

Three Step Brand Check Up

Sorry, but this is for your own good. Open wide. Say, "Uniqueness, consistency, consumer focus." Well, say what you like, so long as you use your brand's distinctive voice, use terms that are recognizably your brands, and speak from your customer's point of view.

I'm checking how well you handle your online brand presence. Thing is, if you're stuck with the same thing all day, every day, you tend not to notice the obvious. You don't see the forest for the trees. This exercise may be both obvious and painful. In the end, you'll agree that by facing up to the examination, you'll help yourself help your brand.

Test One: Can you smash your site to pieces and still recognize it from the fragments?

Some time ago, I reflected on the genesis of the Coca-Cola bottle. It was intentionally designed in such way even if a bottle was broken into shards, you'd still recognize the pieces as having once been part of a Coke bottle. You'd still see brand identity in a single fragment piece. Use this as an analogy for assessing your brand's Web site integrity.

What if the logo is removed from the site? Would a visitor

still know which brand hosts it? Would your brand's voice still be heard in the copy? Does your site use language in a unique way that's clearly reflective of the brand? Does it use terms people immediately associate with your brand, which cannot be mistaken as belonging to another? Are the graphics distinctly your brands? What about navigation? Does it bear your brand's signature? Is it consistent with your offline approach? Does it also reflect your brand's unique personality? Do your site's icons reflect the nature of the brand?

Test Two: Do your communication materials have synergy?

If I looked at 10 random pages from your site, 10 pages from your corporate brochure, 10 of your latest ads, 10 pieces of other promotional material, and your letterhead, would I discern synergy between all these elements? Is the font consistent? Are colour, picture style, spacing, and graphics consistent across all media? Or would I simply see a mess of haphazard materials?

Test Three: Does your site talk to your marketing department or your customers?

Does your Web site discuss "benefits" instead of "added value"? What's the difference? Benefits address concrete technical advantages (think of a stereo system). But benefits don't communicate the all-embracing, high-quality surround sound that will impress friends, do justice to a favourite opera, and create just the right ambience. Benefits don't answer "What's in it for me?" Added value, on the other hand, speaks to the consumer's self-interest.

Every sentence, phrase, and sales argument on your site must bear the consumer in mind, not the tech department or whoever else is in charge of developing your product or services. Added value is what I'll gain as a result of using the product. Will it make me more relaxed? Increase my happiness? Make my work more effective? Save me money?

Many companies forget communication is about getting consumers to see brand benefits for themselves. To get this across, a brand must speak from the consumers' point of view, not the marketing

departments. Remove all those meaningless benefits from your site and other communications materials. Replace them with the added customer value you know customers are after.

How well did score in your brand checkups? I'd be impressed if you passed all three tests. If you did, relax -- for now. Next week, expect a slightly more difficult test. If you couldn't meet these simple criteria, work fast.

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