
YOUR BRAND TOOLBOX

ABOUT SUBSTANCE151

Substance151 is a strategic brand communications firm for organizations on the edge of evolution – whether that evolution is inspired by growth, changing conditions, stronger competition, new customers, products and services or a desire for a stronger, more relevant brand.

Our expertise includes every step of the branding process – from strategy through design, across print and digital media, and covering all aspects of marketing communications.

You can reach Substance151 at brand@substance151.com or 410-732-8379.

GETTING STARTED

Brand = The Perception Your Audiences Have of Your Company

Although the definition is simple, building a strong brand is anything but easy. In fact, a strong brand begins with clearly defined foundational elements that come together to form a brand platform.

From there, you must translate the brand platform into:

- » **Brand Identity:** Look and feel, tone, style, and personality.
- » **Brand Touchpoints:** Traditional and digital marketing materials, corporate and sales tools, branded physical and virtual environments, and more.
- » **Marketing Communications:** The actual messages you put in front of your target audiences.

And, still, you're not done.

Constantly changing market conditions, emerging audience needs, and changes in your company's strategic direction can cause your brand to become out of alignment with today's needs.

Even if everything seemingly remains status quo, there's still significant value in conducting a brand audit from time to time. Should your audit reveal that your brand is no longer in alignment with your company's goals, it's time for a full rebrand.

To assist you with the entire process – from conducting your brand audit through rebranding, we've developed this **Brand Toolbox**.

Let's get started!

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TOOL 1: BRAND ASSESSMENT



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Find your starting point by assessing the strength of your current brand and marketing communications.

Clarity is key to building a strong brand.

You need a clear picture of your company's vision, offerings, target audiences and desired outcomes. You also need to assess your company's current positioning and communications.

The following sets of questions will help you achieve that clarity, honestly assess your current brand and determine whether or not it's time for a change.

First, take stock of where you are now:

- » **Target Audiences:** Who are your target audiences and what are their needs and challenges?
- » **Brand Visibility:** What is the level of awareness of your company among your target audiences?
- » **Brand Perception:** What is the current perception of your company?
- » **Market Share:** What is your current market share?

Then, get specific about your goals:

- » **Increase Visibility:** Do you need to increase the visibility of your company among your target audiences?
- » **Shift Brand Perception:** Is the perception your target audiences have of your company what you want it to be?
- » **Boost Market Share:** Is there room to capture a larger piece of the pie?
- » **Capture New Markets or Audiences:** Are you looking to enter into new markets or attract new audiences?

Next, prioritize:

- » Of all your goals, what are your top priorities and what can be realistically accomplished in the next year or two?

You now have a general overview of where you are and what you want to do. The remaining questions will help you get even more specific and determine if your company is prepared for a rebrand:

How does your brand measure up to your competition?

- » **Current Brand Position:** What is the position your company owns in the marketplace?
- » **Competitor Positioning:** How are your competitors positioned in the marketplace? Make sure to consider competitors in your specific geographic markets, as well as those called up in the same Google search results as your company.
- » **Competitive Differentiation:** What is your primary point of difference? What sets you apart?
- » **Desired Brand Position:** Do you need to make changes in your company's positioning to better leverage what sets you apart?

How effective are your communications?

- » **Value Proposition:** Are you communicating the tangible value your company brings to its target audiences?
- » **Target Audiences:** Are you communicating in a way that resonates with and is relevant to your audiences?
- » **Clarity and Targeting of Message:** Do your communications clearly and directly address each target audience?
- » **Frequency of Communication:** How often do you communicate with your target audiences and is this enough to stay top of mind?
- » **Calls to Action:** Does each of your communications have a clear call to action, spelling precisely what next step you want your audiences to take?

Is now the right time to rebrand the company?

- » **Internal Support.** Do you have the support of the leadership team and key stakeholders? Do you need to enlist the help of a branding firm to provide you with the necessary ammunition that you can use to get internal buy-in?
- » **Key Milestones.** Is there a significant event, such as a corporate anniversary or a new product/service launch, that makes this the ideal time to rebrand?
- » **Resources.** Does the company have the necessary resources (human and financial) to rebrand?
- » **Consequences of Inaction.** What will be the missed opportunities and where might you fall short of your goals?

Do you have the right people in place to rebrand the company?

- » **Internal Strengths.** Does the internal team have all the branding expertise required?
- » **Outside Expertise.** What is the value of an outside branding firm, either to provide guidance or take on the project from start to finish?

If you're like most companies, the above questions have probably triggered the thought of at least a few things you want to change about your brand.

The remaining tools in your Brand Toolbox will help you better understand the branding process – and determine the best path to take.

TOOL 2: BRANDING ROADMAP



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Navigating your company through a branding process can be highly rewarding. But it's also a monumental challenge. So how do you ensure that both the process and the outcome is an undeniable success?

Our Branding Roadmap holds the keys to your role as the leader – whether you're strengthening your current brand or initiating a complete rebrand, and whether you're the CEO, CMO or another key player on the marketing team.

Key 1: Understand the Big Picture

During the process, your team may spend countless hours arguing about colors or a tagline – your job as the leader is to stay out of the weeds. Yes, the details are critically important, but unnecessary obsession will cost significant time and money. Keep your eye on the big picture and you'll be able to navigate your team through every decision in an objective and timely manner.

Key 2: Consider Your Options

Unless you have a full set of branding experts in house, don't be afraid to outsource the strategic and creative process – you are bringing in an ally. When designing your selection process, remember that you are seeking both sound strategic thinking and exceptional creative execution. Keep in mind that most branding firms excel in one, not both.

Key 3: Chart a Path

Branding is a process, not a deliverable. Whether you are strengthening your existing brand or rebranding completely, chart your course – creating timelines, assigning responsibilities and allocating resources.

Key 4: Manage Mindsets

As the person leading the charge, it's up to you to instill a positive perception throughout your company about the branding process and the coming change. Strategic and open internal communications are a must – usually, people simply want to know what's going on.

Key 5: Launch Out Loud

Dropping new business cards on everyone's desks and calling this the brand launch shows you've spent too much time watching *The Office*. Use the launch to celebrate accomplishments, reconnect with past clients and media, and get everyone involved in creating the future. Take the time to remind the marketplace about what your company stands for.

In general, it's a good idea to plan your rollout long before you start, especially if you're performing a complete rebrand. A big, one-time launch is always best, but if carefully pre-planned, a staged rollout can make rebranding on smaller budgets or tight timelines possible.

Key 6: Never Loosen Your Grip

After the launch, your role changes from branding process leader to brand steward. Get graphic guidelines from your expert or design department, prepare to explain why “adjustments” to the new visual identity or message are not permissible, and give all staff and future hires a brand book to help them better understand, and communicate, your company's brand.

Key 7: Cement Your Story

It's not enough to make a great differentiating promise. You must deliver on it. Your new brand must extend into your company's business processes, culture and every action. It is your responsibility to continue bringing additional value to your company's marketing effort by doing what it takes to ensure your company's brand is fully realized.

TOOL 3: BRANDING PITFALLS



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Branding is not brain surgery. But it's not hopscotch either. It requires real expertise. Here are 7 Branding Pitfalls that separate the pros from the amateurs.

Pitfall 1: Thinking Your Brand Is Your Logo

What is a brand? A brand is the perception that your key stakeholders (current and prospective clients, employees, partners, industry and media) have of your company. That perception is created through every single interaction with your company at every single brand touchpoint.

To ensure that every interaction leaves a memorable, consistent and accurate impression, the information you share at each touchpoint needs to stem from your brand strategy. The foundation for this strategy is called a brand platform.

A brand platform consists of several essential elements that are a must for creating a strong brand: Core Position, Brand Promise, Brand Purpose, Brand Values, Brand Personality, Brand Essence, Brand Story, Value Proposition, Brand Experience and Customer Experience.

Remember, your logo, tagline or marketing materials are all expressions of your brand, but they are not the brand. Therefore, the branding process should never begin with a question like: What should the new logo look like?

Pitfall 2: Building a Brand that Can't Achieve Your Business Goals

Your brand must align with your company's business goals. You can't have a brand that promises innovation, for example, if your goal is to be the largest technology reseller. Clearly define what you want to achieve first, then build a brand that's capable of getting you there.

Pitfall 3: Believing Your Brand Only Lives in Your Marketing

Your external message and the experience within the walls of your company must be in synch. Remember that your employees are your brand's best ambassadors. Your brand must be a reflection of your company's culture, and every employee has to fully embrace it and live it with every action, every day.

Pitfall 5: Setting and Forgetting Your Brand – for Decades

A great brand stands the test of time – to a point. Making sure your brand keeps pace with the times and changes in cultural, economic, demographic and other forces inside and outside of your company is essential. Is your brand in alignment with where you are today and does it still resonate with your audiences?

After all, you can't say your company is cutting-edge if your identity and marketing materials look circa 1990.

Pitfall 6: Not Putting Yourself in Your Audience's Shoes

It's important that a brand be meaningful to the company that created it – but not to the exclusion of its audiences. Just because everyone on your team knows what your brand is about, doesn't mean everyone else will. Take the time to ensure your brand touchpoints and marketing communications are relevant to those who do not have any history with your company. Speak the language that resonates with them, motivates and inspires them.

Pitfall 7: Being Too Humble

Strong brands don't overpromise. But they don't underpromise either. In other words, they're not bashful about drawing their audiences' attention to their strengths. Don't be afraid to toot your own horn. As long as you are telling the truth, and provide value, it only helps your customers in their decision-making process.

TOOL 4: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



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Substance151 has a library of information to support our clients and community in their branding and marketing efforts.

Substance151 Blog

If you're hungry for more information on building a strong brand, visit our blog at www.substance151.com/blog/#insight.

You can [subscribe to our blog here](#) to ensure you never miss another article.

Branding Podcasts

You can also listen to the following podcasts:

[Business 3.0: The Hidden Secrets of Branding Done Well](#)

[Brand Engagement 3.0: From B2B to H2H](#)

Contact Us

You can reach Substance151 at brand@substance151.com or by phone at 410-732-8379.

And make sure to join our conversation on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) or [Google+](#).

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