

What's Your Brand?

by Dan Apple
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Because of my last name I am often asked if I have anything to do with the computer company, Apple. My answer is the same each time, "I wish". I resisted their products for a very long time but then finally in 2008 I was fascinated with their new iPhone so I went to their store to check it out. Ever since entering the store I have been a loyal customer. Since that time I have purchased the gambit...iPhone, MacBook, iPad, Apple TV, basically all things "Apple". Their products work well, are easy to use, last a long time and have a clean and distinct look and feel. Now I know what you're saying, what does that have to do with the garage door business? Nothing specifically and everything from a branding stand point. This is a company that has done such a good job of creating a brand that people are willing to stand in line outside of their stores for hours and sometimes days, braving the weather, to be the first to purchase their latest product. The really amazing thing is that they're willing to pay straight retail, no discounts and pound for pound, their products are the most expensive electronic devices on the market. Better still people become, almost always, customers for life. Now that's branding!

What's Branding?

So why is branding important to door dealers? Simply put, your brand is your promise to your customer. It tells them what they can expect from your products and services, and it



differentiates your offering from that of your competitors. According to Brick Marketing, a marketing and research firm in Boston, Massachusetts, "to understand branding, it is important to know what brands are. A brand is the idea or image of a specific product or service that consumers connect with, by identifying the name, logo, slogan, or design of the company who owns the idea or image.

Branding is when that idea or image is marketed so that it is recognizable by more and more people, and identified with a certain service or product when there are many other companies offering the same service or product." Whether it's a low cost producer like Costco or an upscale retailer like Nordstrom, both have created a brand identity that resonates with their customers. According to marketing expert and author, Al Ries, a brand is "a singular idea or concept that you own inside the mind of the prospect." In other words, it's the gut feeling a prospect has about your product, service, or company.

Your brand is derived from who you are, who you want to be and who people perceive you to be. Are you the innovative maverick in your market or the experienced, reliable one? Is your product the higher priced, high-quality option, or are you the low-price leader? You can't be both, and you can't be all things to all people. Either can be successful if marketed properly. However you do need to decide what YOUR brand should be and then set about creating a consistent message. From the person answering the phone to the field technician and every representative in between, your employees, your products and your service all need to reflect your brand strategy. It's the experience with your company that customers remember and will get them to ask for your brand when they need garage doors or service in the future. Branding allows companies to build their reputations as well as expand beyond the original product and service, and add to the revenue generated by the original brand. The thinking is that if your customers are loyal to your brand for their garage door needs, it's easy to assume that they'll trust your brand for other related products like entry doors or retractable awnings.



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Creating a Brand

Creating a brand takes time, a lot of time. That starts with a conscious effort to market your company consistently to the public on a daily basis. It is not one big advertising push or campaign. Rather there are many steps in the process, but the foundation of your brand starts with your logo. It should reflect what you want your brand to communicate. I suggest you invest in having this done professionally. It's that important. Your logo should appear everywhere – on



your website, vehicles, personnel, promotional materials, advertising, installed products and even your store. All of these should integrate your logo and communicate your brand.

Your brand strategy is how, what, where, when and to whom you plan on communicating and delivering your brand messages. It requires that you honestly answer these questions. What is your company's mission? What are the benefits and features of your products or services? What do your customers and prospects already think of your company? What qualities do you want them to associate with your company? Where you advertise is part of your brand strategy. Your distribution channels are also part of your brand strategy. Do you want to sell garage doors at the retail level to homeowners? Or are you commercially driven and want to market to business and industry? Maybe you are focused exclusively on the new construction market. Regardless, what you communicate visually and verbally is part of your brand strategy.

Here's what I mean. Let's say you choose to create a brand that is focused on retail sales. Your brand then will need to reflect what's important to homeowners. Some of these are the latest products, knowledgeable sales consultants, a first class showroom and a technician that exudes professionalism when he pulls up in their driveway, all supported with "knock your socks off" service after they buy. However, if your brand is set in the commercial genre, your company's brand needs

to communicate that you are reliable, well staffed and able to assume their overhead door service needs. Perhaps staffed 24 hour emergency service, certified technicians and a dedicated account manager might be how you market to business, industry and municipal customers.

Let's look back at our Apple Computer example for a moment. Think about their TV commercials. Even the old ones and those being run today communicate that their products are user friendly and hip. Remember the spots with the two guys? One guy said "Hi, I'm a Mac" and the other guy said "and I'm a PC". These spots were extremely successful for the company for one reason only. They branded their products as "cool" and easy to use. As a door dealer your message should reflect your brand. If it's service driven, say that. Then make sure you're the best at it. Your company's message should emphasize how you are better. "Acme Door Service – when you need it today", or maybe "Acme Door – one call is all it takes". If you're branding a family owned and operated business and want to connect on a more personal level to your customers, perhaps a phrase like "Acme Door: The best garage doors to your family from our family". You are not looking for an advertising tag line but rather a way to brand your business to set it apart from your competition.

The Experience is the Brand

Okay. So you've decided what your brand will be. Let's say it's a combination of the most innovative and stylish garage door products backed up by world class service. Those are just catch phrases. The trick is actually doing it. It's not one thing, it's everything - from the moment your receptionist says "Good morning, thank you for calling Acme Door" to the invoice they receive from your accounting department and all of the things in between that are required to complete their purchase. It is the experience you create for the customer when they do business with your company that establishes your brand in the marketplace. It's that compelling word of mouth advertising that is pure gold when it comes to brand development. It costs nothing for these personal testimonials from your customers but they're invaluable.

Angie's List, an Internet contractor rating service, is a popular source for homeowners to find a home improvement contractor. Angie's rating system is a series of grades, A – F, that rate the contractor's performance in various categories.



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Quality of work, presentation, customer service, and prompt arrival are some of the categories. The ratings or grades are provided by the homeowners that have actually used the contractor's service. The best part is that the homeowners have to pay to subscribe to Angie's website so it is easy to assume that the grades given are legitimate. Angie's model is a good parallel to establishing your brand. Branding requires that you take a long hard honest look at each area of your business and rate how you are doing. If you are professing to offer world class service, do you really? Are your deliveries really on time? Do your installers and service tech reflect your brand? These and other questions need to be answered honestly and routinely to make sure the message you are sending is consistent with the brand you want to build for your business.

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What're you selling?

Are you selling solutions or just selling "stuff"? Apple is selling easy to use, hip computers and Smart phones that are cool. Costco is selling guaranteed low prices on a variety of household products, food and electronics. Nordstrom's is selling high end clothing and jewelry in an upscale and friendly environment. What are you selling? You can choose from within a fairly wide range of brand identities. Your company can be the garage door company that gives outstanding service, has very high quality products and has a money back guarantee. Or your company can be the guaranteed lowest price guy in town. You choose. As I said earlier either can work as a brand. But once you choose, stick to it. Cultivating your brand takes time, energy and money. Branding can build an expectation about the company services or products, and can encourage the company to maintain that expectation, or exceed it, bringing better products and services to the market place. In other words the more successful your brand gets the higher the bar gets raised. Of course you jump the next hurdle and in the process strength your brand. That makes your company better and drives your competition crazy!

Dan Apple is president of The Apple Group LLC, a consulting firm located in Bonita Springs, Florida. His focus is assisting garage door dealers with profitability and marketing. Dan served as president of Apple Door Systems in Richmond, Virginia for 33 years which grew to a statewide dealership with eight locations. He was the first president of the Institute of Door Dealer Education and Accreditation where he was responsible for creating the industry's first national accreditation program in 1998. Dan also served as a director of the Door & Operator Dealers Association and the International Door Association from 1994-1998. For more information, contact him at 804.640.4253 or email: danielapple@me.com or visit the website at www.AppleLLC.net.



Summary

The most important asset your business owns is its brand. Develop it, nurture it and protect it. Your brand has the single largest impact on your profitability. Apple has a generation of computer users asking for a Mac when they need a new laptop. What are customers in your market place asking for when they need a new garage door? An Acme? If you have done a good job of branding your company the chances are good that your company's name is synonymous with the phrase garage door. Is it? If the answer is 'yes', great. Just don't let up. Protect and promote your brand and enjoy your business success. If the answer is 'no', don't worry, there's still time. Creating a solid brand is an adventure and a slow process but the rewards are great. The best news is that you can start building or improving your brand today!

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