

Delivering on the promise of the brand

The brand experience is defined by any contact a customer might have with the company

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A STRONG brand has never been more important than it is in today's business world. While branding and having a

brand strategy are certainly not new concepts, consumer expectation has never been stronger than it is now. Brands communicate specific details and information about a company and its product or service and also showcase the organisation's differentiating aspects from its competitors. Appropriate branding ensures the audience has a clear idea of "who" the company is and what they represent. It is obvious that if the brand is in contrast to who the company truly is or what they actually represent, it creates confusion and audiences feel conned.

Having a weak or conflicting brand strategy can directly affect the product or service a company is trying to sell. In contrast, an effective brand strategy

establishes a strong goodwill in your target market and creates a positive image of your company as a whole. What many companies do not realise is they already have a brand whether they intentionally created one or not as customers or clients have a "brand experience" with any interaction with a firm whether in the way the receptionist answers the telephone, the products and services or any contact outsiders have. The brand is the sum of the good or bad that makes up a company and creates the messages consumers or clients receive about the firm. One could say that the brand is a company's own "mojo".

Internally, a brand is the central organising principle of a business, in-



Alarminglly, many companies and agencies do not consider legal advice when creating brands or protecting their brands

corporating the firm's values, determining internal structures and behaviour. Each firm should establish clearly what values the brand represent and ensure that this is communicated throughout the organisation. This will

ensure that there is no confusion as to who the firm is, what they are hoping to achieve and why they have these brand-driven goals. Externally, a brand creates a shortcut for clients to make decisions. A brand is the delivery of a promise which sets it apart from a competitor's product or service.

At the core of a strong brand strategy is the trademark, which has as its main purpose distinguishing the product or service in respect of which it is used from other similar products of competitors. The most effective way of protecting a trademark is by registering it. As a first step, a trademark has to be cleared for use and registration. This is the most important step in the branding process. Depending on the nature of the business, this should be done both locally and internationally.

Once the trademark is registered and the brand is created, it often faces threats in the marketplace which would undermine and dilute the brand if left unchecked. Uncontrolled branding and lack of a uniform corporate identity invariably leads to brand dilution.

Further, the uncontrolled and often unplanned brand extension to a widening range of products or services could dilute the very brand already created. The Virgin brand is probably the best example of a brand that, through its own expansion, could end up diluting the very brand that caused its phenomenal growth. On the other hand, the biggest external threat to your brand is the lack of enforcement of your trademark rights which could lead to descriptive use of your trademark by competitors or the public.

Descriptive use relates to the unauthorised use of your trademark in a

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