

THE WHYNESS OF BRANDING

Why A Business Stands Out, Makes Profit & Finds Loyal Customers

The perceived oversaturation of a market can deter aspiring entrepreneurs, but it shouldn't be a reason to abandon their ambitions. The key to success lies in creativity and focusing on differentiators such as engaging consumers, consistent branding, and professionalism. Talent alone is not enough in a crowded industry; building a strong brand identity is crucial. Entrepreneurs should remember that standing out in today's market is achievable with the right focus and strategy. This ebook offers the six "why-nesses" that lead to a successful brand identity, and how these components create longevity for small businesses.





Introduction

"But isn't it saturated?" That's a question I'd heard from a designer friend. And inevitably, the phrase was stuck in my head long after I'd launched a business. In hindsight, though, the market I wanted to launch in wasn't as crowded as my friend had anticipated. Their perception of the landscape was primarily based on their experiences in the local scene. To my friend's defense, though, there were hundreds of small businesses, practically identical, all around us. But that didn't mean less potential for starting a business. In fact, it was a testament to the untapped potential hidden in plain sight. That meant it was time to get more creative.

Imagine how many prospective business owners would quit before stepping on the starting line if their only proof of ill success was a quick glance around the room. Yes, tens of thousands of hopefuls become entrepreneurs each year. And yes, chances are their products and services look identical to many others. But that doesn't make it impossible to stand out in today's markets. It's not about the number of competitors; it's about your focus and determination to make a difference.

Many entrepreneurs are amazing at what they do. When they realize others are equally talented, they become so engaged in preparing the meal (developing their products or services) that they forget to set the table (build their brand and connect with consumers). Just like a well-prepared meal needs a beautifully set table to be truly enjoyed, a great product or service needs a strong brand and a connection with consumers to be successful.

However, talent is the unlikeliest problem for a small business to thrive in an industry packed with creative thinkers. The real challenges are oversaturation and, unfortunately, the rise of artificial intelligence. The hyperfocus on business development, product design, and a whole list of other internal operations pulls the entrepreneurial focus away from consumers. To overcome these challenges, entrepreneurs need to tap into their humanness and understand the value of that characteristic.

Successful entrepreneurs are not just creative but also strategic. They understand the importance of connecting with their audience on a

human level, drawing them in emotionally. But they also know how to maintain a consistent, professional brand. This balance, this ability to seamlessly transition between an analytical and creative mindset, paves the way for a business's success.

With the Six Brand Essentials, I'd like to help others master the brand-to-consumer connection. And hopefully, by the end of this guide, more entrepreneurs will have found their differentiators and gained insights that they can use throughout the lifetime of their small business.



Humanness

When Business Growth Intertwines With Human Experience

The growth phase of a business grants the best experiences and, later, the best stories. As entrepreneurs, we try to deny or hide the ugly things that teach us hard lessons along the way. And probably, that's just being human. Covering things up because they show how imperfect we are is a good instinct unless, of course, later, our perfect, no-mistakes stories fail to connect our brands to our target audiences.

As professionals in our crafts, we should learn to treat some of what makes us, us, as a part of our branding and as if it were an experiential aspect of our business. This could involve sharing personal anecdotes in your brand's storytelling, incorporating your values and beliefs into your brand's mission statement, or even using your personal journey as a business owner to inspire your marketing campaigns. For instance, if you're a business owner who has overcome significant challenges, sharing this story can inspire your audience and create a more personal connection.

I know. This sounds weird, right? "Why would I tie my personal experience to my business?" But suppose we stop and think about how a business truly interacts with its consumers. We'd realize that there are lots of emotional and psychological exchanges causing people to buy in. Where does that come from?

Consumers don't just buy out of necessity. If that were the case, we'd all be saving a lot of money. People and their buying habits are driven by emotions, values, and alignment with cultural and political matters. They buy with their hearts, not just their wallets. This emotional connection is significant for building brand equity and acquiring customer loyalty. By understanding and tapping into these emotion drivers, we can start to see the power of integrating personal experiences into our business and its branding.

Think of it this way: If consumers make purchasing decisions based on emotions, values, and alignment with cultural and political matters, then a business owner's personal experiences, whether flattering or not, can be a strong foundation for a brand's story. This may complicate the process of brand building, but it also creates more possibilities for connecting with your audience on a deeper, more personal level. Remember, your experiences are unique to you, and that's what can set your brand apart.

Although a business comprises many tangible parts and pieces, it doesn't actually emote—not like humans do—at least not until the humanness element of branding is implemented.

If we think back to the origin of the idea that caused us to start a business in

the first place, those feelings, values, and emotions that surface all share a link, not only to a market need but also to us as entrepreneurs and how we sometimes share pain points with the people we create solutions for.

Making Ideas Irresistible To Consumers

Before an idea is sold, its appeal should be convincing enough to consumers and likely even to yourself. Now, obviously, that's a complex thing to do. Convincing others that your idea is innovative, practical, and worth buying is challenging, even for established brands. What that means for you and your business is hours and hours of market research, skimming the local region for competitors, and optimizing your offerings to better qualify as buyable.

You'll notice while researching that the competitors you come across will be indistinguishable aside from a few variables like messaging, values, and brand identity. Every market appears to be one big mall where the further you get onto the concourse, the more you realize you've seen all there is to see. And then, you notice the mall goes on for many more miles. Imagine setting up a storefront for your brand in this mall. Now, imagine being a customer on the concourse. That's how it feels when new brands

are introduced to a market. Icky and undesirable.

If you want to capture a person's attention in the concourse, your brand identity, messaging, and experience must entice them. Then, your product or service should elicit a few great memories and emotions, enough to ultimately culminate in a second purchase. You'll need something that sets your business apart to do this. A differentiator.

For example, let's say we have someone like Tracie Atwater, owner of Atwater Bakery, who decided to trust the process long before ever considering herself a business owner. She'd spent a lot of time at tables in flea markets and fairs with her grandmother, who suffered a mobility impairment. Together, they sold a heck of a lot of freshly baked cookies and brownies before Atwater's experiences summed up to something she'd considered valuable. Tracie said starting a business was about as unlikely as hitting the lotto, "it just didn't seem like something somebody in my family could do. None of us even knew what that looked like because we didn't have role models."

As Tracie's business grew, she struggled with sales, but this obstacle transformed into what she now calls the heart of her business and its mission."

Instead of selling baked goods at fairs, Atwater pivoted. She began to sell a bi-weekly subscription where customers can choose from a selection of delicious treats, flavors, and themes that change based on the availability of seasonal ingredients. Making this change allowed Atwater to survey her customers to learn about the kind of treats they liked. It also separated the brand from other bakeries by allowing a product typically bought at a storefront to go directly to consumers. "This was Grandma's idea. When she asked how somebody like her [disabled] could get some of these treats, I realized," Tracie said. "I should think of ways to reach customers who don't have access or aren't always mobile."

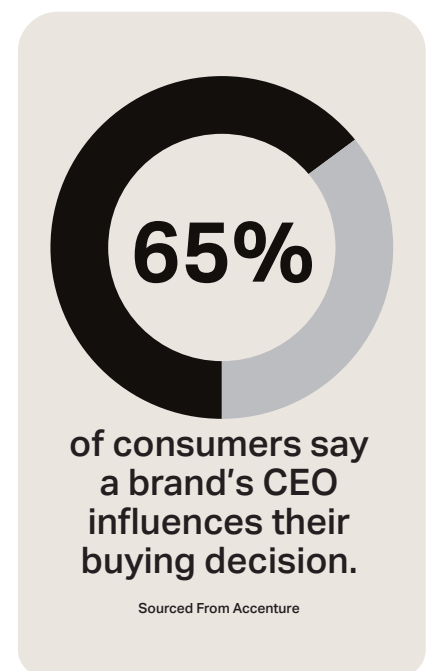
After gaining enough success to expand its target audience, Atwater Bakery worked with a brand designer to redevelop its logo, messaging, and marketing strategies to better align with market trends and appear more professional.

Recognizing The Experiences That Relate

If you've studied business management or are great at researching beforehand, there's a framework for starting a business. For example, before an entrepreneur transitions into owning a business entity comes the business plan, product development, completing tax & legal documents, and dozens of other tasks. Much of this goes unknown

to consumers. They don't see the inner workings or any menial tasks business owners put up with. However, they recognize the stories or moments a business owner shares that feel slightly more human. Personal even.

Consumers like to hear how a business or its owner takes action, deals with problems, and makes decisions. They also want to know how a company aligns with the social and political landscape. A clearer picture of the person behind the curtain often plays a significant role in a company's public perception and helps consumers decide what your brand will mean to them, and is what makes your brand feel human.



Awareness

Knowing How To Differentiate Your Business

If you've studied business management or are great at doing research beforehand, then you'd know there's a sort of framework for starting a business. For example, prior to an entrepreneur's transition into owning a business entity, there comes the business plan, product development, completing tax & legal documents and dozens of other tasks. Much of this goes unknown to consumers. They don't get to see the inner workings nor any of the menial tasks business owners put up with. What they do recognize though are the stories or moments a business shares that feel slightly more human. Personal to the entrepreneur even.

Consumers like to hear how a business takes action, deals with problems, and makes decisions. They also like to know how a business aligns itself with the social and political landscape. Having a clearer picture of a business' values and experiences often plays a significant role in a brand's articulation and perception. While Founder Experiences are the key emotional experiences an entrepreneur faces when building a business model and attempting to make their ideas executable and sustainable, showing a commitment or alignment to certain subjects are helpful in deciding what your brand will mean to them. Here are five strategies a business owner can implement to identify differentiators in order to effectively stand out from competitors:

1

Build A Competitive Analysis:

Study your competitors by analyzing their branding and marketing strategies. This can provide insights that you may not have considered and help you find gaps or opportunities in the market.

- Include pricing for product or service offerings.
- Research common visual aspects of the market such as logo design, color palettes and shape language.
- Analyze how competitors are acknowledging their consumers such as responses to feedback, direct interactions, brand messaging and advertising.

2

Create Consumer Profiles:

Develop a semi-fictional representation of your ideal customer based on the research data you collected about your target audience.

- Write down all the ways customers find your brand.
- Look for what influences your consumer's purchasing decisions.
- Learn how consumers interact with your products to help identify key touchpoints and areas where you can better meet their needs.
- Study demographic information, behavioral traits, preferences, and pain points.
- Look for consumer values, and political and social alignments.
- Use stock photography to represent your consumer persona to better visualize your target audience.

3

Use Groups & Forums On Social Media:

Join relevant groups and forums on Facebook and LinkedIn to observe and participate in conversations about your market or industry.

4

Learn & Adapt To Consumer Behavior:

Don't be afraid to play around with different messaging and how you interact with your consumers to see what resonates with your audience. Track the results of these experiments and adapt your approach based on what works best.

5

Observe & Interact With Your Audience:

Use surveys and interviews with potential or existing customers to better understand their demographics and buying behaviors. If a business is still fresh and has no customers, finding the most closely related competitor and analyzing its customers on social media and its website, could also be great research.

- During your analysis, look for common characteristics among repeat customers such as demographics (age, gender, income level, education), geographic location, and purchasing patterns.
- Make detailed notes of both positive and negative consumer responses to products and services.
- Ask questions about their preferences, needs, and satisfaction levels.

Valuableness

Win Over Your Target Audience With What Matters

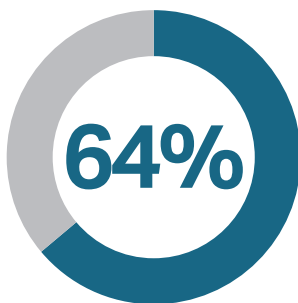
One way to communicate the true impact of your small business to consumers is to offer them a glimpse of what it truly stands for. This offering doesn't mean you have to reveal trade secrets, share a unique recipe, or explain the inner workings of your world-class kitchen gadget. In fact, providing something *that* valuable might only pique their interest temporarily. The key is to find a balance between transparency and intrigue. You can provide 'value' in a different way by allowing consumers to make assumptions about the guiding principles that shape your brand's actions while still maintaining a level of mystery that keeps them intrigued.

Try this: Reflect on your first interaction with your favorite brand. Was it a planned visit or a chance encounter? What scents greeted you as you entered the store? What sounds filled

the air? How did the staff respond to your questions? And what prompted you to become a repeat customer? If you can recall the answers to at least three of these questions, you'll realize your experiences with your favorite brand were linked to specific ideals and evoke particular emotions. These memories and experiences foster positive emotional responses and provide clues to a brand's values.

Although the psychological responses to particular experiences result in the consumer's subconscious understanding, receiving even the slightest bit of intuitive information keeps consumers connected with the brand, even in the comfort of their homes. Expressing your business's core values at your storefront and through other mediums like the web, video, and customer service showcases what your brand cares about and builds trust and credibility with your audience.

Furthermore, today's consumers are increasingly conscious of their purchases' ethical, social, political, and environmental implications. This means they consider factors such as a brand's stance on sustainability, its treatment of workers, its involvement in social issues, and its political affiliations. This concept is crucial because certain aspects of your brand's values will likely resonate with their ideals, making your business appear approachable and forward-thinking, while others won't.



64%
of consumers form brand loyalty because of relatable or shared values.

Sourced from Harvard Business Review

Brand Values:

When attempting to discover brand values for your business, it's important to consider the following details:

- The origin of the company and the business owner's entrepreneurial journey.
- The inspiration or need behind starting your product or service.
- The traditions that make your product or service unique.
- The process behind your product or service and what makes you an expert.
- The social movements your brand is currently aligned [with or aiding].
- The challenges and pitfalls your business faces and how it overcame them.
- What current consumers say about your business based on feedback from purchases.

Expressiveness

Visual & Verbal Expression Relationships

The best part of building a brand is the creative freedom and the ability to curate the way consumers perceive it. Granted, we tell customers our business story through verbal or written messaging, it can be a lot more engaging to show them using tangible mediums like posters, product packaging and photography. Adding a visual aspect to your brand identity allows a business to express its values and other attributes to form a personality.

For every business, the components of a brand identity will be slightly different, but the structure will be the same. To help make your brand visuals cohesive, it's recommended to seek help from a design professional who can plan and create visual elements for all channels including your website, social media, marketing and advertising.

Here's why having a strong Brand Identity is important:

Aligning Marketing and Development Strategies:

Consistent brand visuals ensure that all marketing efforts are aligned and coherent, making campaigns more effective and ensures that all actions taken by the company are aligned and supports coherent growth and development strategies, ensuring that the brand remains focused and true to its essence.

Building Consumer Engagement:

A well-crafted set of brand visuals allows consumers to interact on an emotional level. This creates the sense a businesses and consumers' values resonates and can lead to strong brand advocacy.

Developing Brand Recognition:

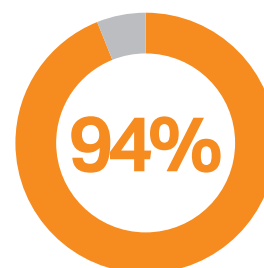
When consumers repeatedly encounter the same logo, brand colors, typography, and messaging, it becomes easier for them to recognize and remember a brand. This familiarity is crucial for influencing their purchasing decisions.

Building Consumer Loyalty:

A brand that looks and feels professional across all platforms builds trust with consumers.

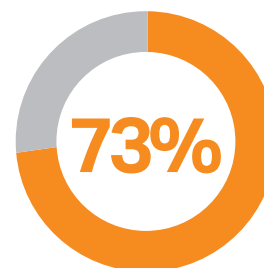
Differentiating A Business In A Crowded Market:

Strong brand visuals help a business stand out by clearly communicating the brand values and personality through color, images and shapes. If done correctly, consumers will be psychologically locked into your brand.



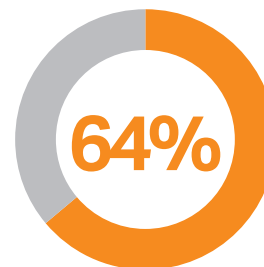
of consumers will recommend a brand they're emotionally engaged with

Sourced From: GENSER



of small businesses invest in social media marketing as part of their branding

Sourced From: THE MANIFEST



of consumers say they want brands to take a stand on social and political issues

Sourced From: EDELMAN



Adaptiveness

Design And Its Changing Creative Landscape

Let's address the elephant in the room: artificial intelligence (AI). By now, it's revolutionizing menial tasks across industries as well as transforming graphic design and the creative process as a whole. Automating tasks and shortening the time to generate creative assets has become a lifesaver for many because it improves work efficiency. But is it really all that great?

If you're unaware of the impact and implications of this technology, AI-powered tools can generate design options based on inputted preferences, significantly speeding up the creation of logos and other aspects of branding and design work. These tools use machine learning to analyze trends and datasets, producing aesthetically pleasing designs that can meet current market demands.

For example, AI can assist in color scheme selection and typography matching and even create customized graphics and layouts. However, AI represents both an opportunity and a unique challenge for small businesses and entrepreneurs. While this new technology can handle repetitive tasks, allowing business owners to focus on their ingenuity, it's important to remember that AI is a tool, not a replacement for human creativity and understanding. This technology doesn't consider the connections

between branding, marketing strategies, and consumer research. Therefore, it can produce beautiful imagery but leaves it up to you to ensure that what it creates is the proper visual output for a business.

If a business owner intends to create brand assets independently, they must work with a certain level of caution and discernment or risk confusing consumers.

The Automation Of Everyday Tasks

Tedious tasks consume so much of our precious time—resizing images, formatting designs for various platforms, and tweaking layouts until your eyes glaze over. It's no wonder AI seems like a Godsend meant to clean up mind-numbing chores.

For example, Adobe GenAI, specifically Adobe Sensei and Adobe Firefly, can generate images, handle content-aware fill, and use multiple large language models (LLMs) to develop and modify text-based experiences for brands and marketing teams. It's basically an intern you can train on data sets, one that will never ask to take a break. Can somebody say efficiency gains?

A Partner In Innovation

I know. AI is ready to stifle our creativity,

right? But it's actually proving to be a fantastic collaborator. Imagine having an all-in-one tool that can help iterate multiple design variations and allow you to test new styles. Sounds pretty awesome. With the help of AI, a single 10-minute brainstorming session can now produce dozens of creative ideas.

Personalizing The Experience

In today's culture, personalization can go a long way. With AI as a partner, you can make a design that speaks directly to individual users and consumers. For instance, AI can analyze consumer behavior and preferences to craft personalized marketing materials. For a small business owner, this means a customer browsing their online store will soon be able to see banner ads tailored to their specific needs and interests. And no, not like the ones about Ninja blenders that pop up on your web browser after you've mentioned them to a friend. I mean, banner ads designed to match that sole consumer.

This also applies to dynamic content, making for a truly immersive, relevant, and custom experience. Superb for business owners, big and small. For designers, this means creating more flexible design systems that can adjust dynamically.

Expanded Access To Design Resources & Creativity

AI is standardizing access to high-quality design resources. Just a year ago, creating professional-grade designs required expensive software and extensive training. Now, AI-driven platforms are leveling the playing field.

Tools like VistaCreate and Canva offer powerful new design capabilities to anyone with an internet connection. This is great news for entrepreneurs, small businesses, and individuals who need to produce compelling visuals on a tight budget. However, there's a flip side.

While AI tools make it easier for non-designers to create decent designs, the demand for professional services takes a huge hit. Businesses

that once relied on pro designers for things like branding and marketing materials might now turn to more budget-friendly AI tools. And as the market gets flooded with AI-generated designs, this devalues the creativity design professionals bring to the table.

The Human Touch

Despite its remarkableness, AI will only partially replace professional designers. There's no replacement for the human touch—creativity, empathy, and strategic thinking. AI is a collaborative partner that can handle some heavy lifting, like data analysis and tasks that need to be automated, so designers and small business owners can focus on crafting compelling narratives and innovative concepts.

As this collaboration grows, designers

must adapt by developing new skills. They will need to understand how to leverage AI tools effectively to thrive in the upcoming landscape.

AI is undeniably transforming the design industry, bringing both challenges and opportunities. By automating tasks, augmenting creativity, streamlining data analysis, and expanding access to design resources, AI empowers the world to push the boundaries of what's possible.

As we embrace these changes, we must view AI as a tool that complements our creativity rather than a perilous threat. The future of design lies in blending human emotion and ingenuity with artificial intelligence (AI) to keep things dynamic and innovative. Let's continue to design for the future.

45%

of consumers expect exceptional design across sales and marketing

Sourced From: LUCID PRESS

55%

of memorable & positive brand impressions are based on visual aspects

Sourced From: LUCID PRESS

81%

of consumers are likely to recognize a brand based on its colors

Sourced From: LUCID PRESS

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Expectedness

Consumer Expectations With Branding

Consumers have specific expectations when they interact with brands. Meeting these expectations is not just important; it's crucial for maintaining consumer trust and credibility. By understanding and proactively addressing these expectations, brands can foster consumer loyalty and ensure long-term success. It's not just meeting expectations but exceeding them to create a memorable brand experience.

Consumer Visual Expectations

Authentic Brand Content:

Remember to include honest storytelling, whether derived through photography, multimedia, or video, to appear authentic. Genuine and relatable content accurately reflects your brand's identity.

High-Quality Visuals Elements:

Visually appealing, high-res graphics are crucial to maintaining a sense of professionalism.

Clear Communication:

Simple and honest communication about products helps consumers understand product details, ingredients, pricing, and your company's ethical practices. Being transparent lets consumers decide if their purchases meet their standards.

Consumer Engagement: Actively engaging your audience beyond selling, such as interacting with them through social media, involving them in community activities, and providing valuable content, creates feelings of value and ownership for consumers.

Confidence: Consumers want to trust in your brand's quality and integrity. Giving them access to positive reviews, testimonials, and guarantees helps build this confidence.

Essential Brand Identity Components

While the components of a brand identity may vary, the underlying structure remains the same for every business. To ensure your brand visuals are cohesive and represent your business, it's advisable to enlist the help of a design professional. They can strategize and create visual elements for all of your channels, including your website, social media, marketing, and advertising, thereby enhancing your brand's visual identity.

Brand Logo: A well-crafted logo should be simple, memorable, versatile, and reflective of the brand's values and personality. It should be easily recognizable and work well across various mediums and sizes, from printed materials to digital platforms.

Typography: Selecting the right fonts enhances readability and reflects the brand's character. Your choice in typography should align with the overall aesthetic of the brand; for example, traditional serif fonts might communicate a sense of heritage, craftsmanship and elegance, while modern sans-serif fonts could suggest simplicity, boldness and contemporary style.

Photography And Imagery: Other visual elements, such as imagery, photographs, videos and graphic illustrations also reflect the brand's story. For example, recordings of the artisanal cheese-making process or the local farms where ingredients are sourced, can strengthen a dairy brand's narrative. Graphics, including icons, patterns, and illustrations, should complement the overall visual identity and must be used consistently across all touchpoints.

Brand Color Palette: Colors evoke emotions and mood, so it's important to select hues that align with the brand's personality and message. For instance, earthy tones might convey a nature and sustainability, while bold, vibrant colors like violet and orange could suggest innovation and excitement. The chosen palette should be used consistently across all brand materials to reinforce brand recognition.



Building a brand will always be the basis of differentiation. A business will blend in without one. So, no matter how challenging or time consuming the research, every business owner should expect the execution of their brand to never get easier. As a matter of fact, I foresee that even with artificial intelligence and a shift towards task automation, only the multifaceted nature of research and analysis will become a lighter lift for business owners. The requirements for careful planning, telling a story, and defining a brand's identity will be even more significant. For a business to connect to consumers who can essential have all and do all in a DIY scenario, brand's and even professional brand designers will need to think more strategically on how to connect more intentionally to emotions and human values. Things AI cannot yet replicate.

In the future, there's a brand-to-human connection or brand sentience that we'll not be able to escape. That's why it's important now, to do the work. If we want to enhance market position and appeal to buyers, then expect a

transition towards more segmentation or target audience refinement so that products and services better overlap consumer societal views and values. When we pair that information with consistent and high-quality brand collateral, supported by comprehensive brand guidelines, this ensures the effectiveness of brand identity.

As it stands, that means the DIYer should invest time in their branding, while others should find a professional branding service to provide expertise and creative direction.

By doing so, you will have understood why branding will always be the differentiating factor.



I'm Eric B., Brand & Identity Designer At East Baluster.

Connect with me on social media and share your small business experiences. Follow for more tips on building a cohesive and effective brand.

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