

More than just a brand,
creating an Action Brand™

What is a brand?

*"A brand is a promise that when kept
creates preference."*

~ Peter Sealey, PhD

What is an Action Brand™?

*"A brand promise that goes beyond
preference to generate response."*

~ DMW Direct

Strong brands open doors to opportunity.

A McKinsey Study of 5,000 customer interviews found that for 21% of consumers, brand is the dominant factor in their shopping decision. That same study also concluded that, on average, the strongest brand in a category enjoys a 19% price premium. In fact, across categories, brand drives 18% of total purchase decision.

Such studies give empirical evidence to most marketers' widely held faith in a strong brand. There is less consensus on how a company or product goes about the business of developing a brand. This paper discusses branding in general, and how DMW Direct—as a direct marketing agency—goes about branding in a different way, and the solid ground on which our process is built.

The traditional brand process. Typically, a brand starts with a Unique Selling Proposition, or U.S.P., and powerful brand image, as developed by ad pioneer Rosser Reeves in the 1950's and 60's. This approach birthed such iconic brands as The Pillsbury Doughboy and Marlboro Man, many of which live on to this day. In the 1980's and 90's, there was a preference for a "Cultural Brand," with imagery and catch phrases that entered everyday conversation. A great example was the "Where's the beef?" campaign for Wendy's and "Perception/Reality" for *Rolling Stone* magazine. A current branding school champions the "Attitudinal Brand." A good example is Nike, where communications grab the audience, make a lifestyle affinity statement, then sign off with Nike's graphic "swoosh" – often without using the actual Nike name.

These approaches, demonstrated by their results, all have merit. They also have a common requirement: a large budget to ingrain the brand with a broad target audience. Nearly all widely used brand-building models are derived from the practices of large consumer package goods companies, who employ large general advertising agencies and accept multi-million dollar budgets as commonplace.

How our approach differs. DMW Direct serves clients who do not have huge budgets to play with. And DMW Direct is a different kind of agency. Frankly, if our clients had much more money to spend, we still would not develop brands in the typical traditional way. Because DMW is not a traditional advertising agency.

DMW is a direct response advertising agency. This gives us a very different bias when undertaking a branding project. Our perspective is affected by decades of experience serving both small and mid-size commercial and non-profit clients – who look to us to steward their budgets, and use proven direct response techniques to produce measurable results for each dollar they spend.



Our techniques—in both branding campaigns as well as acquisition and retention programs—have proven results with a client portfolio that spans the gamut from AM South and Discover Card, to CLEAR mobile internet and The Hartford, to Microsoft and public television stations. Across this broad variety of clients, we have participated in re-branding initiatives, product launches, and brand rollouts. We have worked with brands in transition, including organizations coping with unforeseen competitive pressure, even organizations evolving from a protected marketing environment—due to regulations, geography or one-time semi-protected status—helping them evolve into a strong position in each of their increasingly competitive free-market realities.

Each situation we have encountered provided new insight. Working from a sensitivity to each client's unique situation and our response-driven point of view, DMW works to create Action Brands™. This approach to branding has been developed from 25+ years experience with enterprises who must spend their budgets wisely and could never rely on consumer awareness or Gross Rating Points to meet their goals.

What is an Action Brand™?

Like other branding approaches, an Action Brand™ will create a U.S.P. It will carve out a position in the marketplace. It will be memorable. It will accomplish many of the same objectives as a traditional brand. But it works hard to do more. It is created to drive the public to action: to open an account, switch providers, subscribe to a new service, deepen an existing relationship.

The goal of most branding is to “create a unique position in the public's mind” or to “make your brand part of popular culture.” All laudable goals. But not aimed at producing what we hear more and more clients being asked to produce: measurable results. Only an Action Brand works, from its inception, to motivate consumers toward a measurable response.

The goal of an Action Brand goes beyond defining what you do well and what is different about your offering. It focuses on what is most profitable to promote in light of your unique business reality and to exploit specific facets of your competition's offering. Action Branding defines what it is that's different about your organization, what makes a real difference to your target market(s), and how to present the difference(s) to them in a way that makes them take action. It is built on the answers to three questions:



1. What promise(s) have the greatest power to move your customers and prospects?

Your brand should focus not only on what might make your product or service unique, but what the specific target audiences you need to persuade care about. And what they care the most about. Then: what are the hot buttons that have the greatest likelihood of urging them to take the action(s) you desire?

2. What opportunities present the greatest potential for your organization?

First: opportunities relating to your target audiences – needs that are unfilled by present players. Second: opportunities created by your competitors – such as geographic coverage or business philosophy. Third: opportunities in society – trends or current events that may open new doors.

3. What core competencies or promises can your organization best deliver?

Most organizations do a number of things. Viable products, attractive pricing, professional service and accessible locations are part of the mix in every viable enterprise. But some will be greater centers of excellence than others.

Where the answers to these three areas overlap is where an Action Brand begins.

The crucial difference about an Action Brand: results. An Action Brand is not content with “an increase in business” or tallies of “new Facebook fans and open rates.”

Our focus is to generate measurable action resulting in leads, sales, account openings, and increased dollars of revenue.

Examples of Action Brands – in action!

Now, to go beyond theory and into practice. A few examples of Action Brands – in action. A themeline is not the totality of a brand, but it is a concise way to examine a branding effort. To make an impact in the market, it needs to be less about your brand’s attributes, or its personality, or even defining a U.S.P. – and more about conveying a critical consumer benefit. An Action Brand is tuned to what we refer to as “the radio station everyone’s ears are plugged into: WIIFM – What’s In It For Me.” A few examples:



Action Brands are created where promise and opportunity overlap your enterprise center(s) of excellence.



"Your Trust Matters"

This Action Brand keys in on the disenchantment consumers feel toward commercial banks and financial institutions. It aligns our client with the consumers' values and priorities. It is not about "us," but "you." It was the foundation for a multi-media advertising campaign. Even with early results reported in its initial phase, this campaign has already achieved triple the desired brand awareness impact (for a credit union which started with a 14% awareness in its market). And while sales activity was not part of the initial campaign criteria for success, it has created thousands of new members who opened new accounts.



"Surf Less. Net More."

When a financial services provider launched a new marketing model, they called on us to help drive market research, name a new Web portal, develop the themeline and design the logo, as well as execute their brand launch. Not unusual for an Action Brand, the themeline itself is a call to action with a strong, concrete benefit. Our client's goal was to drive 1 million Web hits in 3 months. Our campaign generated 1.2 million – in just 45 days. Plus it drove thousands of quotes for financial services, generating measurable sales – actions the client was not anticipating at this stage of their marketing plan, or even considering as a probability.



"We're here for you every step of the way"

The branding theme we created for Independence Blue Cross's Medicare product marketing is not so much about the client, their heritage of service and their painstakingly built network of top hospitals and doctors, as what they can do for the consumer. The theme underscores the consumer's need for stable, local service and a lifetime of good health. The launch marketing campaign branded with this theme generated 118% of the lead goal, achieving a significantly lower CPL (cost per lead) than budgeted.

What an Action Brand does.

In short: it drives response. Going beyond building brand preference to actively strengthening your franchise with existing customers (reduced attrition, increased cross-selling), while driving new customer acquisition.

First: Your Action Brand will meet the same criteria as any sound brand strategy. It starts with a brand vision. Defines what you want to be known for in your competitive market(s). Secondly, it provides a foundation for your brand architecture, solidifying a name, logo and tagline to support growth. Third, it communicates meaningfully to motivate your target audiences – both internal and external. And finally, it creates a brand personality to attract new customers/members and convert them, old and new, into long-term, loyal customers.

This core “brand value” or “brand essence,” once defined, should drive all organizational activity – from receptionist greetings to sales presentations, marketing materials to telephone interactions, to internal signage and programs to incentivize cross-sell – to ensure the vision of the organization pervades all facets of operations. This total brand immersion is the final step to energize the organization’s core value in the performance of all daily tasks, increase client satisfaction, customer retention, and ultimately, all bottom line activity.

Lessons learned: Action steps toward building your new Action Brand.

As a direct agency, this white paper, like everything else we do, cannot simply end with a concluding statement. A call to action is required! So here are a number of “to-do’s” for anyone undergoing a brand process:

1. A “brand” in action affects so much more than advertising and marketing. Too often a “brand” is simply considered to be a logo, or graphic standards. At its best (and one should never settle for less) a brand is the essence of what an organization stands for: a combination of its credo, personality, even “soul” if you will. It should be relevant to fulfilling a promise to the consumer and to accomplish that lofty goal, it needs to pervade all aspects of an organization.

2. Money isn’t funny when it comes to people’s finances. Everyone enjoys a good laugh. We all enjoy those famous funny brand ad campaigns. First, remember those campaigns rely on grand budgets to succeed. Also, years of in-market testing for multiple clients in all facets of financial services, from insurance and banking to credit cards and loans, with results spread-sheeted out by cost-per-lead, show that humor consistently (and almost without exception) fails in head-to-head tests with benefit-driven non-humorous approaches. Humor can “work,” but is very rarely ever the best performer when hard-core direct marketing measures are a priority. Winners needn’t be boring or stuffy. But they cannot rely *solely* on humor.



3. Your younger customers and prospects may be hip: maybe you shouldn't be.

This is another insight gleaned from multiple in-market tests, not focus groups (because sometimes what people say does not align one-to-one with how they actually behave). Twenty and thirty-somethings may crave hip soft drinks, fashions and entertainment. But in the final analysis, the people they will rely on to take care of business relating to critical concerns such as their money and health will be relatively serious, conscientious, reliable folk. Not surprising, really.

4. Get a truly outside perspective.

It can be beneficial to work with an agency who knows your business. On the other hand, you are already an expert in your business. Our clients, in categories we know well, benefit from our counsel most when buffered by learning from our clients in other industries. One of the things clients value most is being able to ask us: "What are your clients in other industries doing about (this issue)?" An agency should be able to surprise you and challenge your "givens."

5. Demand a "no cookie-cutter" approach.

All clients are different. Their challenges are unique. Be wary of an agency that has "Their Style." When it comes to style and tone, every campaign should reflect the personality of the client, not the agency. The work for each client should be different: whether a brand campaign or quarterly sales drive. Even offering the same product, a client's personality will (or should) differ. At least it will if the brand was developed properly. The test: if you can switch the logo at the bottom of an ad, and the message still feels appropriate, the brand positioning is not living up to its highest potential.

6. Expect substantial deliverables.

As discussed earlier, a brand is more than a logo and graphic guidelines. But these are important. At the conclusion of a branding process your agency should deliver a Graphic Style Guide defining graphic usage in real-world applications. And a Brand Book communicating specifics of the Brand Personality, backed by a training schedule (possibly called Acculturation Sessions or even "Tribal Rites") to help all your employees (or associates) embrace and become advocates of your new brand. From a practical side, you should also receive a full package of graphic elements and fonts in various file formats and resolutions so your internal staff, and other communications partners, can run with the new brand independent of your agency.



7. Expect results that you can measure.

You may want to see a change in marketplace perception and awareness of your brand via a pre- and post-study. You may want to create a mechanism to track increased traffic. We like to also take steps to generate metrics that will measure increased new customer/member activity, leads, sales and/or revenue. You may need numbers to justify budget, meet (or exceed) stated objectives, or just show a positive R.O.I. Whatever your plans, we encourage you to push for some mechanism to capture quantifiable measurements as your new brand is implemented.



These seven points summarize the considerations we recommend to every organization planning a branding or re-branding project. They are elements DMW Direct has a track record of accomplishing on behalf of our clients. We know these steps produce results helping both not-for-profit and for-profit clients compete successfully in competitive markets and in times of transition.

As relentless champions for measuring brand success, we can also assure you that you can get the accountability with "brand." Key metrics include aided and unaided brand awareness; media effectiveness through post buys and benchmarking; and ROI metrics like activation, utilization, retention and cross-sell.

As you create, refine or rejuvenate a brand, we hope you find actionable insights in these pages. And whatever you do, don't settle for a passive, traditional brand. Demand an Action Brand! If you would appreciate some assistance in achieving that goal, DMW Direct is at your service. **Please contact George A. Price, Vice President Business Development, at 484-383-0064 or gprice@dmwdirect.com.**

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