

Internet Branding

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So you want to build your Internet brand? There's a lot to it. You need the positioning skills of an ad agency, the keen foresight of an information architect or usability guru, and, above all, a commitment to listen to your customers. You've got to move beyond logos, taglines, key messages and graphic identity into the customer's real-time interaction with the brand, for the entirety of the online experience. So what do customers expect of that online experience?

The brand is the identity of your organisation, representing what you have to offer. Brands - even, and especially, typefaces - communicate to customers on an emotional level. Or experienced strategists can assess your current branding and in most cases improve upon it. We can recommend an entirely new brand identity for you which conveys a suitable message. Before doing this we analyse your aims and your customer base and establish what is most likely to appeal to them. A new - or even adjusted - brand can reinvent your company, greatly improve your image, make customers remember you, trust you and be confident in conducting business with you.

Imagine you attend a much anticipated dinner at a hot new restaurant. The restaurant's staff is extremely courteous, you are seated on time, the drinks are cold, dinner is delicious, and a good time is being had by all.

When it comes to dessert, however, an unidentified insect is reposing right in the middle of your tiramisu. That four-star restaurant came so close, but ultimately, so far from making a positive impression, let alone warranting a recommendation to your friends. That restaurant has lost you forever.

Now imagine you caught that clever Super Bowl ad by yet another dot-com and you visit its site. The site loads quickly, the design is exquisite, content seems robust, but you can't find the product you are looking for. The navigation is confusing and there aren't shortcuts or site maps to provide clues, so after two minutes you give up and click over to its biggest competitor, where you find your product in three clicks.

In the Internet space, branding means creating a great user experience. Internet branding moves beyond logo, tagline, key messages and graphic identity into the customer's real-time interaction with the brand, for the entirety of the online experience.

Building brand equity via the Internet requires all the positioning skills of an ad agency, but perhaps more importantly, it requires the keen foresight of an information architect or usability guru. Internet brand strategy requires the expertise of a human factors engineer to plan web site construction and management around how and why people use a particular web site in the first place.

Every company seeking to use the Internet to further establish brand equity should focus on offering utility that is not found in the physical world, while guaranteeing key functionality speed, intuitive navigation, ease of use, content quality, personalization, customer service, and security and privacy assurances.

As the Internet is an interactive, user-initiated medium, Internet brand strategists must also be exceptional listeners, especially since digital consumers are no longer passive recipients of marketing messages. Because increased dialogue is the by-product of exceptional web development, Internet brand strategists should be judged on how well they interpret and utilize customer feedback.

As The Cluetrain Manifesto explains, "Markets are conversations. Through the Internet, people are discovering and inventing new ways to share relevant knowledge with blinding speed. As a direct result, markets are getting

smarter and getting smarter faster than most companies."

If great brands speak to the mind, senses, and heart, great Internet brands will hurry up and also speak to our diminishing attention spans. One of the challenges of any Internet business is the exponential growth in the number of web sites competing for the attention of time-starved individuals.

As web viewers are overwhelmed by too much information, increasingly chaotic schedules, and millions of marketing messages, competition for their notice has become a short-attention span theater, where the victors are fast sites with "sticky" content and applications, intuitive navigation, and a user-friendly interface. These sites offer real value to those perpetually short on time.

The great irony of the dot-com advertising explosion is that TV, print, and radio offer phenomenal value in driving web traffic the first time. However, the spike in traffic will be short-lived if content and functionality are not compelling enough to encourage repeat visits, and unless the user experience provides the information the user needs when he needs it. If the user experience fails that simple test, the offending site has probably lost another customer forever.

All is about imagination - Endang Kurniawan

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