

Seven Steps to Brand-Led Marketing

Step 1: Become truly 'marketing minded'

When many people think of marketing they think of meeting customer needs. Of course, understanding and responding to changing customer needs is essential, but there is another dimension. Brand-led marketing ensures that you meet customer needs *in a way that is different from your competitors*. If you can't find this point of difference you're in danger of becoming a price-based commodity.

Ask yourself:

Do my customers really see me as different from my closest competitors? How/Why? What can I do to make my business more distinctive and appealing to help secure them as long-term and profitable customers?

Step 2: Monitor the changing environment

We live in a rapidly changing world of many threats and opportunities. Few business managers take adequate time-out to stop, look around, and reflect on how these changes might have an impact. As a result, most companies die young.

Ask yourself, at least once a quarter:

What are the changing consumer trends, competitor activity, legislation, economic trends or technology developments that might have an impact on my brand and my business?

Step 3: Have a meaningful vision for your business *and* your brand

A business Vision (or Mission) has a number of roles: most important of which are to inspire and guide. Too many business Visions include words like 'leader', 'best', 'preeminent', 'most successful'. Words like this can mean many different things to different people. Because of that they are of limited help in inspiring or guiding the behavior of the business team. *Brand Visions have just the same function*. Make sure that you have a written Vision for your brand that is strong enough to inspire and guide behavior.

Ask yourself:

Do I have a brand Vision that everyone understands and has bought into? How might I improve my brand Vision, so it is a stronger inspiration and guide?

Step 4: Build your brand 'from the inside out'

Building a brand is not just about advertising or marketing communications. Nor is it just about your product or service. Your brand is really what your customers think of you, and how much trust they have in you. To build a strong brand you have to have a clear idea of how you want to be thought of, and then consider everything that you say and do.

In everything that you say and do, ask yourself:

Will this get me closer to where I want to be in the mind of my customers?

Step 5: Plan for success

There is a phrase: "If you don't know where you want to go, any road will get you there." This is true in life, and it is true in business. If you want to succeed you have to have clear, measurable objectives - you have to know where you want to get to!

Ask yourself:

Do I have a brand plan with clear, measurable objectives? (And am I measuring the things that are really important!)

Step 6: Become a 'learning business'

Continuously improving your brand-led marketing effectiveness is essential to long-term success. The best way to achieve this is to ensure that you take a little time to become a 'learning business' by building learning into your processes.

For every marketing initiative you undertake, ask yourself:

How can I build learning into this, so that I can find out what works and what doesn't, and do it better next time?

Step 7: Be prepared to change

What worked in the past may not work in the future. If you can achieve steps 1 - 6 that's great, but you have to go one step further. You have to be prepared to change. Don't just do the same things better, look around for new ways of pursuing your vision and your desired brand. Explore, experiment and anticipate.

Ask yourself:

Is there an opportunity to break-out and achieve a step-change from where I am now?

Kind regards

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