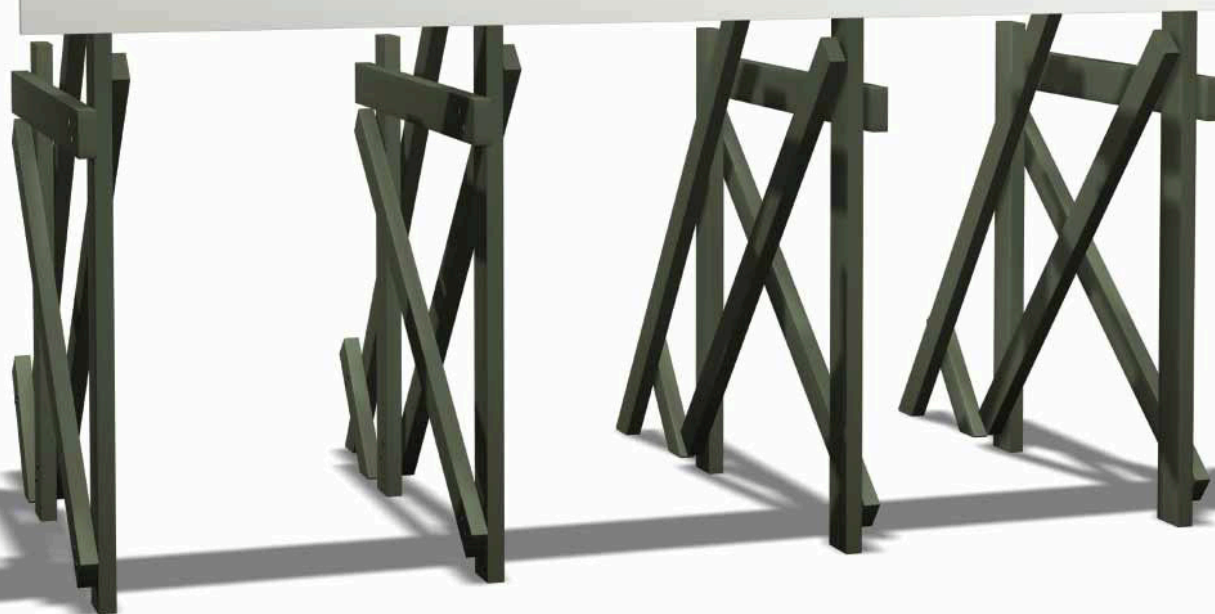


# BUILD VALUE IN YOUR BUSINESS WITH A SIMPLE, EFFECTIVE BRAND STRATEGY



## A STRONG BRAND COULD BE THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT GOAL FOR LEADERS OF PRIVATE COMPANIES SEEKING A GENUINELY USEFUL STRATEGY FOR GROWTH.

**B**ut if it's not practical, understandable and quickly and easily implemented, a brand strategy won't work – on any level.

Even today, when executives of private companies think about branding, too many consider that it's mainly the concern of global giants like Nike and Toyota or that it's an arcane, mysterious science, according to consultant Graeme Gladman.

In fact, good branding can be achieved by taking logical, practical steps, and it impacts every aspect of an organisation, he says. As founder of BrandQuest, a leading Australian marketing consultancy, he speaks with authority. He has been creative director of a number of iconic brands ranging from Grace Bros/Myers through to Katies Fashions, BP and Mazda.

The benefits of improved branding are many and obvious. The most obvious, says Gladman, is that it makes a company more effective by building sales leads. It's also an effective way for leaders to get everyone in a company clear on strategy: exactly where they want their organisation to go and what they want to achieve. When

well executed, it makes the organisation more efficient, reducing marketing costs versus sales.

To develop and strengthen a brand, all organisations – from companies in every industry sector and even not-for-profits, educational institutions and government departments – can benefit from developing a clear marketing roadmap, says Gladman. In this process there are two essential steps:

**1: Identify the organisation's strengths.** Understand where your company has been and where it plans to go. If you don't have a clear direction and focus internally, Gladman says, how can you communicate it externally? "You'd be surprised how many organisations we talk to where one executive's idea of their competitive advantage differs completely from another's, and this includes CEOs and other board members."

The first step is to have all major stakeholders participate in this identification process, and it needs to be driven from the top down. Indeed no marketing strategy can be created without the insights these stakeholders bring to these workshops.

As Gladman explains it, you need the kind of focus and direction that everyone in the organisation instinctively “gets”. So whether you’re on the top floor or in a carpark working bay, you understand the prime purpose of the organisation and what its aims are. (At BrandQuest opening workshops, facilitators seek answers to six questions – see box).



**2: Ensure a consistent message.** A big failing Gladman and his colleagues encounter in companies is inconsistency of message, tonality and application of branding devices like logos and taglines (the latter being “incredibly important”).

“We come across a number of companies who say what their tagline is, but have something different in their brochures, and something else again on their website because they believe that’s what they need for the online environment.”

For smaller to medium-sized companies the tagline that goes with a logo is vital. Powerful brands like Nike or Apple can get away with not using taglines, but when you’re a company with an acronym for a name, for example, your name and tagline must jointly explain to people who you are and what you do.

To help ensure consistency every organisation needs a strict set of guidelines in a “brand book,” says Gladman, giving guidance on such matters as the application of brand colours, the logo and how not to corrupt it, and precisely how stationery and marketing literature should be developed. Otherwise people with the best of intent will modify a key ingredient because they feel it works better for a particular job.

**“...companies with high brand values have consistently higher [company] values than those of their competitors. With many baby boomers thinking about retirement, this can be vital for private businesses.”**

Graeme Gladman

think it’s either “sponsoring the races or advertising”. He tells them to think of marketing as a symphony orchestra with advertising as, say, the percussion section.

It’s easy to ignore marketing for a number of years in a company’s growth phase, he says. “Look at successfully branded companies like Qantas and Westfield that are dynamic marketers,” he adds. “They all started as small businesses, but it’s not good enough any more just to have a great product and service and great staff.”

Branding revitalises a business. A company that’s grown steadily for 30 years and whose owners are

looking to get a good reward from it may be strong and profitable, but does it seem relevant and contemporary to prospective buyers? Often a long-established company can come across as stale and tired. A new, sophisticated brand strategy will not only improve staff morale and increase sales, it will spruce up the firm’s image, making it more appealing to buyers who want to

build on the past but hope to take it to the next level.

“Fresh branding can be like a company metamorphosis,” says Gladman. “Like a cocoon recreating itself as a butterfly.”

**BRANDING BUILDS VALUE**

Most importantly, however, it raises a company’s value. Recent research by Harvard Business School shows that companies with high brand values have consistently higher values than those of their competitors. With many baby boomers thinking about retirement, this can be vital for private businesses.

“People will be wary of buying *Graeme Gladman Accounting* knowing that Graeme Gladman is about to leave,” Gladman explains. “But if I build a brand around that business called *Excel Accounting Services* then I can exit stage left, remain a consultant to important clients while the newcomers who bought the business can retain a consistent public image.”

**BIG BUDGETS UNNECESSARY**

Large consultancies can take 12 months to produce a marketing strategy at a cost of six figures. But branding need not be a long and expensive process, even in complex, sophisticated organisations. The quicker the process the better, Gladman says. Aiming for speed has two benefits: rapid implementation in a fast-changing market and a reasonable price. “Imagine if somebody was doing a marketing strategy in the mortgage category and started last November and it was not due for completion until this November – need I say more?”

Companies that enjoy most success in their branding efforts are usually agile, don’t procrastinate and want to get to where they’re going faster than their competitors. And the principles of successful branding apply across the board. When he started his company Gladman believed its core market would come from manufacturing and retail, but he was surprised by the number of professional services firms it became involved with.

He concludes: “So it’s not about size of companies, it’s about the mindset of people who manage or own them. They need to understand the importance of getting the basics right, and to achieve their vision quickly.”

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**QUESTIONS THAT SET BRAND DIRECTION**

- What do you need to say?
- Who do you need to say it to?
- What makes you different from competitors? *Every* company is different, and this differentiation is a key communication point for a marketing strategy.
- *Why* you can claim to do what you do. (Why you can “walk the talk”.)
- How do you to say it for best effect?
- When do you say it for maximum impact? ■