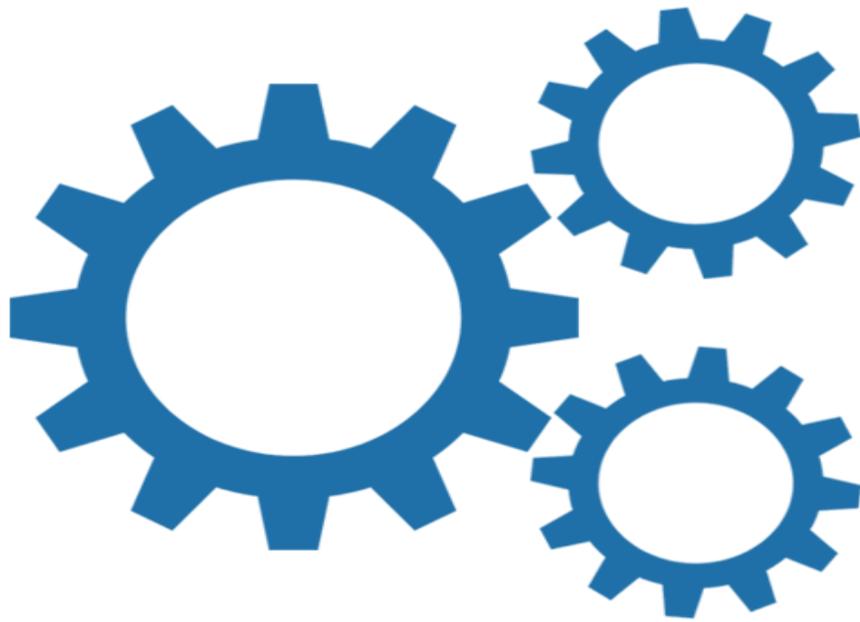


ONLINE BUSINESS BLUEPRINT



GUIDE 3:
CREATING YOUR ONLINE
IDENTITY AND BRAND

Creating Your Online Identity and Brand

If you are in the internet marketing business, the retail business, manufacturing or nearly any other type of enterprise, then you must be concerned with your online identity and branding.

This should be the number one priority of any company that relies on the public to buy their products and services. But if you are new to business or even new to web marketing, then you might not know exactly how to build your online identity and brand.

In this report, you will learn everything that you need to know to become a master of building your brand online.

What is an Online Identity & Brand?

The first question that must be answered before you can learn anything about the how's and why's of branding is what exactly an online identity is; as well as a brand.

Your online identity is the overall picture of your company online.

What you have to understand is that people don't buy from companies. They buy from brands.

As a company, you are a faceless and soulless entity that wants to take their money. But as a brand, you are a familiar presence and a trusted partner in their value proposition.

Your online identity encompasses everything that you are online; everything that people see, hear or feel about your company. Your brand includes both physical aspects like your logo and slogan, as well as less tangible ones such as your reputation, tone and more.

Companies spend millions of dollars building their brand online. of course, this is unrealistic for most people, but even if you are a small business or a sole internet marketer you can build a brand online that is going to give you the relationship that you need with the public to turn a visitor into a buyer and then into a loyal customer.

Why is it Important?

So, why is your online identity so important? There are several reasons why this is the case. We've already discussed the most important ones, namely that your company success and bottom line depend upon them.

But an identity is especially important online because you need some kind of digital avatar in order to interact with searchers and online shoppers.

You need to create a brand that they will recognize and trust and then come back to again and again. Your online identity is the most important thing that you will ever do online.

Setting Up Your Brand

Now we are going to discuss some of the things that go into creating an online brand that can represent your company. We will start with the basics, much of which you may already know, and then move on to more advanced strategies.

Creating Your Physical Identity

The first thing that will discuss is creating your physical identity. These are tangible things that people are able to look at or listen to. Of course, since this is mostly digital content, they aren't actually tangible, but it simply means that they are physically there.

The first thing that you need to do is create an amazing logo. If you are just starting out in business, you are likely on a pretty tight budget. When businesses don't have a lot of money to spend, owners may try to design a logo themselves or find a discount graphic designer to create one.

But the logo is the most important part of your physical identity because it must be instantly recognizable and easily remembered by anyone who has seen it. This means that it needs to be the right balance between simple and well-designed, with the right colors, shapes and fonts.

Your physical identity also includes your website. If your online identity is the face of your business online, then your website is your business address.

When people want to find out more about your company, as well as when they want to buy your products and services, they will visit your website. Your website needs to display your branding, logo, description and tell people what to look for when they come across you online.

Of course, physical branding also includes various other applications of that same logo such as social media profiles, business cards, letterheads and basically, anywhere that your business is listed.

Your logo is just the outermost image of your company of course. You also have pictures of executive management, descriptions, origin stories and various other elements making up your physical identity online.

Creating Your Intangible Identity

When it comes to your non-physical identity, there is still a great deal of importance attached to it. Your non-physical identity is what people believe about your company, what sense they get from reading your company story and what philosophy and values you present to the public.

None of these things are accidental. Each one of these intangibles is carefully crafted by you and your staff.

Your reputation, your philosophy and your values are all things that you create and then ensure gets into the hands of the public. But before we get into how to disseminate these things, we have to cover how they are created in the first place.

Some of these elements are published to your website, or at least, the information published to your website should infer these elements.

For example, suppose that you published a blog, and you spent a great deal of time writing about the families of people who worked for you, and what kind of policies your company is creating to benefit those families. Someone would rightly infer that families are important to you; that they are one of your values.

You also want to build the impression that you are an expert in the field. That means that you'll have to spend time online actually promoting that image.

Some of the best ways to do that is by answering questions on websites like Quora, visiting the relevant forums in LinkedIn and maintaining a membership on bulletin boards and other sites within your industry.

However, you do want to make sure that you have all of your physical identity elements in place, because when someone comes across your expert advice, you want them to associate it with your company and remember you in the future.

Branding & Propagation

The next thing that we'll discuss is propagation. Once you have built a brand identity, then you have to figure out some way to get the information out there.

Your logo, company story, philosophy and values can all exist on your website, but unless someone has a reason to go there, you aren't going to be able to spread your message very far and if you want your online identity to affect your bottom line, you have to do some marketing.

Of course, we have already discussed a few ways that you can do this in the sections on creating your online identity, such as answering questions on "expert answer" websites like Quora.

We will go into these methods in a lot more detail below. But keep in mind that you have to set up your online identity before you do any marketing work.

That includes uploading your logo and company information to all relevant social media profiles, registering with the appropriate forums and adding visual aids and signature links as well as any other activity online that will place your brand in the public view.

Maintaining Your Brand

The next step after ensuring that you have a social media presence is marketing and maintaining that brand. These are seemingly two separate things on the surface, but in a way, they are nearly the same.

Most or all of the steps listed here are done for both purposes simultaneously – both to market your company's identity and maintain it so that you have a good reputation as a strong, trustworthy brand.

The Importance of Googling Yourself

If you want to find out what the current state of your identity is, there is no better way to do so than by googling yourself regularly. Type your company name into any search engine and see what comes up.

You might come across some positive customer reviews from sites you didn't even know existed, or you might find that there are some negative reviews out there that you can address.

Finding out what is going on with your business online is quite easy with internet search engines, especially if your company name is something unique that isn't going to bring up a bunch of non-relevant results.

Blogging

Blogging is one of the best ways to market your company online and any IM guru will tell you so. Blogging does several things at once for your

company. First, it presents you as a human being or group of human beings. When people read your blog posts, as long as they are well written and personable, they will see a person behind the words.

Also, blogging helps to establish your credibility. People will see you as an expert if they come across your blog post and it answers some industry question they had.

Finally, blogging continually adds keywords that the search engines will index you for, meaning that you'll get more visitors to your website.

Professional Associations

Professional associations can also give you a great deal of credibility on the internet. If you belong to a professional organization that is recognized by others in the industry, then you will be seen as more of an expert in the field, and more people will want to buy from you because of that recognition.

Google Alerts

You should also set up Google alerts so that you can get notified whenever your company name comes across the Google news wire service or the other locations that the alerts notifications will monitor.

This will allow you to stay in the know and respond quickly should a negative piece be published.

Domain & Social Media Names

You also want to claim domain and social media names as much as possible; and as quickly as possible. This includes variations of your company name with your .coms and social media profiles, as well as your actual company name with all of the standard extensions out there.

This will help you build brand dominance over your name.

Signatures & Descriptions

You also want to use email signatures, forum signatures and any other listing online to your advantage as much as possible. Maintaining these can take time out of your undoubtedly busy day, but it can be worth it.

For example, when you change your forum signature to reflect a new product or any other changes to your company, the changes are reflected across the entire site, on every post that you have ever made.

This means potentially thousands of eyeballs just for changing a single forum signature. That's also another reason why being active on forums is such a good idea.

Forums and Q & A Websites

We have already discussed why forums are a terrific place to market your company and build your online profile. What forums you choose will depend upon the industry that you are in and what kind of expertise you want to build.

But there are other websites that you should focus on as well; those are the question-and-answer format sites. Yahoo Answers is an example of this, although that service is mostly defunct now, but the most popular out there is definitely Quora.

Quora has questions on every single topic you could think of, and the number of unanswered questions likely number in the millions. Quora is a great place to build your expertise, because you can put your company information in every single question you answer.

Conclusion

The bottom line is that you simply have to create an online identity if you want to make it in the world of retail or internet marketing.

People don't just visit the internet anymore; they actually live on it, doing most of their shopping online, using the web for entertainment and in many cases, working online.

Your identity needs to meet them where they are because they won't come to you.