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\$100K of Free Branding Advice, in Just Three Words

Here's a simple formula for successful branding, employed by the best brands in the world.



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There is a moment during every branding presentation I give when I offer something enormously valuable--for free. I tell clients to write down what is essentially the formula for successful branding employed by the best brands in the world. With their undivided attention and pens in hand, I summarize this formula for them in three words: Unify. Simplify. Amplify.

This is how the world's best brands tell their stories effortlessly. Apple. Virgin. Lego. Dyson. Prada. They all apply this formula. But the good news is that this can work for any brand, old and new, large or small-- when designing a new brand identity or refocusing an existing one. This is how it works:

STEP ONE:

UNIFY

Know who you are and believe it.

As a company, if you are not unified in your vision, your branding effort will be DOA. Without consensus, your aspiration to become a great brand is a non-starter. No matter the nature of your company--a high-powered law firm, an Internet startup, a new fashion label--you need to speak with a singular voice and agree on who you are and what your value is to your customers.

Naturally, a charismatic visionary can lead the way (i.e. Napoleon, Henry Ford, Sir Richard Branson), but even those titans needed to get their key players aligned. Most often, it's a group of senior executives to start with, but it applies to every individual in the company. There is no other option. They all need to say "yes."

STEP TWO:

SIMPLIFY

Create a clear and compelling message, in words, pictures or both, so that everyone--from your employees to your customers to your mother--can easily understand your brand promise and why they should care about it.

The more memorable this message and image is, the easier it is for "believers" to become "ambassadors" and communicate it to others. The result: They will love you for your clarity.

STEP THREE:

AMPLIFY

This is where a lot of brands fall short, because it takes determination, commitment, and real money to reinforce your brand identity everywhere. To optimize design and marketing dollars, brands need to work consistently and strategically to activate all touch points with target audiences. Great brands do just that and they never miss.

Take a moment and test this model on your favorite brands. Walk into any Lego store, and you can feel the unified brand message, from each individual Lego brick to the holistic constructive creativity in the space. When your Netflix envelope arrives exactly on time, you know this is what their core values simplify down to: customer service, fulfillment, and delivery. When you lovingly unwrap a new product from Apple, you see their dedication to detail amplified in every respect.

Is it a simple formula? Yes. Easy? No. I estimate that this “free” advice is worth about \$100,000 if a company really gets it right. Don’t apply this formula and doom your brand to bland.

In the coming months, I’ll be showcasing brands that unify, simplify and amplify, and those that do not. I’ll be examining “legacy” companies and those born yesterday from a wide cross section of industries. If you have a suggestion for a brand that you love that employs this formula well--or examples of ones that don’t--I’d like to hear about it. Please share them here.



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