

# Brand building workbook for business start-ups



# Introduction

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The Ancient Egyptians might not be the first thing that comes to mind when you consider your marketing, but you have to admit they knew a thing or two about building. And all successful marketing strategies are founded on the careful construction of step upon step of well-designed manoeuvres, climbing towards the pinnacle of excellent customer relationships.

This is as true with business start-ups as any other business, or maybe more; after all, gaining and maintaining clients' trust is crucial in order to grow.

It takes thought, it takes hard work, it takes patience. You need skill, you need ideas, you need tenacity. But get it right and you have a landmark which signposts your business as solid, strong and reliable, something that stands the test of time and suggests an optimistic, upwards trajectory. Get it wrong, on the other hand, and it could end up going pear-shaped. What you're aiming for is pyramid-shaped.



# Design

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You wouldn't embark upon building something substantial and long-lasting without first concocting a suitable plan and making sure you have the tools to follow through on the job.

These thoughts on building your brand are inspired by the Customer-Based Brand Equity Model developed by Keller, adapted here to encourage business start-ups to understand and have a go at this tried and tested sequence of steps towards brand-strengthening.

It may look a bit academic, but when all's said and done it's basically about the various facets of interaction with your customers, founded on good old human communication.

# Customer-Based Brand Equity Model

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Adapted from the Customer-Based Brand Equity model by Keller (1993)

# Ground floor: Salience

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This is the importance of identity awareness, and it comes first as you can't expect anyone to experience your brand or develop any attitudes or behaviours - much less declare undying loyalty to you - if they don't know who you are. Do you stand out?

You don't make your presence felt by accident, you have to be creative in putting your brand out there to the point that you are instantly recognised. But the flipside is that you also need to be recognised for the right reasons, that your prospects and customers perceive your service as it really is. Do they classify you into the right category? These considerations indicate that you have to be very aware of the needs and desires of your customer base, in order to then develop a compelling proposition that offers to satisfy those needs.

Try and get on the same wavelength and truly understand their concerns, then your unique selling proposition can flow from that. Think about how they go about choosing a service like yours, and what would influence their decision-making process. Recognise exactly who you are targeting and be as specific as you can relative to your business. For example these can incorporate professions and careers, age ranges, family circumstances, aspirations, and the list goes on. Communication of your brand will need to clearly address these aspects and leave no room for guesswork - it should be glaringly obvious from your proposition.

You and your team can usefully reflect on meetings with existing clients to determine the best way of representing your brand. And you can brainstorm amongst yourselves, equipped with a knowledge of competitors' offerings that you've gleaned from market intelligence. It's a time for really getting to grips with what it is that you deliver, what's unique about your service, and ensuring that you can portray this in a way that transmits faithfully to the listening public. Allow yourself the scope for some tweaking and adjusting if necessary, or other actions that ensure your proposition is spot on.

It's also true that it's not simply what you say but also the way that you say it: once you've established your 'voice', your customers will recognise your language, the music of your communications, in short, your style.



# Exercise: Salience

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What do you want your brand to represent?

What do you want people to say about your brand?

What do your customers say about your brand?

# Exercise: Salience *continued*

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What is your brand mantra?

*In other words explain in 3-5 words what your brand delivers.*

How would you describe your brand's tone of voice?

# First floor: Brand Meaning

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Having established your clear, recognisable and accurate identity as a brand, we go up a level into the realms of what that brand means, in other words: what exactly are you? This involves hitting upon the best way of communicating what your brand stands for and crucially how it can meet your customers' emotional and rational needs.

There are two complementary building blocks to this stage: performance and imagery.

**Performance** is to do with how well your service satisfies the requirements of your customers. How does it measure up? Although your customers may not be expressly aware that these forces are at work, there may be a whole range of characteristics that subconsciously affect their thinking: the product's primary and secondary features; its reliability, durability and serviceability; the service's effectiveness, efficiency and empathy; style and design; and price. You can have the most attractive brand in the world, but if it doesn't deliver - or even over-deliver - what it promises and what the customer actually needs, then you've no chance of building loyalty.

**Imagery** is also about meeting customers' needs, but specifically on a social and psychological level. Factors to consider include: user profiles; purchase and usage situations; personality and values; history, heritage and experiences.

As you develop a track record in business, the imagery aspect may be satisfied simply by their past and current experience with you and your service, in other words, directly; for others, it may come about through targeted marketing or recommendation from happy customers, in other words, indirectly. You'll need to explore how you can best demonstrate and foster trust, especially growing a new client base.



Both performance and imagery should be harnessed in tandem when you're working on the best way to shape and promote your service. Try to be objective so that you can identify gaps or anomalies, and fix them. It'll result in a well-rounded and credible 'brand personality' which will encourage clients to engage with you.

This is where a trustworthy relationship really comes into its own, whereby clients not only know you personally but also know that they can rely upon the services you offer.

# Exercise: Brand Meaning

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Describe your brand's performance.

*In other words, what are the tangible fetures of your brand?*

What does your brand promise to deliver?

What imagery is appropriate for your brand?

What does your brand performance and imagery have in common?



# Second floor: Brand Response

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By now you've formulated and communicated your stand-out identity, and upon that you've articulated what your brand means in terms of meeting your clients' needs, both rational and emotional. The next step up really gets down to the nitty-gritty of what your customers think or feel about you - and of course you ignore this at your peril! So at this level of the building process, you have the opportunity to take positive, beneficial and practical action, all geared towards that all-important pinnacle of customer loyalty.

Once again, the blocks at this level fall into two categories, judgments (which we could describe as being more objective) and feelings (more subjective).

**Judgments** are taking place constantly about the **performance** and **imagery** of the previous step, whether you or your customers realise it or not. They are weighing up the **quality** of your brand, which could be actual or perceived quality; the **credibility**, taking into account expertise, trustworthiness and likeability; they **consider** how closely your brand matches their specific requirements; they assess its **superiority** to competitors. If you can tap into these judgments and thought processes, you have a truly valuable resource to help ensure that your brand is fit for purpose and presented as well as it possibly can be.



**Feelings** have equal weighting in how customers may respond to your brand, in a sort of heart versus head scenario. Our model suggests six positive brand feelings: warmth, fun, excitement, security, social approval and self-respect. Clearly some of these may appear more relevant in your organisation than others. It's a good idea to reflect on which feelings are the focus of your brand strategy, and whether that works. Again, it's well worth seeking feedback from clients so that you gain a real understanding and a rounded picture of how they respond to your service. If necessary, you can then use that intelligence to amend or enhance your performance and imagery.

The way in which you gather this invaluable feedback needs careful thought and planning. You can use surveys and feedback forms or client forums, and each case should be viewed as a genuine opportunity to ask open questions and get to the heart of what matters to your customers.



Preconceived ideas are off limits! The outcomes should shape the key benefits and even the performance and imagery you promote, so it's important in building customer loyalty to take this seriously and get it right.

You can make use of external sites relevant to your industry and location in which clients rank your performance, and a sample of your clients could potentially be surveyed quarterly. More revealing still, perhaps, are focus groups or client forums, as these allow you to explore defined issues in greater depth. They are challenging to run but provide a dynamic situation where people's ideas can spark off and stimulate each other - in other words the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts.

Then don't lose sight of the need for outcomes! Have a plan in place to capture and scrutinise your data and use it to make improvements or even develop new services.

# Exercise: Brand Response

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How will you get feedback from the market and monitor the brand response?

Where could you look to see if people are talking about your brand online?

*Maybe consider setting up Google alerts to see when your brand or team are being mentioned online.*

How could you get feedback offline?

*What considerations would mean that you get unbiased feedback to inform your brand strategy?*

How frequently will you monitor the brand response? Who will do it?

# Penthouse: Brand Resonance

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Congratulations, you're approaching the top of the brand-building ladder! By labouring away at the **Identity, Meaning** and **Response** levels of the Customer-Based Brand Equity pyramid, you've reached the point where the real and long-lasting benefits kick in. Capping-out ceremony, here we come!

Brand resonance is about clients deciding how much of a connection they would like to have with you. Ideally at this point you have truly fostered a strong loyalty, such that it becomes natural for them to have an ongoing relationship with you.

Be careful not to get so wrapped up in nurturing and servicing your existing clients and building short term demand, at the expense of the long game.

This resonance doesn't come easily, though. Fashioning this most desirable of penthouses has to be worked at, but when you do, it speaks of a deep psychological bond with your brand. On top of the hard graft of the previous stages, it comes about through a thoughtful approach to strengthening four further categories. What can you do to increase all of these?



**Behavioural loyalty** - this is where clients repeatedly buy from you. Perhaps you have found that clients test the water by initially trying your brand and the development of a successful relationship could lead to entrusting you with a bigger order pot in due course.

**Attitudinal attachment** - this is about customers loving your service or brand, viewing it as particularly significant in their lives. It not only relates to what they're getting for their custom but how they're getting it, in other words the whole customer experience. Make yourself and your team irresistible by being a delight to work with.

**Sense of community** - this is a sort of tribal loyalty, where clients feel connected to people associated with your brand, whether your team or other customers.



You might consider mounting activities and events which tap into this community aspect: depending upon how your customers engage and what they value about this interaction. It could be based on their motivation behind using your brand and also social functions marking special milestones in your firm's history or cultural occasions that simply demonstrate the firm's interest in its community. What you choose to do will be based on a good understanding of what your clients would like.

**Active engagement** - this is about your brand being part of the fabric of your clients' lives, even when they're not buying from you, and is a particularly important indicator of brand loyalty. In today's online world, it's especially evident in social media circles, where clients follow your platforms and engage with share worthy content. At an even more active level, you could instigate a client committee or steering group which contributes to the direction of your organisation - a sure fire way of making people feel involved!

# Exercise: Brand Response

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How will you measure behavioural loyalty?

What can you do to increase loyalty?

How can you measure attitudinal attachment?

What can you do to increase attitudinal attachment?

*In other words how would they like to engage with each other?*

# Brand Response *continued*

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What would your brand community value?

If you were to plan a series of community events (these could be online and/or offline) over a 12 month period, which events would you hold and when?

How would you measure active engagement?

What could you do to get people to engage further?

# Enjoy the view

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Brand laddering works if you tackle the stages carefully and in the right order. The Customer-Based Brand Equity model builds a solid structure that embeds your clients' experience, attitudes and behaviours from both a rational and emotional perspective, and the end result is the kind of customer loyalty that is gold dust to your brand. This is an excellent framework to use to build a new brand.

But remember that the Pyramids weren't built in a day! Think like an architect (or engage a marketer to help), draw up those plans, keep an eye on your project management, don your hard hat and get building! Also revisit the plan as initially you won't have the brand response to inform you. This approach should evolve with your brand.

