

ABOUT BRAND

What is brand?

The term “brand” can seem intimidating, being a very broad term, encompassing a multitude of aspects and dimensions. By definition the word brand means “the identity of a specific product, service, or business.” To boil that down to simpler terms, brand really is what people think of or attribute to a company, service or product. Recognized or not, brand influences our every day lives, effects our purchases, decisions, and actions. Proper and thorough strategy and brand development must be in place to ensure your brand is received and perceived in a positive light, through all brand touchpoints.

To explain further, we felt we could best illustrate what brand is through a case example: let’s look at the car company, Volvo.

You see an ad in a magazine for Volvo. In the ad, there is a bright color photo of a family inside of a Volvo wagon. On the page there is the Volvo logo, tagline and copy that tells a story of the family in the photo, in which they highlight the safety features and security of owning a Volvo. All of this, visual, textual, works towards establishing and communicating the brand of Volvo.

Now, when you see a Volvo ad, without knowing why or how, a collection of key adjectives immediately come to mind, such as “safe, well built, solid”. These perceptions did not simply happen overnight, but the brand of Volvo has been evolving over the lifespan of the company, and in every exposure you have had to the car has worked to reinforce these concepts and establish their brand.



The Volvo logo has been well founded through the 90+ years of the company’s existence. Dissecting the logo, we can examine its components. Starting with the name, Volvo, which means “I roll” in Latin. Then noting the rich blue solid bar of color which forms a bridge across the circle mark and sets the foundation for the type. Blue, being the color of the sky and sea, is often associated with depth and stability. It symbolizes trust, loyalty, wisdom, confidence, intelligence, faith, truth, and heaven. The Volvo name set sturdy in all caps, a clean, full-bodied serif font. Serif fonts forms have foundation to their shapes, which creates an even line to the base and median, this creates a unified form to the logo type and conveys a sense of stability. The circle

with diagonal arrow is actually the ancient symbol of Iron, (it is also the symbol for "Man".) The iron symbol was used to also reflect the strong tradition of the Swedish Iron Industry along with the associated properties such as safety, quality and durability.

There are unconscious messages being conveyed through all aspects of the logo mark. Its shape, color, font, size... This has all been well thought out, crafted and constructed through highly trained brand managers and logo designers.



Now we look at the photo in the ad, which shows a family riding in the back of a Volvo, smiling, and comfortable reflecting their confidence in the vehicle they travel in. The subject of the photo focuses on the target market for Volvo wagons, families. You, having kids, without even being aware you are drawn in, are relating to the image that shows a mother and daughter engaged in playful conversation. All elements of the photo, such as the props, specific lighting, hairstyle, clothing, pose and gestures are all specifically controlled to convey a message to you that parallels and communicates the Volvo brand.

Every aspect of the brand is considered with each breath the company takes, from the logo mark, across all marketing materials including web site, print, television, outreach advertising and PR, and all the way down to the language company workers use when they talk about the cars.

Brand Extensions

These are all brand extensions that are within the control of the company. They can be architected, designed, constructed and developed. A well-constructed brand strategy will utilize all available touchpoints to extend its message and establish the public perception of the company or product. Though the reach of brand strategy control has its limits, and there are many forms of brand development that occur outside of the company's driven messaging and branding efforts.

For instance, there are forms of brand that occur organically, or through outside sources. Such as by word-of-mouth; you may know a friend, or even friend of a friend, who told you about an accident they were in, but was protected because of the solid construction of a Volvo. Or you see your neighbor's Volvo, and are impressed by the stylish design, the plush leather interior, and ergonomic dash design, you now associate Volvo with class, quality, comfort, as well as the brand

messaging Volvo works to communicate, safety, security and durability. The brand has been extended.

On the other hand, Volvo released a lower-tier vehicle line, the S-40 class wagon, this car had a lot of problems and issues, where consumers found it unreliable, expensive to maintain. This shows how a company might hurt their own brand by trying to expand into markets that do not line up with their core competency. Volvo's are higher-end cars, and negatively effected their own brand by trying to expand their customer base to create lower-cost options of their cars.

Outside Brand Forces

Another outside source of brand development occurs through independent media sources, auto review television shows, web sites, and magazines. We are exposed to safety testing results through avenues like Consumer Reports, driving and performance reviews through Car & Driver. There are multitudes of web sites that provide reviews and customer feedback opportunities.

To a degree, Volvo has the ability to influence these reports by focusing their resources and development on safety, and considering that is what their cars are best known for, you would expect to see a Volvo perform well in safety ratings. A bad score could certainly damage the public perception of their product, thus blemish their brand.

In today's internet savvy world, word-of-mouth capacities have taken on a whole new level of potential impact. With the various avenues of Social Media, the power to spread brand impressions is in the hands of you and I, and for better or worse, word can travel like wildfire. This dynamic we will discuss in a follow up paper, but suffice to say, thanks to social media, the modern power of word-of-mouth is one of the greatest challenges any brand faces.

So we can see how a well-constructed brand will build, and grow, well beyond the confines of the company itself. A brand takes time, consistency, and repetition to become "established". You see the Nike swoosh, and you know its Nike, that took 30+ years, and probably billions of marketing and advertising dollars to establish. You see a Nike swoosh, and you think sport, top-notch athletes, performance which parallels to quality, reliability, but also aspiration. We see these athletes and hope by wearing Nike apparel, we too can be super athletes. This development took time, this took repetition, this took money (lots of it), they took chances, and sometimes got burned (Tiger Woods) but always, Nike stayed on their brand course and is a powerhouse brand because of it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the success of a brand is based on a few key factors and assumptions. First, we have to assume that a company provides a solid service, and produces a solid product, and employs ethical business practices. The company then needs a well-constructed identity and brand strategy, maintaining a consistent application of identity and brand through all levels of its marketing outreach.

Regarding organic brand development: if the company stays true to its brand, stay consistent with their brand messaging, and carry the brand through all levels of its business. they should benefit, not suffer from the many forms of organic brand development.