

Page One: Brand Strategy

There is a plethora of different components that go into building a successful business, but before you can start working on any one of them, you need to figure out your brand strategy.

What is a Brand Strategy?

Think of your brand strategy kind of like an outline for a paper or the diagram of a play for a football match. If you are into cliches, you can think of it as your road map. Whatever you choose to call it, it is what will get you from where you are now (starting out) to where you want to be (a wild and extremely profitable success).

It seems simple enough but building your brand strategy is not something you should rush. The more thought you put into it now, the more likely you are later to know what to do when the unexpected pops up. And, trust us, it will pop up.

How Do You Make a Brand Strategy?

Every part of your brand strategy is made up of three basic components or categories:

1. Purpose
2. Emotional Impact
3. Consistency

Let's break them down.

Your brand's **purpose** is, essentially, the reason you decided to start your own business in your first place. You identified a problem that needed solving, right? What was that problem? How exactly do you plan to fix it?

Your brand's **emotional impact** is what creates the bond between your company and your customers. You need this emotional impact to stay in business after your first flash of success. Identify the emotional appeal of your offering and figure out how to build on that over time.

These two components feel like they should be easy enough to suss out, yes? Here's the truth: they are both quite difficult. You have to put real time and thought into the building process.

Your brand's purpose and emotional impact are what help you create your brand's identity. Once you've figured out your brand's identity, you can figure out who your target audience and ideal customers are. When you know both of those things, you'll be much better prepared to practice consistency.

Your brand's **consistency** is probably the most difficult component to get right. Consistency is what cements your brand's identity, it's *jes ne se quais*, in the minds of consumers. This identity (it might be helpful to think of it as a sort of anthropomorphising of your purpose) must remain the same across all of your products or services, all of your marketing materials, how you approach customer service, etc. It needs to be cohesive and steady.

How do you do this? This is where that diagram becomes important. Once you know how you are and who your customers are, and you understand just how important consistency is, you aren't just ready to emotionally connect to your customers. You are also ready to figure out how you will actually connect with your customers.

In other words? Now you're ready to put some real work into an actionable marketing plan.

Page Two: Brand Design/Development

Every entrepreneur knows that branding is important. Your brand is your company's identity, and it is what, hopefully, your customers will bond with during their journey through your sales funnel. How, then, do you do it? How do you figure out what your brand is? How do you design it? How do you develop it?

Branding is About People

The idea for your product or service probably didn't just pop into your head spontaneously, though sometimes it does feel like that! On the contrary, you are more likely to have come up with your grand idea after noticing a problem that needed to be fixed. You saw someone struggling and started brainstorming ideas to help them and viola! Your product or service idea is born.

They are your starting point: the people you want to help.

Branding is About Understanding Your Audience

Who are these people who you are trying to help? It is important to know everything you can about them. What are their names? Where do they live? What are their demographics? Do they have hobbies? Do they have a specific career? Where do they hang out (when hanging out is allowed again)? And, most importantly: what do they want?

Branding is About Conversation

If you know to whom you are selling, you should be able to come up with a way to sell to them that they appreciate. Advertising is about selling a product. Period. It's a fairly straightforward process. Branding, however, is about talking to your ideal customer, learning about them and teaching them about you. How you go about this is going to help inform your brand identity and your branding and marketing strategies.

Branding is About Who You Are

You've identified your ideal customer and target market. You've gotten to know them—who they are, how they think, what they want, what they need, etc. Branding, however, is not a one-way street. It is also about letting the market know who you are.

So, who are you? What is your company's name? How did you start it? Why did you start it? What is your ultimate goal (hint: not making money)? What do you value? Why do you value it? These are all questions your customers should be able to answer, at least superficially, about your company before they buy anything from you.

Branding is About Aesthetics

This might feel jarring, but it's true. Brand identities and strategies are mostly about connecting with customers and forming emotional bonds. Part of that, however, is being identifiable. Do you have a logo? Do you have a slogan? It might sound silly, but what colours are on your colour wheel? What fonts do you use? Each of these seemingly small things plays a large role in helping customers differentiate you from your competition.

Deciding upon these seemingly small things will be much easier if you have already figured out who you and your customers are. You've probably absorbed a lot of their aesthetic into your brand already. Now you just have to put it to work.

Page Three: Website Design and Development

Let's be honest: anybody can toss up a bare bones website, call it a day, and hope for the best. If you want to attract customers, though, you need to do more than the bare minimum on your site.

Make It Look Good

The first step to good website design and development is your site's aesthetic. How your website looks is what will decide whether or not a potential customer sticks around to find out more about who you are and what you do. Thankfully, because by now you've figured out your brand's identity, a lot of the basic work in this area is already done.

Quick caveat: Always use actual photos of yourself, your employees, etc. instead of stock photos. Real photos give your site more character and are more likely to entice customers than a generic stock image. You can have a professional photographer take these photos if you're not comfortable taking them yourself.

Make It Easy to Navigate

Customers should be able to quickly and easily find whatever information they need regardless of where they are on your website. The more clicks they have to make to get to the information they want, the more likely they are to click away from your site altogether.

The best way to make navigation easy for your site visitors is to have your navigation/menu bar very obviously present on every page of your site. Another good idea is to make your company logo a hyperlink for your site's homepage.

Another good idea is to make sure that every page of your website contains your contact information. This way, regardless of what page a potential customer is looking at, they'll know how to get in touch (remember: the fewer clicks a viewer has to make the better for your business).

Scalability is Important

Your website needs to look just as good on a small screen as it does on a big screen. Why? Because most of your potential customers will be checking out your business's website on their mobile devices. If they are met with a site that isn't easy for them to navigate on a handheld device, they will simply click back to their Google search results and check out the next site on the list.

The best website designs scale easily between devices, so that, whether someone is looking at your site on their laptop, tablet, or phone (and it will more than likely be their phone), your website looks good.

Be Findable

Of course, none of this matter if potential customers cannot find your site in the first place. If you haven't already learned about SEO, now is the perfect time to start.

Every business has to have a website. There is no way around this. Thankfully, there is plenty of help out there for those who aren't coding savvy or who, frankly, do not have the time to develop and design their company's site themselves. Even if you plan on hiring help, however, it is still important that you understand how a good business site looks and how it should function.

Page Four: Search Engine Optimization

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is a tool—though it is also referred to as a technique—that business owner can use to make sure that their pages “rank” as high as possible in the results someone gets after conducting a search.

A Quick Vocabulary Lesson

In order to get a better idea of what Search Engine Optimisation is, you need to understand some basic terms and acronyms. Here is a quick overview

SEO: Search Engine Optimisation

SERP: Search Engine Results Pages

Organic Results: results returned because the content on the page matches the searcher’s query.

Paid Results: results returned because someone paid for space in the “sponsored” area of search results.

PPC: Pay Per Click

Keywords: ideas or subjects contained within a site’s content and/or the words entered into a search engine

How Does SEO Work?

Every day (though usually it is more frequent than that), search engines send out digital spiders to crawl around the internet. These spiders keep track of what they see and catalogue every bit of it for the search engine’s records. When a person conducts a search for something, the search engine then scans its records for the same words, phrases and ideas contained in the search query. It delivers what it finds to you in the form of a list of links, ranked in terms of how relevant that page or site is to your search.

SEO, then, is the act of you making sure that the content on your website’s pages matches the same words, phrases, and ideas your ideal customers will be searching for so that your products and services are listed as close as possible to the top of the list of results they get from the searches they conduct.

That’s the gist, anyway.

Why Is SEO Important?

Remember, the internet is huge and the average person's attention span is short. Nobody wants to have to sift through pages and pages of links to find the information they are looking for. By ranking results by their relevance to a person's search SEO saves the consumer time and energy.

For business purposes, SEO is how you make sure—to the best of your ability—that your company's website is ranked close enough to the top of the list that your customer finds you before they run out of patience for searching through their returned results (this typically happens after they have exhausted the links on the first SERP).

TL;DR: SEO helps you get seen and keeps you from being relegated to being another blurry face in a massive group photo.

How Do You Do SEO?

There are a number of factors that go into SEO: keyword-centric and relevant content creation, link building, tagging, and even meta tagging. It's a lot to keep track of. That's why, unless you have a lot of time on your hands to invest in keyword research and data analysis, you probably won't be doing a lot of your own SEO. This is one of those areas where hiring a professional to help you is definitely worth it.

Page Five: Lead Generation

Your company's website plays a lot of different roles in your company's success. It conveys information. It sells your products and services. Hopefully it entertains. Most importantly, your site generates leads.

What Is a Lead?

Many new entrepreneurs confuse site traffic with leads. Here's the difference between them. The people who visit your site make up its traffic. Leads are the people who visit your site (as part of its traffic) and then take action while they are there.

The action a person takes will have been specifically designed to help them indicate their interest in your products or services and it is the first real step in the sales conversion process.

How Do I Generate Leads?

A lot of times, that action involves something like signing up for an email list, agreeing to take a survey or following your company's social media accounts. It helps you obtain their contact information so that you can continue the communication process and further entice them to buy whatever it is that you are selling. To get a site visitor to agree to share this information, many companies offer an incentive that grabs their attention.

For example, in exchange for their email address, perhaps you'll send them your latest white paper on a recent development in your industry or a coupon for half off of a future purchase. There are many different ways to generate leads. There are even apps and software programs that can help you streamline the process.

We've focused on digital leads so far, but leads can be analogue, too. For example, when you sign up for a drawing for a free item at your favourite department store? That is a form of lead generation.

Whatever your method of generating leads, make the process as easy as possible for your potential customers. Like with website navigation, the more steps a person has to take to show you they are interested, the more likely they are to eventually just give up and move on to the next prospect!

Why Do I Need Leads? Isn't Traffic Good Enough?

It's true: a percentage of the people who visit your website will make a purchase during that first visit. That percentage is usually small and, unless you are selling multiple products, they have little reason to buy from you again (though, presumably, you captured information during the sales process that will convert the buyer into a future lead).

Leads, on the other hand, require a little more woo-ing to convert. And, as you go through that process, you give them the opportunity to learn more about your company and your brand. You increase the chances they will form an emotional bond to you and your products. That emotional bond can then turn into multiple future purchases as well as aide you in growing your referral network.

Remember: traffic is great, but even with a radically high volume of traffic, if you're not capturing leads? You're just leaving money on the table.

Wouldn't you rather put that money in your pocket?

Page Six: Content Management

If the first thing that pops into your mind when you read the words “content management” is a blog, don’t worry; you are not alone. And you’re not wrong! Blogs do make up a lot of the content that businesses publish online. Your company website should definitely have a blog of its own. Blogs, however, are not the only sort of content your company should produce. Far from it!

What is Content?

Content is, to put it in the broadest terms, anything you publish that isn’t a direct advertisement for your company. Its purpose is to inform and/or to entertain. Sales are nice, but not the goal of content management.

Why Should I Publish Content?

Content is how you communicate with your audience. It helps solidify your brand identity, build a rapport with your buyers and, most importantly, makes it easier for people to find out about your business in the first place. Search engines love content—especially content that is regularly updated. It is your content, not your paid ads, that is the likely to improve your organic search engine rankings.

Content is also a great way to sell yourself without blatantly selling yourself, if that makes sense. High quality content helps you tell people about your company, products, services, etc without being too “salesy.” Nobody wants to be sold to all the time. Content helps you promote yourself without making any overt sales pitches.

What Kind of Content Should I Publish?

We’ve already (briefly) mentioned blogs. A blog is the easiest way to make sure that your company’s website is consistently pushing out new content to feed those search engine spiders. There are lots of different types of blog posts—updates about developments within your company, analysis of industry trends, posts that detail how involved your business is with its local community, etc.

Social media posts are another form of content that potential customers will appreciate. Your business should have strong presences on the major players (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter) as well as any platforms that focus on your specific niche.

Email is a tried-and-true method of sharing content with your customers and leads. Having an email newsletter is a great way to keep people in the loop about what's happening at headquarters.

What is Content Management?

So far, we've talked mostly about content creation. Content creation is just a part of the content management process. If you want your content to be effective, you must be creating content consistently. It's good to set up a schedule for your various content publishing funnels. Editorial calendars help with this. Project management tools can also help keep everybody organised.

If you are just starting out, you can probably manage every aspect of your company's content management on your own. As your business grows, however, it is easy to get overwhelmed and for your management system to start to falter. Don't be afraid to ask for help! There are plenty of tools and teams out there that can help you maintain both your quantity and the quality of your content management needs.