

Branding 101

an educational white paper from Creative Liberation Lab and Limeadestand Works



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Introduction to this white paper

Hello, I'm Willow (Hello, Willow! Not Mello Yello®, which is a registered trademark of the Coca-Cola Company). One of the earliest memories I have of my childhood (I was still in pre-school, around age 5) was that I was obsessed with store signs and product packages, fascinated by how different designs, colors and typefaces were used to make them look special and different. Very often I was the first one to notice if something looked amiss, when a business did not use the correct color palette or typeface. I was also the first one to spot typos on a sign, a poster, or a map on a wall.

By the time I was in elementary school, one of my hobbies was to create mock-ups of imaginary product designs, corporate brands, and publications such as magazine covers and newspapers. I would participate in various contests put on by public agencies, that were all into the 1980s “corporate identity” wave and sought public ideas for their new brands. When I was 10 years old, I was at my uncle's recording studio in Manhattan and he taught me how to use Coral Draw and Aldus PageMaker (the predecessor to today's Adobe Creative Suite) on the Apple Macintosh Classic. I thought I went to heaven.

In middle school, I hated school—it felt too regimented, almost military-like, and my grades were always low because the grades were on a curve and students had to compete against everyone else in the class to obtain good grades—but I found my refuge in the art studio. I became president of the school's fine art club and pretty much ran the studio for a year. But I was actually more interested in commercial art and design at the time, rather than the traditional fine art. I looked for a high school that taught arts at a quasi-professional level, and my goal at the time was to progress from there to a college that teaches graphic designs. I got an excellent fine art education (in addition to college-level academics) at the Northwest School in Seattle. But life happened along the way. My interest shifted toward journalism and that became my major for the first three years of undergraduate studies.

Being a journalist-in-training gave me another layer of professional experience. I learned how to use words correctly, and how to refer to organizations and brands in their proper forms. *The Associated Press Stylebook* was an enjoyable read for me for the same reasons why I have always been pathologically obsessed with visual details (what a nerd). In the second year, I took a year-long internship as an executive editor of a small community weekly. In my office was—behold!—an Apple PowerMac with a screen big enough to fit a tabloid newspaper and Adobe PageMaker. I've redesigned the newspaper and made it look quite impressive. Around the same time, I got on the Internet for the first time and I self-taught HTML.

With this kind of background, you know why I can be quite obsessed with both visual designs and written words! They are two forms of communications among people—they have meanings and how they are perceived by the audience matters.

This brief white paper was created with two kinds of people in mind:

First, this is one of the course materials for the Creative Liberation Lab entrepreneurship education program. While it is far from comprehensive, the materials presented here will give learners just enough information and practical protips to get a head start on branding.

Second, it is also a client education resource. Small business owners who are looking for working with Limeadestand Works will find it helpful in understanding what we do and why we do it—and, at the same time, putting them on the same page as we are. Often small business owners do not either understand the need for a sound branding program or they do not take their brands seriously enough. One of the main aims of Limeadestand Works is to bring the best practice and latest trends in brands that “big guys” know to independent entrepreneurs and mom-and-pop businesses. This white paper outlines the cornerstones of a strong branding strategy that distinguishes you from the rest of the pack.

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What is a brand?

“Ideas have consequences.” — Richard M. Weaver.

In the Bible, God changes names of several people. In one of such episodes, Jacob was renamed Israel (Genesis 35:10), from “the one who grabs a heel” to “the one who wrestles with God.” Had this event not happen, probably we have a country named Jacobia instead of Israel!

In more recent years, we can think of a certain celebrity musician who was once Sean Combs who was Puff Daddy and then was P. Diddy and then Diddy. Comedian John Oliver once had made fun of him on his Last Week Tonight show, but many people change their names for a wide variety of reasons. The most common ones involve marriage: As much as I find this practice anachronistic and misogynistic, Jane Smith is wedded to John Davis and then becomes Mrs. Jane Davis. The implication is that Jane is now part of the Davis clan, who will bear Davis kids who will carry that family name to the posterity.

The underlying human being doesn't change. Their DNA does not change. Their personality probably won't change that much. But when someone changes their name, they are just like a new persona.

For that matter, why do people even have names? In two of my ethnic backgrounds, addressing somebody by their name is considered extremely rude and offensive. A century ago, they believed that addressing somebody by their name would incur a curse that it was a common practice for them to have been given several names at various stages of their lives: one when they were born, one when they turned adult, one when they took upon a certain profession (like artisanship or monkhood), and one after they died. In many other cultures, it's the opposite. And parents spend a lot of time and effort on naming their babies. Why? Why can't everyone be just “buddy” or “dude”?

Through the course of human history, we've discovered that names have a power – even though they are just a short string of letters (or a set of sounds, in a pre-literate culture). It was more than just a way of distinguishing Person A from Person B (after all, even though we know it's a lot more efficient, we usually don't refer to people by numbers).

And names we give to babies are ideas. Some parents may choose a name from the Bible or from the Catholic saints. Others may choose a name from a historic or heroic figure, or even from among their own ancestors. A lot of thinking goes into naming a baby.

Or, for that matter, for pets. Why does one call their cat Cleopatra if it makes a better descriptive sense to call her White Cat Black Spot (Instagram hashtag #whitecatblackspot)?

Words have meanings, and ideas have consequences.

As an aspiring or new business owner, the branding of your business is just as important as (if not even more so than) naming your own baby. It sets a right tone from which you can frame your story. It helps you control (or at least influence) how your business and products are perceived by the public and customers.

According to the dictionary, brand means “identification mark on skin, made by burning.” This is the older meaning of this word, coming from the days when livestock and slaves were literally marked with a unique symbol to identify their owners. In the modern usage of English, brand is defined as “a name given to a product or service.”

But it is more than just a name. It is a package of how a product, a company, or a service is identified and distinguished using verbal, visual, and other elements. Jennifer Lee, in her book *The Right-Brain Business Plan: A Creative, Visual Map for Success* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2011) defines brand as follows:

Your brand is the heart and soul of your business. It's the image, emotional response, and experience that comes to mind when people think of your business. A strong brand makes a consistent and lasting impression on your perfect customers and

helps them remember who you are when it comes time to make the purchase. Your brand is the essence of what makes you stand out from the crowd. It shows up in what you say, how you say it, and who you say it to. (Lee, 2011:75)

I define brand as a “shorthand” or mental touchstone that connects people’s mind to an anticipation of certain, specific experiences. When you say, “I’m going to Trader Joe’s today” instead of “I’m going to that grocery store out there,” it not only adds precise specificity to your intention but also you anticipate a set of experiences that are associated with Trader Joe’s. You buy a bottle of Coca-Cola instead of a bottle of carbonated liquid candy because you are willing to pay more for that “Coca-Cola experience.”

Sometimes brands distinguish one experience from another. Flying Southwest Airlines is a vastly different way of traveling from flying Virgin Atlantic. And each of these brands have a very unique way of communicating their brands: Southwest Airlines may have “boarding groups” and funny flight attendants rapping safety instructions (and they are all Boeing 767 aircraft!), but Virgin Atlantic has luxurious seats and mood lighting, living up to the hip and sophisticated image Sir Richard Branson has built behind his Virgin family of enterprises since the day he started a record company long time ago.

These brands use many different elements—some obvious and some not so obvious—to fortify their presence in the marketplace. Trader Joe’s, for example, always advertises their sales through their *Fearless Flyer* pamphlets printed on rough white sheets of paper using only black and red inks, decorated with old-school illustrations that evoke the image of the 19th century. You will automatically think something is amiss—or maybe it’s even fake!—if you see a Trader Joe’s ad that are full-color and on glossy paper.

Before we move on, I’d like to touch on a few misconceptions about brands.

First, company names and brands are two different things, although they can be identical to each other. Many companies that maintain multiple products are better known by their products’ brands: for example, not everyone is familiar with Mondelez International but they know of Oreo and Nabisco. Oath is the name of the company that owns Yahoo! and Huffington Post.

Second, you cannot copyright your brand, but you can register a trademark. (Similarly, if you author a book, you can copyright the book’s contents, but not the title of it; however, the title may be registered as a trademark.) In the United States, it is not a legal requirement to register a trademark but it helps to have an objective documentation of your brand use and history if someone else disputes that they have a right to your brand.

Third, brands are not a “logo.” (I will get into this later because most people—even many professionals who should know better—don’t have a clue when they talk about a “logo.”) Neither is branding a one-time process. It is an all-encompassing system in which you project your company or products to the world through multiple streams of verbal, non-verbal, visible and subtle communications.

Now onward.

Power of a brand

In the previous chapter, I made several references to how brands construct an anticipation of certain customer experiences.

Brands have a power in making people think that what you have to offer is special and different. Some brands are also called “lifestyle brands” and make consumers think that they’re part of a lifestyle—or even a culture or community—by buying the branded product. One of such examples of a lifestyle brand is Harley-Davidson. While there are many brands of motorcycles, Harley-Davidson has developed a faithful community of followers who enjoy a specific kind of biker culture and a sense of camaraderie among the fellow Harley-Davidson owners. Such brands are more than just a product or a company; it is a chosen family with shared stories and folklore. When a brand reaches to this level, all sorts of subsidiary products also will emerge: think of Harley-Davidson branded T-shirts, motorcycle helmets, and leather jackets. It’s a sub-culture that simply doesn’t come with a Yamaha or Kawasaki motorbike, only available with a purchase of a Harley-Davidson.

More commonly, however, a brand name is a sign of trust and expectation of quality. And it can be, sadly, broken when the brand does not live up to its name. Once upon a time, Schwinn was a well-known brand name of bicycles. Schwinn bikes were tough and reliable, it was a household name that represented the golden age of American bicycle manufacturing industry. But in 2001, the Schwinn brand was sold to Pacific Cycle, a distributor of cheap imported bicycles for mass retailing. Today, Schwinn (bicycle enthusiasts and mechanics often call it “Pacific Schwinn” in order to distinguish it from the traditional Schwinn bikes) is a low-end bicycle brand with short durability span (I once bought a Pacific Schwinn mountain bike and it took only two months for it to break down).

This is why reputation management cannot be divorced from the overall branding program. These days, Facebook is having a tough time defending its brand from the publicity nightmare at the Cambridge Analytica debacle. What will you do to redirect the public and consumer’s negative perceptions of your brand when a bad thing happens to you?

For the readers of this white paper, the question often is, “Why should I care so much about brands?” Too many small businesses do not pay attention to their brands and take them seriously. Their brand strategies are often haphazard and inconsistent, leading to frequent changes (even before their brands earn any degree of public recognition) and brand dilution (I will discuss brand dilution later) that make their branding meaningless. Some even think that “branding” means “making a logo.”

It is my hope here that readers learn it is a lot more than that. Brand is power. Use it every day.

Who are you talking to?

Before moving on to the actual nitty-gritty of branding, let’s talk a bit about public relations. Public relations, or P.R., is a discipline of how to communicate about your business to all stakeholders in order to protect your reputation, build a trust and relationship, and to project a positive public image.

While many businesses only think of advertising and marketing, branding is a public relations matter, because you as a business owner must interact with more than your customers.

Other stakeholders include your neighbors, local community organizations, government agencies, the media, elected officials, companies that you do business with (such as vendors, contractors and wholesalers), as well as competitors in the same industry. While it is important to tailor your message to your audience (for example, your city councilperson may want to hear about how your business plan will promote recycling, but not necessarily about your next “exclusive online half-price offers”), the brand must be consistent across all forms of communications to all audiences.

One of the best way to think about what kind of branding you should do is to first think about your “customer avatar” (or a hypothetical ideal customer of yours).

Then everything else will flow from it.

Let’s do an example. We’re starting a custom jewelry shop where we create unique wearable mementos to celebrate customers’ self-expression.

Our ideal customers are likely to be young womxn/femmes. Let’s for the sake of this exercise, call her/them Amelia. Amelia is around 28 years old, and at least has three years of undergraduate college education. It’s quite possible that Amelia is white, but could be Latinx or Black. For the sake of this exercise, we’d say multiethnic. We can go on creating a story about Amelia, just like a process of character development when you’re writing a novel or a movie script.

The more specific our Amelia becomes, the easier it becomes for us to imagine what kind of brand will appeal to Amelia.

So we create a visual that feels crafty, artsy, fun and playful. We might pick a handwriting-style or script-style typeface, and a color palette that consists of several pastel colors on a natural-looking background. On the verbal side of branding, we could start playing on the words “crafty” and “assembling.” Use your thesaurus and come up with as many related words as possible.

We come up with “Foxy Strings.” Why? “Foxy” has several meanings (denotations and connotations, or, “dictionary” definitions and “hidden” implied meanings). In a dictionary, foxy is defined as “artful, guileful, slick, tricky.” (WordNet 3.0) But the word “foxy” is also a slang for a “young and beautiful woman” who is “attractive and sexually appealing” (Urban Dictionary). The “strings” refers to both the act of stringing together and also the fact that we make jewelry that are customized and assembled on a string.

For its emblem, we designed one based around a line drawing of a fox playing with a string and beads, as if the fox were a cat.

In later chapters, we will be using Foxy Strings as an example again, so remember this.

Elements of a brand: Visual

When people think of a brand, they usually think of its visual elements first. Coca-Cola has a red label with a stylized “Coca-Cola” calligraphy. Starbucks has a deep green color everywhere: on the sun shades outside its stores, on the baristas’ aprons, and on the paper cups. McDonald’s is best known for its “Golden Arches” against a vermillion red background. I don’t even have to put on a picture here to illustrate any of these because, unless you’ve lived in a cave all your life, you immediately know what I am talking about. You can literally conjure up a picture of a Coca-Cola bottle, or a Starbucks paper cup, or a McDonald’s Golden Arches within a second.

There are several components of the visual brand element:

1. Emblem
2. Wordmark
3. Color palette
4. Typefaces
5. Packaging
6. “Logo”

Emblem is usually the pictographic part of the brand. For example, Starbucks’ mermaid-in-a-circle is an emblem. KFC’s stylized portrait of Harland “Colonel” Sanders is an emblem. Emblems contain pictures or simplified drawings. By contrast, logo is a short for *logotype* (the word “logo” comes from Greek word *logos*, or “word”) and must be a stylization of a letter or letters, usually inside a geometric shape such as a square or a circle. Examples include Safeway’s “white S in a red background,” McDonald’s Golden Arches (a stylized form of the letter M), and the Toyota Motor Company’s two-ovals in an oval logo (derived from the letter T). One of my chronic pet peeves is when people confuse between these two. If you cannot see a letter in it, it is an emblem; if you see a stylized letter of the alphabet or a number, it is generally a logo.

Wordmark differs from a logo in that it is a stylized form of an entire brand name. It is the brand name spelled out in a specific typeface (often mistakenly called “font,” I’ll get to this soon) and in a particular color. An example of a wordmark is that of T-Mobile, WinCo Foods, and Fred Meyer. If you’re from Canada, you must be very familiar with the wordmark used by the Canadian federal government (“Canada” in a serif typeface, with a little Canadian flag above the last letter “a”).

Many brands combine a wordmark with an emblem. Examples of a “combo” includes Walmart (the six-pointed yellow “asterisk” is the emblem, accompanied by the “Walmart” wordmark in either gray or blue), Sprint (the yellow emblem with the black wordmark), and AT&T (the blue globe emblem with the black AT&T wordmark).

It is also important to know that you do not have to have all of the above to have a successful brand. There are many companies that do not have either a logo or an emblem, simply using a wordmark alone. Conversely, there are companies that only has a logo, no emblem or wordmark. Personally, I recommend against creating a logo and instead shoot for having a memorable emblem that is indisputably unique.

Color palettes are a set of colors you will consistently use everywhere your brand appears. These colors are very specific and are usually defined by their RGB, CMYK (for printing), and Hexadecimal (or “Hex,” used in Web site designs) numbers—and sometimes also by their Pantone® colors. It is not sufficient to just specify vague general colors such as “green” and “blue.” For example, the “blue” used by Facebook’s brand is completely

different from the “blue” used by Twitter’s brand. In general, it’s good to have a set of two to five main colors, and you must use the precise colors in all your visual media (Web, print, signage, and so on).

Typefaces also define your brand’s personality. For example, this is written in the Andada typeface and the subheadings are written in the **Amaranth** typeface. It is important not to confuse a typeface with a font (although this conflation is pervasive). A font refers to a combination of typeface, size, and style. Therefore, this is a “10-point Andada regular font” where as the typeface is “Andada.”

If you are a maker of products, package design is an integral part of your visual brand. The upscale jewelry brand Tiffany & Co. has become known for its teal gift box. Victoria’s Secret is clearly identifiable by its striped pink paper bags. Quaker Oats is famous for its cardboard canister that prominently features the “Quaker man” face.

Once again, be very specific about every aspect of design: colors, shapes, typefaces, and any other graphic elements used – and even the kind of paper you use for the packaging. Muji, Japan’s famous “anti-brand” merchandiser, has established its brand personality through the consistent use of unbleached recycled paper, natural wood and clear plastic in all of its products. (Therefore, Muji—despite its “No Brand Good Items” name that started out as a countercultural critique of the consumerist excess of the 1980s, bubble-economy Japan—is a comprehensive brand.)

Elements of a brand: Verbal

At the most fundamental level, the **verbal element of a brand includes the names of one’s business, products, and services**. As in the visual elements, your choice of words should be deliberate and carefully thought out—and they must be reinforced through consistent usage.

Verbal elements of a brand also include **slogans, taglines, and sub-brands**.

Unlike the visual elements, you must also take into account how easy it is for the brands to be pronounced and remembered. For this reason, I strongly suggest (and I cannot overemphasize) the following:

- Your principal brand (the brand name by which your business and/or key product is identified) must consist of **no more than three words. Most effective brands are two words**. Exceptions to the 2-to-3-word rule are prepositions (of, to, for, with...), articles (a, an, the), and place names (such as Oregon, Portland, Seattle, America, Northwest, etc.). Anything longer than three words generally loses its effectiveness because most American people are intellectually incapable of correctly remembering or saying more than two or three words. Inevitably, a brand with too many words will get “chopped” by consumers. For example, Whole Foods Market turns into “Whole Foods,” and Wells Fargo & Company rarely is referred to by its proper name even by the press. Remember, **pithiness is golden**.
- One of the tell-tale signs of an amateurish attempt at branding by small business owners is to see something like “Elaine’s Country Kitchen & Italian Restaurant.” The redundancy of the words kitchen and restaurant aside, who will have a patience to actually say all six words? Sooner or later, everyone will call it “Elaine’s Restaurant” or even “Elaine’s.” While I understand how some entrepreneurs want to encapsulate their visions into a brand or to try too hard to make the brand envisage their hope for future expansion, this is not a place to do it. **Keep it short and sweet!** (Also: You have to keep in mind that as a business you will fill out lots of forms both online and on paper. Many forms have a character number limit of 25 to 28 letters including spaces. Social media profiles also have a short character limit.)
- Think hard about how your brand “sounds” to people. Does it have a pleasant cadence, like poetry? Do they have a word or words that might have a connotation that you don’t want it associated with? If you live in a city where many ethnic groups are represented, be sure to look up what your brands sound like

in their languages. Think also about the rhythm of poetry—use rhymes and alliterations if you want. Go find your college English literature textbook and review what “iambic” means.

- Taglines, or slogans, are not the place where you describe a business; rather, it is where you conjure up a certain emotional appeal and invite the audience to interact with the brand. An excellent example of a slogan is that of TriMet (which is the brand name of Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon): “See where it takes you.” In five words, TriMet’s slogan creates a sense of anticipation and an invitation to action (ride TriMet!). Notably, this slogan does nothing to describe what TriMet does or has to offer; however, it points to a certain customer experience of serendipitously discovering neighborhoods and destinations TriMet takes you to, but you may not have known about.
- Taglines or slogans also can be tailored to specific cultural demographic. In TriMet’s example above, the Spanish-language media use a completely different slogan: “Viaje mejor” (travel better).
- The good thing about slogans or taglines is that they are a lot more flexible than your principal brands—you can change them more frequently, without having to file government paperworks, change Internet domain names, and so on. You can even have several slogans and rotate them—and measure which one performs the best.
- A slogan or a tagline should be **no longer than six words**. Anything longer will not be memorable and thus becomes ineffective (not least to mention it won’t fit in every medium).
- Boilerplate messages are pre-written texts that are used to summarize what your business is about. This is somewhat like an “elevator speech” but is used in written media. Ideally, at least one of the boilerplate messages should be under a paragraph and consist no more than 120 characters (this way, you can even fit it in your Twitter and Instagram profiles). For press releases and brochures, you can use a somewhat longer boilerplate message, but it should still be kept under a paragraph and within four lines (on a computer screen or on a letter size paper). Unlike slogans, the boilerplate message should relate to what your business or product is about: “We help ____ to do/be ____.” A boilerplate message may include a slogan, however, either at the beginning or the end.

Elements of a brand: Others

There are other ways you can also establish and fortify your brand aside from visual and verbal elements. For example, the network television company NBC has long used a “sound mark” called “NBC Chimes” that is a sequence of three musical notes: G3, E4, F4. It is in fact a trademark registered with the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

Chanel’s perfumes are also brands in scents (“scent marks”). A few other companies, such as Verizon (for the distinct “store smell”), also trademark smells. The United States Patent of Trademark Office recognizes 10 registered scent marks, but in the European Union, scent marks are not registered because of its difficulty in describing scents with precision.

Another form of non-verbal and non-visual branding is so-called “trademark service.” You can think of the famous cookies that await you at every DoubleTree by Hilton hotel (the cookie predates Hilton’s acquisition of the DoubleTree chain).

Sub-brands: brands within a brand

When you have multiple products or services, it may help to have “sub-brands.” Likewise, if your business serves two distinct demographics, sub-brands are helpful in reinforcing both your main brand and the sub-brand.

Victoria’s Secret, historically a retailer of “sexy” lingerie targeted toward heterosexual women in their 20s and 30s, created a sub-brand Pink when it made a casual product line for the young adults and college students. Unlike Victoria’s Secret’s visual elements that emphasize sensuality and elegance, Pink uses the “collegiate” typeface (as in typical school athletics) and product displays emphasize play (not “that kind of” play) and casual urban life rather than something that reminds you of a boudoir photo session.

Car manufacturers are also an excellent example of how sub-brands distinguish specific product lines for segmented demographics. Toyota Motor Company created Lexus as a brand for its European-style luxury vehicles at the time when Toyota was still seen by most Americans as a cheap car for commuting (it is also worth noting that Lexus was branded “Toyota Windom” in Japan, where people knew Toyota as a maker of both budget cars such as Toyota Corolla and luxury cars such as Toyota Crown—hence an association with the Toyota brand was more effective than “destigmatizing” Lexus by distancing it from the Toyota name). Scion is Toyota’s sub-brand for the younger audience. Each sub-brand has a distinctive set of visuals, verbals, and other brand elements to ensure that they appeal to the intended population.

Some sub-brands are not opposed to the main brand, but rather are part of it. The Hilton hotel chain maintains several sub-brands to distinguish between price ranges and set of amenities, but they are always co-branded with the principal Hilton brand: for example, DoubleTree by Hilton and the Embassy Suites by Hilton.

Psychology of brands

Ultimately, brands appeal to human emotions rather than to reason. People make lots of buying decisions without a rational thought. When I was in middle school, I was really into buying Pepsi instead of Coca-Cola. They are almost the same, aren’t they? At the time, Pepsi had more sugar than Coca-Cola. But I was drawn to the Pepsi brand because actor Michael J. Fox was on its TV ads and the tagline was the taste of “the new generation.” It sounded cooler and trendier than my parents’ Coke. (Also, it was around the time when Pepsi just rebranded itself. The design looked definitely better than that of Coca-Cola.)

Good branding programs, therefore, make a strategic use of typefaces, colors, and imageries to elicit intended emotional response.

Some typefaces make your brand look serious, formal and professional, while changing the typeface could make it look more casual, creative and playful. Some typefaces give out an elegant and sophisticated vibe, while using wrong typefaces can make your business seem stuck in the 1950s. And don’t get me started on the infamous Comic Sans MS typeface!

It has been written much about psychology of color. While you can look up online for numerous articles on this topic, generally they go like this:

- Yellow is the color of happiness, clarity, and optimism.
- Orange is the color of cheerfulness, confidence, and friendliness.
- Red is the color of excitement, boldness, and passion.
- Purple is the color of creativity, wisdom, and imagination.
- Blue is the color of trustworthiness, strength, and reliability.
- Green is the color of peace, health, and prosperity.

On the verbal side, the tone of language you use in your brand communication (in brochures, websites, blogs, and so forth) also is relevant to the psychology of your brand. Is it casual and conversational? Or is it authoritative and preachy? Does it look too serious? As with all other aspects of brand, be consistent with the tone and style of your writing.

On the importance of honesty and truthfulness

Branding is not propaganda. It is not an activity that involves making something bad look good to unsuspecting masses. Unfortunately, the capitalistic greed means there are multinational pharmaceutical giants using their brands to peddle opioids and tobacco companies pushing cancer-causing products to third-world nations.

Branding without a high standard of ethics and social consciousness is immoral.

An ethical brand must be rooted in honesty and truthfulness. You cannot exaggerate your brand to make it sound and look like something that is beyond your capacity. You cannot sell a lie. You cannot call a cat “a dog” when all what you have is a cat.

While some brands are metaphoric and allusions, brands that confuse people aren't very effective. For example, a certain bar in Portland once decided to brand itself “The Liquor Store.” It was so confusing that even the signage has a small type on the bottom that reads: “not a real liquor store.” To make the matter worse, if one searches online for “The Liquor Store in Portland, Oregon,” search results show real liquor stores first. You cannot call a bar a liquor store when it isn't. It's deceptive and confusing—even if it's not necessarily unethical in this case.

On the importance of self-discipline and consistency

Once you set your mind on your brand, you must reinforce it consistently across the board. If you named your business “Foxy Strings,” every form of internal and external communications with your customers, the press, vendors, and employees should never deviate from “Foxy Strings.” Don't start calling it “Foxy's” or “Foxy Strings Jewelry” or by any other unauthorized variances—or even worse, by generic terms such as “jewelry-making studio.”

Branding is a form of self-discipline. You will need to watch every word you say or write, and be aware of how you use your words habitually—as it requires a retraining of your habits in order to reinforce your brand, and ultimately, to create your unique culture.

At the very least do:

- Have a brand manual which outlines how your brand is referred to (correct spellings, capitalization, typeface and colors used, and so on) that everyone involved has a copy of.
- Establish a visual guideline in which proper placement and usage of visual brand elements are defined (for example, how the emblem and wordmark should appear on a piece of paper).

How to prevent brand dilution

Any deviation from an established branding scheme will sow doubt among the public and consumers and dilutes your brand. (Ask yourself: Do you feel something is amiss if you went to Starbucks and something was in purple instead of the standard Starbucks green—or, if the word “Starbucks” was spelled in a different typeface, or if the sign says “Starbuck's Cafe” instead of the proper “Starbucks Coffee” brand?)

The **brand dilution** also happens when you frequently change aspects of your brand. If you are the owner of Foxy Strings, don't suddenly make it “Foxy Strings Custom Crafter” one day and “Foxy Strings Jewelry Studio” a month later. **Don't add to or subtract from your brand.** This is extremely important.

Consistency in brand communication is also crucial in establishing your brand and defending it from any future legal disputes should they arise.

Have some discipline. If you have established a boilerplate message, stick to it at all times. Your slogan must be spelled, capitalized, and punctuated in exactly the same way across the board. In the branding world, loose lips sink the ships. As don Miguel Ruiz says in his book *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*, “be impeccable with your words.” It can’t be truer than that.

On brand communication: it is not a one-time event

According to the *Cambridge Business English Dictionary*, brand communication is defined as “the combination of activities that influence customers’ opinions of a company and its products.” In real world, perception is as important as substance. We shape our sense of reality through our perceptions of what we see, hear, touch and feel—and how we interpret these sensations. By creating positive perceptions, you can open the hearts and minds of your potential customers for your message, products and services.

We live in an image-conscious world. Even the best ideas and products can go unnoticed or not accepted if they are not presented in a way that evokes positive emotions and sense of relevance to your customers or intended audience.

Brand communication, therefore, is never a one-time event. It is rather a continuing process that never ends as long as you’re in business. It is an art of storytelling through words and imageries. In order to be effective in brand communication, you have to be tuned into the culture and trends of your customer base. Conducting consumer opinion surveys is helpful, and so is to ask open-ended questions on social media and solicit feedback.

Epilogue

Back to Foxy Strings, we decided that our hypothetical “Amelia” is a fun-loving and creative soul who loves to express her uniqueness and share it to her friends and the community. She is also keenly aware of the social issues of the day and truly cares about what she can do to make the world a better place for everyone.

Our initial product (or minimal viable product, “MVP”) was a customizable costume jewelry made to order, using better quality materials than what one might be able to find at mass retailers and craft stores. But after researching deeper into Amelia’s demographic, we modified the product sourcing policy by focusing on sustainably produced materials and recycled/upcycled materials—and purchasing them from cooperatives and businesses that create economic opportunities for those who experience poverty.

Also, because Amelia is a crafty soul who wants as much of DIY element into whatever the product she buys from us, we’re creating an online “build-it-yourself” virtual jewelry studio where customers can order one-of-the-kind products that will be assembled at our artisan shop.

The verbal storytelling aspect of the Foxy Strings brand therefore focuses on our social mission, celebration of individual creativity, and uniqueness of our products. After playing with several words, we created a slogan, “Peace together your world, your style.” (with the “peace” being a play-on-words with the verb “piece.”) The slogan stays within six words, with the word “you” repeated twice to emphasize that we put our customer first.

The color palettes are based on soft, natural colors (light mint green Hex #D1F4D3 and unbleached brownish white Hex #FFFCF4), but in reference to the word foxy, we chose a yellowish orange (Hex #FFB406) as a highlight. To emphasize the creativity and playfulness of the brand message, we chose *AMATIC SC* and *Cupola* as primary typefaces while using a more generic GFS *Artemisia* for body text.

So here we've got a wordmark with a slogan:

The wordmark consists of the words "FOXY STRINGS" in a light green, hand-drawn, uppercase font. The letters are slightly irregular and have a casual, sketchy feel. The text is centered within a solid black rectangular background.The slogan "Peace together your world, your style." is written in a light green, lowercase, hand-drawn font. The text is centered within a solid black rectangular background.

Bonus assignment: What kind of emblem would you design for Foxy Strings? Use the space below to doodle.
(Hint: We already decided that it should be a line drawing image of a fox playing with a string of beads.)