

## B-to-B Branding in a Connected World

Branding has always been about much more than logos and graphics. It comprises the total experience customers and prospects have with your company.

By adding newer, richer choices, today's new communications technologies—everything from blogs and podcasts to wikis and mobile—are changing the fundamental basis of business-to-business marketing almost daily.

While some are saying that branding is no longer relevant in that increasingly fragmented media world, we believe branding actually is more important than ever. In fact, it's critical to your success.

### **New World Branding**

The new media and interactive technologies offer more ways for customers to make contact and experience your brand. As a result, marketers have more responsibility for the brand than ever before—and more opportunity to make the customer experience a rewarding one.

Customers and prospects are taking advantage of the new technologies in all phases of the buying process, from research to vendor selection to spec comparison, all the way to making a purchase where appropriate. In surveys of engineers, for example, 90 percent of respondents say the Web is an important part of the buying and specifying process.

But the Web is just the tip of the iceberg. New technologies have changed the game by creating a deeper, richer, two-way marketing interaction. B-to-B customers are embracing new communications technologies, especially those that maximize their ability to learn new things, retrieve information and share it with their colleagues.

That may mean prospects download a podcast that educates them about a new technology. Participate in a blog, written by one of your top design engineers, that addresses design issues or technical problems. It could be a wiki you post and encourage users to amend. Or it could mean that you allow users to request RSS feeds from your site—and let them choose what kind of content they'd like to receive.

### **The New Challenges of B-to-B Branding**

Not surprisingly, the proliferation of new media opportunities also includes a risk. With so many new options, there's the possibility that your branding could become diluted, even fragmented.

That's why we believe branding is more important than ever. Branding represents your differentiation, your promise to your market about how you will add value to a business relationship. And the new technology radically changes how you deliver on that promise.

The new media give you exciting new ways to make your differentiation come alive. Richer, fuller media enable greater depth of expression and a two-way conversation (as opposed to a monolog). And therein lies the critical new leap to make—one-way broadcast media give you great ways to shout your brand differentiation from the mass media rooftops. New technologies give you the opportunity to show it.

That opportunity, of course, is a double-edged sword. What does it say about your *partnership* positioning, for instance, if you don't invite the dialog, or fail to engage your customers with the deeper, richer communication? You can no longer rely only on your sales force or customer service or manufacturing to fulfill your branding promises. Now that the new technologies offer your customers and prospects a much more direct way to experience your company, their experience must live up to that promise.

To rise to the branding challenges these new media present, B-to-B companies need to mount a much more directed branding effort, internally as well as externally.

### **Brand Guardians**

Marketers need to consider all the options B-to-B prospects have before them. They can use a search engine to find and compare all of the products in a category. They can go to a blog to hear what the market is saying—and maybe tune in to the complaints of dissatisfied customers. They can compare products online, and buy from any number of sources.

With so many ways for your customers and prospects to find a way into your company—and, on the positive side, so many ways to get your message out—it is more important than ever to develop strong brand messaging that has different expression in any and every channel of communication.

B-to-B marketers can be their companies' brand guardians, providing the external messaging that will maintain a strong brand identity in a time of media proliferation and brand fragmentation.

### **Brand Ambassadors**

The new media bring renewed importance to the concept of *internal branding*. The new level of dialogue and open communication make it essential that people throughout your company understand, reflect and live the brand.

The new media have put them in direct contact with customers and prospects—or it will soon—so their role in shaping your brand will only increase. They are your brand ambassadors, and they can play a critical role in making the brand come alive for customers.

A great deal depends on their ability to clearly present the brand, embrace its values and be an effective advocate in all of their interactions. That means a little training and constant communications about your brand, and how your company is living its brand values every day.

#### **B-TO-B BRANDING IDEAS THAT CONNECT:**

1. Branding represents the total experience customers and prospects have with your company.
2. New media choices make branding more important than ever.
3. The new media enable deeper, richer communications with your customers.
4. This radically changes how a B-to-B company develops and delivers its brand messaging, and how it lives up to the promises it makes to its customers.
5. Marketers can be the brand guardians, helping everyone understand their role in an interactive media environment.
6. People throughout your company can be the brand ambassadors who understand, reflect and live the brand.

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Godfrey provides full-service, integrated business-to-business branding and marketing communications services. The agency offers research, brand management, advertising, public relations, digital marketing, search (SEO and SEM), media, direct marketing and analytics services.