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Branding Your Business: A 'Principled' Approach

By Mike Rowlands

One hot day, in the spring of '76, Steve was out raising capital for his newly founded business—by negotiating the sale of his beloved VW van.

Within an hour, half-hearted tut-tutting all finished, he accepted \$1,000. His new venture was off to the races—more than could be said for the van: Steve refunded \$500 two weeks later when the van's motor blew!

Regardless, Steve and his business partner, a childhood friend, got to work building circuit boards hobbyists would cobble together to build computers.

Four years later, Steve's company enjoyed what was then the most successful public offering in history. Steve's payday? \$217.5 million.

Today, Steve's little company is one of technology's most successful brands: Apple Computer has built its world-renowned brand on three guiding principles: a relentless focus on innovation; an obsessive, detail-oriented culture; and a commitment to industry-shifting products.

So what do we really mean when we talk about brand-building?

Often, 'brand' is used as a synonym for 'logo.' For marketers, the definition often expands to include an organization's 'graphic standards'—the colours, fonts, and imagery used in advertising and other marketing communications. But here's a more complete definition, used by leading brand consultants:

Your brand is "***the expectation of an experience***".

This implies at least three interesting things: First, your brand lives in the minds and hearts of everyone who interacts with the brand. Ever heard the phrase 'good will?' That's the brand's value—an important corporate asset.

Second, brands can be affected by all manner of business leadership, communication and customer experience processes. Staff will follow a leader whose authentic values are consistent with their own. Customers will buy repeatedly from companies who have a predictably enjoyable experience (think Starbucks). In both cases, that's loyalty. Something you definitely want to earn.

Third, branding is *everyone's* department, whether they're answering your support line, maintaining your website, selling or implementing your software.... The list is endless.

So how do you build a great brand? Well, begin with the goal in mind—and the ultimate goal of branding is to operationalize a consistent approach to business. Work with your team to define your non-negotiable Guiding Principles—typically five to seven statements about your business that define your operating philosophy.

And remember the acronym, **AVID**: **A** is for authenticity, arguably the most important characteristic of successful brands in the 21st century. **V** is for value; nobody will buy from you if

you don't deliver that! **I** is for inspiration, the emotional appeal of a successful brand that makes customers *want* to buy. And **D** is for distinction: Be different from your competitors, but also be relevant.

Then share your Guiding Principles with everyone inside and outside the business. Use them as a touchstone for decision-making, integrate them into performance reviews, and use them when developing your marketing campaign.

Before you know it, you'll be proud of the brand you've built.

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