

Telling Your Brand Story

By Dan Stiff

Everyone has a “brand” story. The question is: who is telling it, you, or your competition? Told well, your brand story will not only leverage your presence in the marketplace; it will become the one great differentiator for your company.

Let’s shatter a myth: brand does not belong to marketing. In fact, when leveraged well, your brand is a powerful tool that can be used by sales to boost your company’s performance and profits.

As a manager, you need to get comfortable with the success stories of your brand in the marketplace and make those stories part of your company’s selling arsenal. By articulating your brand story, you will convey your company’s unique advantages, engage the customer, and differentiate your products and services from those of competitors.

You should be able to tell your brand story in 30 seconds.

Start formulating that story by asking yourself these questions:

- Am I adequately meeting the needs of a buyer who is now more than ever interested in looking at the attributes of brand when considering products?
- Am I typically emphasizing concepts that relate to brand in my presentation to the buyer?
- Do I know how to express the importance of brands?

Don’t be surprised if the answer to all three is no. Brand is the crown jewel of the company, yet for too long it’s been considered the property of Marketing. A great brand story will give you more focus in your profession, boost performance at work, and improve your customer relationships.

Creating Your Brand Story

Your brand is made up of the collective experiences of the customers who engage it and the people like you who represent it every day. You need to make it your story by being engaged with it and by engaging the customer. This will not happen overnight. You will need to practice it and, most important, live it.

Start by answering these questions:

- What is the history of your brand?
- What is the language of your brand? That is, what are the compelling and emotional words that represent your brand well?
- What has been the impact of your brand on you, your buyers, and the marketplace? If the brand is new, a better question is: What impact do you believe the brand will have on the marketplace?

Finding Your Brand Language

How do you start speaking brand language? Begin by becoming a student of your brand. Ask your customers how they perceive the brand and what words they would attach to it. Ask your buyers questions that help build your brand language—questions that can get at the customer's perception of your brand. These questions can be posed one-on-one or in a group setting, such as an end-user panel, market research, customer forum, or customer feedback surveys. Your end users are closest to the product and have a keen sense of what the brand means to them. They can articulate it.

Here are some questions that will help you collect brand language:

- Why do you buy from us?
- What does our product or service do for you that no one else can duplicate?
- What is your impression of our brand? How does it improve your lifestyle?
- How do we build trust and credibility with you as a customer?
- If our company went away tomorrow, what would be missing in the marketplace?
- If you have brand loyalty to us, describe why.
- If you have brand loyalty to a competitor, describe why.
- What are we distinctively known for in the marketplace?
- What blockbuster product or service was a breakthrough for us in the last five to ten years? Why?
- If you could tell our CEO one thing about how to improve our personal connection with you the buyer, what would it be?

Turning Your Salespeople into Brand Ambassadors

Studies have shown that the salesperson is the most vital link to the customer. A survey by Prophet Company, management consultants based in San Francisco, found that companies “ranked the sales force as their most effective brand-building tool, ahead of traditional tools such as advertising and marketing.”

In truth, most companies spend the largest portion of their annual budget not on advertising, but rather on investment in their salespeople. If that is the case for you, then make a concerted effort to build each salesperson into a brand ambassador who will become a “walking billboard for the brand.” The study went on to say that “what drives customer perceptions during the purchase cycle is traditionally managed by other parts of the company, outside of marketing.” Salespeople are key to driving customer perceptions of your brand.

Salespeople need to tell a brand story that is rich and has history, using brand language that is evocative and memorable. A great brand story will knit you and your customers together as people with similar experiences and similar heritage—just like a family. If your customers know your brand's story they will understand how your company thinks, who you are, and why it makes sense to do business with you.

Once you have created a brand story and language that reflects it, make sure all of your salespeople know how to communicate it. You'll be pleasantly surprised by the results.

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Dan Stiff is president of Leadership Performance Development, Inc. (www.lpdinc.com), a training and consulting company specializing in sales, leadership, and organizational development. His new book is *Sell the Brand First: How to Sell Your Brand and Create Lasting Customer Loyalty* (McGraw-Hill).

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