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Brand is
built on
experiences,
not a logo.

How distinct is your brand?

If Apple opened a convenience store, within seconds you'd have a pretty clear picture of what it would look like and how the shopping experience would feel.

What if Samsung followed suit? What experience comes to mind, if any?

Truly, the concept of branding has evolved and, quite frankly, been watered down over time. What was once defined by a logo and tagline is now the overall experience and expectations a company builds to reflect who it is and what it promises its customers. Through the following pages, we'll explore what branding is today and help you determine if your current strategy is guiding you to become more like Apple where regardless of what product or service you provide, the expectations are clear and meaningful. Or, if your brand strategy is less distinct, it can be harder to become memorable to your audience.

Where branding began, and what it means today.

First, it's worth acknowledging the traditional understanding of branding, which centered around logos and taglines. For decades, a brand was defined by these two elements with the logo serving as the face and the tagline as the voice of a company. But as consumers, technology, and business have evolved, the concept of branding has transformed.

At its inception, branding was a simple way for producers to mark their products as a way to differentiate from others. This was more about ownership and quality assurance than what we think of as branding today. While competition was scarce prior to the industrial revolution, this shift toward mass production created a need for businesses to distinguish themselves. Ultimately, the logo was born as a visual symbol to help consumers quickly create a mental link between a product and its creator.

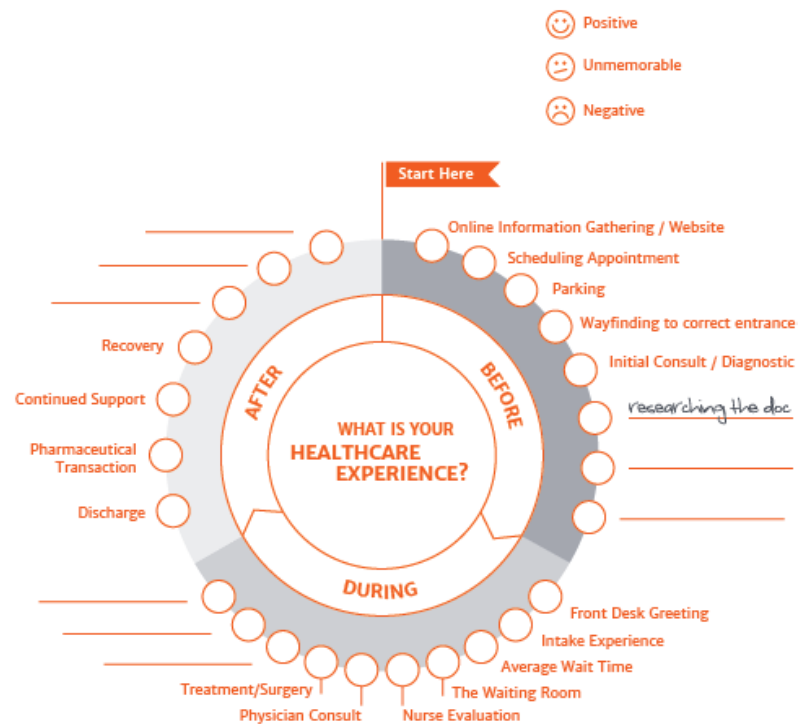
It doesn't take a lot of mental calories to visualize brands that embraced the concept of branding and the visual identity logos help establish. You're likely thinking back to the example of Apple, or even the Coca-Cola script, the Nike swoosh or the Wells Fargo covered wagon. Although some of these examples were created long before the others, they were each designed to be memorable and easily recognizable, a feat that has only gotten more difficult as consumers become more and more bombarded with choices.

To complement a company's logo, taglines were soon added to the brand formula. A catchy phrase could encapsulate a brand's ethos or promise in just a few words. "Just Do It" or "Think Different" not only stuck in the mind but also communicated a brand's attitude or benefit. While some brands continue to place a great deal of emphasis on a tagline, the digital age has changed the branding game significantly. Consumers have greater access to companies and can easily research and compare products from the comfort of home. They no longer have to step inside a store or speak to the company before making a decision. The result: today consumers are more empowered and demand more from the brands they interact with. The conversation is no longer completely driven by the brand; it's deeply influenced by what other people (educated or not) say.

Brands can no longer rely on a logo and tagline to connect and "stick" with their audience. Good brand strategies are focused on offering a consistent and positive experience across all touchpoints. This goes beyond the product itself to include customer service, online interactions, and even the deeper values of the company. A positive brand experience is a mix of functional and emotional factors. First and foremost, consumers want products that meet their needs. Trust is established when the brand not only solves their problem but also offers great value for their money. Additionally, aligning with a company's values can make customers feel proud, prompting them to recommend the brand to others. Finally, when a product enhances a user's self-image, it adds a personal touch to the brand connection. Together, these elements build a strong and lasting brand relationship.

To build your brand as an experience, identify (and nurture) your touchpoints.

Brand Experience Touchpoint Example



Still have the vision of Apple’s convenience store in mind? In its simplest form, this is the result of effective branding in today’s consumer-driven world. The reason you’re able to envision this tech-to-fuel example is because Apple has been diligent in identifying the consumer experience at every touchpoint.

Yes, the bitten apple logo is instantly recognizable, and “Think Different” is a tagline etched in the minds of anyone over the age of 30. But what truly solidifies Apple’s brand is the entire experience—the minimalist product design, the intuitive interface, the sleek packaging, the customer service, and the story it tells. The Apple brand is not just about a logo; it’s about a lifestyle and an ethos.

It's impossible to talk about touchpoints without including a conversation about websites. A brand's website is often the first touchpoint for a customer, and its design and functionality contribute significantly to the overall brand experience. Today, it's not just about making a sale. A brand's website is more about creating an online journey that reflects the brand's personality and makes the customer feel valued.

Social media has quickly become a key touchpoint, and it has further proven the need for brands to become more human. Brands are no longer faceless entities; they need to have a personality that compliments who they are. This also speaks to consumers' desire to know the people behind the brand, its values, and how it contributes to the world. This transparency and authenticity have become integral to the overall brand experience.

Beyond online content, brands should invest in exploring its touchpoints, both big and small, to identify ways the company can weave its personality, beliefs, and values into the customer experience. From in-store to phone, sales to support, there are a number of opportunities brands have to further deepen their connection with consumers. The same exercise can be used to strengthen internal experiences for employees. The more they see and feel the ethos of a company, the more likely they are to contribute positive affirmations about the brand.

Consider all of the voices that influence the perception of your brand.

Truly, effective branding is other people telling your story on your behalf. A clearly defined brand strategy that reflects who you are in an authentic way is a company's best tool for guiding the conversation. However, bringing your strategy to life through your touchpoints, engaging your employees and inviting your customers to share their experiences is essential to building an enduring brand in today's environment.

There's a reason the concept of storytelling has become popular in conversations about branding in the last several years. Well-crafted narrative brings a brand's personality to life and it helps businesses feel more human and transparent to consumers. While brands can bring this narrative to their online platforms, there is often just as much power in user-generated content. In the age of Instagram and TikTok, customers are no longer just passive recipients of a brand's message. They are empowered to share their experiences on social media, contributing to the brand narrative in interesting ways. This user-generated content becomes a part of the overall brand identity, and many brands leverage it to strengthen their connection with customers. While there is risk associated with actively engaging customers and others to participate in conversations about your brand; it can also help your brand feel more focused on your customers than yourself.

Consider the case of Airbnb. Their logo is a simple, recognizable symbol, but what truly defines their brand is the collective experience of hosts and guests. The brand isn't just about finding a place to stay; it's about creating unique and personal experiences. The user reviews, the diverse listings, and the stories shared by hosts and guests all contribute to the multifaceted brand experience.

If brand is an experience, what is yours saying about you?

Truly, branding has evolved from a two-dimensional concept to a multifaceted experience. It's about every interaction a customer has with a brand, from the moment they discover it online to the unboxing of a product, to the customer support they receive. It's about the emotions a brand evokes and the values it represents.

Don't get us wrong, logos and taglines are still crucial, foundational elements of your brand strategy. When done well, they give consumers insight into who you are without burning a lot of mental calories. However, they are now part of a more comprehensive strategy that considers every touchpoint and interaction with your customers.

As we look ahead, the future of branding will likely continue this trajectory. Virtual and augmented reality may further blur the lines between the physical and digital brand experience. Brands are beginning to immerse customers in virtual spaces that reflect their identity and values. Artificial intelligence is headed toward personalized interactions, tailoring the brand experience to individual preferences.

While the touchpoints will continue to evolve, branding will continue to build upon being defined by the experiences people have: If you were to shift from what you're offering today to a completely different product, what picture would your customers paint in their minds—if any?



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