

The Importance of "The Fifth C" in Branding

By Isabelle Albanese

1. Why is branding essential for a small firm?

Branding is essential – period – for any size firm. I believe it is especially critical for smaller firms since they usually don't have tons of cash to keep their brand's essence top of mind.

2. How do you build a brand -- what's the proper breadth, scope?

I believe there are two critical pillars in building a brand's worth – consistency of presentation and the ability to stand for something in the minds of your customers/consumers.

- *Consistency of presentation* means that every single point of contact with your customer/consumer communicates the essence of your brand – its proposition and promise; its credibility and craft – in the same way. Consistency builds brands.
- *The ability to stand for something* – means that the mere mention of your brand must be meaningful to its customers/consumers. What does your brand – your firm – stand for? When your customer/consumer thinks of your brand (your business), what's the first thing that comes to mind?

The proper breadth and scope is entirely subjective and depends greatly. What's right for your business at a specific time may not be right for someone else's business. As yourself a few key questions to help determine breath and scope:

- What are the category dynamics and level of competition?
- What's the playing field like? What's the caliber of your competitors?
- Are your objectives immediate or long range?

3. What top 3-5 things are a must-know, must-do for small business owners regarding branding?

I think I may have answered part of this question with the last answer! I believe the top three "must dos" for small business owners relative to branding are:

- Be consistent in your presentation (discussed above)
- Stand for something meaningful (ditto)
- Be credible. And credibility is everything in branding. If, in positioning and communicating your brand's position there is a lack of credibility, then being consistent and standing for something don't really amount to much do they? Credibility means being proven; being trustworthy; being real. It means getting that immediate "head nod" when you put your brand out there. Any customer in any category will tell you that these qualities are paramount in maintaining a relationship with a brand. *And in differentiating that brand from its competitors.*

4. What are the top mistakes to avoid?

I think a big mistake – but one that is very tempting to make – is to try to stand for too many things. Advocating too many benefits just begins to bring the credibility of your brand into question. It's tempting because you want to be sure – especially when starting a new business – that you don't leave anything out. There are many important benefits – which one do I stand for? But I believe that when you identify that critical salient piece of equity and are consistent about presenting and supporting it, your brand becomes clear and laser-like. This is another key way to

differentiate.

5. How do you build a brand when you don't have megabucks?

If you take every opportunity to present your brand in a consistent, meaningful and credible way you have the opportunity for whatever financial support you do have to work as hard as it can. Word of mouth is worth "megabucks" and doesn't cost you a penny. But no one's going to be talking about your brand (except maybe in a pejorative way) unless the equity is consistent, the message is meaningful and the presentation and delivery are credible.

6. What if anything should CPA firms consider when building a brand?

I think with any type of firm, there are key points of consideration when creating and building a brand:

- a) First and definitely foremost – *know what's important* to your customers/clients. For our business, a CPA firm has got to be reliable, act/work with integrity and be smart about accounting!
- b) Determine how your firm can best deliver on/address what's important to your customers/clients. How is it uniquely positioned/staffed/organized, experienced, etc.?
- c) Now figure out how your firm can *be different* in the way it delivers on/addresses what's important.
- d) Then – at the risk of being redundant:
 - Be Consistent in Presentation
 - Stand for Something Meaningful
 - Be Credible

7. Do most small companies brand, do they do a good job, why or why not?

Well – I really don't know the answer to that question! I'd say if small companies want to grow, they've GOT to brand themselves! They've got to create some equity in the minds of their customers or I'd guess they will forever remain VERY small. And frankly, if you've got a name for your business – you've got a potential brand. Hopefully it's the right name (another article, I suppose, but one that at the very least delivers a benefit) and it's well-tended.

8. Anything else you'd like to bring up on the subject?

In my book, [The 4Cs of Truth in Communications™](#) I talk a great deal about what it takes to be effective in communicating a message. I believe that being effective in creating and building a brand can be measured by the same 4Cs yardstick.

- **Comprehension** – make sure you are clear about what you want your brand to communicate.
- **Connection** – stand for something meaningful to your customer/client
- **Credibility** – be sure you deliver (see above discussion)
- **Contagiousness** – make sure your brand is unique in its presentation and delivery. Be worth talking about!

Isabelle Albanese is the author of the book, **The 4Cs of Truth in Communications™** and spent 16 years in the advertising business building consumer packaged goods brands! She has written articles on effective communication which have appeared in publications and on web-sites including Sales & Marketing Management, American Management Association, About.com, Communications Solutions, HR.com, – to name a few. She is the Principal/Owner of a successful marketing consulting firm,

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