in Facebook or create a background for your Twitter page. Each form of social media has it’s own purpose so keep your audience in mind when you develop the look of these pages.
Streamline Your Customer’s Process of Doing Business with You

With the understanding that your brand is an experience, do everything you can to create an online experience that enhances your brand. Implement online applications, registration processes, purchasing – anything that will make the experience of doing business with you easy and enjoyable.

Blogging to Build Your Brand

There are tons of benefits to blogging. Establish thought leadership, introduce your customers to new and interesting things, let them know what you are good at, and create a place to have dialogues with them. You’ll create more awareness for your brand.

It’s a good idea to keep your blog as part of your website because you’ll generate a lot more content for the search engines. If you decide to make it a separate blog, make sure it fits with your brand. You’ll want people know it’s the same company with a visual relationship and a link to your website. For more info on developing content for blogging see our white paper on content strategies.

Brand Wherever Your Customers Are Online

There are plenty of other opportunities to reach your audience online. Through email marketing and newsletters, mobile and online advertising, landing pages, widgets, and more, make sure your brand messages are visibly consistent.

Branding is a lot about repetition and consistency. Use the tools available to create quality online experiences for your customers consistent with your brand.
There’s More to Branding than Branded Websites – Putting it All Together

As we’ve learned, branding is not what we say it is; it’s public perception. Great brands understand the power of design. The brands that usually come to mind are Nike, Target, Coca-Cola, Disney, Starbucks. And certainly they bring creativity and design to everything they do, far beyond their websites. All of the ways customers experience your brand are called touchpoints. We are going to wrap up this series on branding by talking about some of the other touchpoints to pay attention to that can round out the brand experience.

Every way that customers contact the brand creates an impression of the brand. Some of them are obvious, like print materials, packaging, marketing, and one-on-one interactions. Others like post sales support or intangible benefits received might not be so apparently conceived as part of the brand strategy. Figure out what your most influential touchpoints are and address them appropriately.

Everything you do communicates something. Some methods will be obvious and some may not.
Here are a few basic touchpoints to consider:

Print and Promotional Materials
Business Cards, brochures, banners, signage, packaging, shirts, and other promotional items – all of these items are opportunities for the public to see and feel your presence. So again, be consistent with your visuals as far as the identity system and quality of each piece. And be consistent between your vision, values, mission and your visual voice.

Also, pay attention to the details in every piece. What does it feel like, what’s it made of, does it convey smart thinking, does it evoke a particular emotion? For instance, what do you want your business card to communicate about the company? What kind of paper or printing techniques should you use? Your card should make clear what you do and how you are different. Take advantage of the space on the back of the card. And of course, make sure your website URL appears clearly someplace.

Events
Every event you participate in or host has multiple opportunities to reach out. What do the materials you display say about your company? Are they consistent with your brand identity? What about the event itself? The types of events you are involved in communicate something as well. And once there, is the presence of your staff consistent with your vision and values? How do they look, how do they represent? If you are at a tradeshow, consider using a QR code to direct people to your site. And if so, would you benefit from having a mobile version of your website? If you attend a lot of tradeshows, the answer should be yes.

Customer Service
What is the experience of dealing with your company like? Is it easy to reach a live voice? Is the contact information on the website easy to locate? Would you benefit from having a Live Chat feature on your website? And is your staff friendly, helpful, supportive, considerate? How about the voicemail system? Is it efficient, professional? And what do they hear while on hold? What are all phone interactions like? Do they support your brand identity?

Figure out what your most influential touchpoints are and address them appropriately.
Public Relations

Naturally, if branding is public perception, any public relations activities are important. At the very least, consider well-written, professionally edited press releases. Consider assembling a press kit, getting public speaking engagements, monthly newsletters, and of course, blogging and social media. You might also consider what types of organizations you could get involved in, volunteer for, or otherwise support.

Everything you do communicates something. Some methods will be obvious and some may not. Some may influence or impress and some may be used for damage control. Pay attention to all of these touchpoints and how they represent your brand.

You’ll notice that many of these things still relate or connect back to your website. That’s why we believe a branded website is something all companies need. A great website is foundational for any brand. So invest in your branded website. It can be the best thing you can do for your business.
Katalyst Creative Group: About Us

At Katalyst Creative Group (KCG), we use a team approach to web development applying our core strengths in Graphic Design, Website Development, and Content Strategy. This way, through every step of our process, we develop a 3-dimensional view of your entire project from first idea to final delivery. When you work with KCG, you work directly with the principals, who are involved in every project to ensure that we maintain the highest quality and professionalism.