

A-LINE's GUIDE TO BRANDING

Understanding and Executing
Branding in Today's Digital Age

ALINE
INTERACTIVE



The A-LINE Guide to Branding

Do I Really Need a Brand?

The short answer: You already have one (and maintaining it is absolutely necessary!)

Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon famously said “Your brand is what other people say about you when you’re not in the room.”

In other words, no matter the size or age of your business, your brand is the public face of your company – whether you’ve worked to cultivate it or not. By continually addressing your image, the act of branding allows you to distill your organization’s strengths and culture into a distinctive and consistent message that permeates your business and pulls clients through the door.

Where Do I Utilize my Brand?

A brand lies at the very heart of any business. Executed successfully, it makes itself apparent everywhere, from the tiny platform of a business card to the out-sized splash of a billboard. It works for you while you’re working, and it works for you while you’re sleeping. You embody your brand when you’re interacting with customers, and your brand embodies you when you can’t talk to a client directly.

Where do you utilize your brand? Everywhere!

Ready to Start Working with Your Brand?

Read on to better understand the tools and processes that drive successful brands in today’s digital age.

Successful branding involves distilling your organizational strengths and culture into a distinctive and relevant message.

Branding: More than Just Skin Deep

Is the word *brand* a noun, or a verb?

Yes. It's both, and when you're creating your organization's brand, keep in mind that the spirit of your brand permeates everything—not just your advertising, your website, and your business cards, but the essence of what you and your employees do every single day to serve your customers.

That's why creating a dynamite brand takes considerable time and thought on the front end.

It boils down to answering some thoughtful questions: Who are you? What sets you apart, makes you unique, and speaks to the very heart of your company? Why would customers want to do business with you, instead of with your competitors?

The branding process, way before the creation of a logo, starts with a deep and honest look at your organization. It begins with you, but who better to consult than your employees, the living pulse of your organization? We'd encourage you to bring them into a brainstorming session or two, and spend time defining what sets your organization apart. Customers or potential customers might be included in a separate session to be sure that you're creating a brand that represents services and products that are relevant to them. Not only are these brainstorming sessions a great way to tap into a valuable brain trust, but they create the kind of buy-in you need from employees to ensure that the brand you develop is supported every day.

Branding begins with a deep and honest look at your organization.

If you like, a professional can lead the brainstorming session to help sift through the services that your company offers to assure that your unique offerings are captured. When you're ready to translate your essential message to colors, shapes and verbiage, a designer can help you create a striking and memorable logo that works across an array of platforms, and design collateral materials (stationery, web site, brochures, signage, etc.) that are consistent with your core message. Marketing plans that reach out to your audience where they live add to your bottom line, and save costly errors.

But before any of that, figure out what makes you *you*. And how to live it everyday.

Keep It Real.

Here's what we're bombarded with in modern society: messaging. It's everywhere, it's constant, and it's overwhelming. The sheer volume of it guarantees that most of it is blocked out by the average consumer.

And there's another reason that consumers block out messages—messaging has a bit of a bad rap. We're not buying it, and for very good reason: We don't believe that it's the real deal.

Keep It Real. (continued)

An authentic brand can stand out in a crowded marketplace. Authenticity shines like a rare light in the darkness. A true-blue, real-deal, straight-from-the-heart brand represents not only the relevant services and products that customers are looking for, but the promise of a company that is passionate about its business, and cares about its customers.

When you're developing your branding, pay close attention to what you promise and what you deliver. Do they match? How is your brand represented when your employees answer the phone, handle complaints or criticism, or make good on a late delivery or a defective product? How is your brand reflected in every aspect of your business, from the spaces you inhabit, to the user-friendliness of your website and to the tone of your social media posts?

Business is about numbers, and budgets, and payroll. But none of that matters unless you can get and keep your client's business. Your brand—both as a noun and as a verb—should speak from the heart.

It will set you apart.

A Good Logo is Hard to Forget.

A brilliant logo is hard to beat, and developing a logo is generally the first step in branding after the brainstorming is done. No matter what the medium, your logo has just micro-seconds to catch potential clients' attention in a crowded field of messaging. If it's designed properly, and used relentlessly, your logo can become a well-known and loved symbol among your audiences and fans.

When developing a logo, consider color, shape, clarity, and the flexibility to be used across a broad variety of platforms—from the smallest business card to a billboard or a television ad. Be sure that the logo captures the essence of your company. And always, keep it simple. Less is more in the world of logos.

The word “logo” comes from the Greek word for “reason.” If your mark doesn't have a compelling story behind it, we'd say it's time to consider an update.

Over and Over and Over Again...

Once you've nailed down your brand, and developed the materials that support it, promote it ... and only it. Repetition is a long celebrated rule of advertising as a way for brands to become embedded in the mind of the public.

Establish and maintain a commitment to your corporate logo, color palette, typefaces, photography and illustration style as well as to your messaging and its tone.

Over and Over and Over Again... (continued)

Be consistent in the frequency of your marketing as well. No matter what the platform or variety of platforms, regularly marketing to your targeted audiences, in good times and in bad, is the key to long-term success. Find ways to track your effectiveness, and tweak your efforts or add to them when necessary.

Be consistent from the inside out. The branding process provides an invaluable road map of your business culture, and ensuring that road map is traveled every day is the ticket to maintaining an authentic brand.

There are times when being consistent can mean changing your brand as well, because all authentic brands are consistent with the company that they represent. Frequently when your company grows, you need not only more employees and more space, but you need to update your brand. When the market changes, if you add services or products, or when you receive significant feedback from customers that points you in a new direction, you may consider a refresh.

Don't be afraid to be bold and take this step.

Whether it's a new website, a refreshed logo, or a first venture into social media, it's vital that your brand reflects the company that you are today, and the one that you aspire to be tomorrow. The modernization of your brand exhibits your company's ability to change with the times, to be known as fleet-footed and forward-thinking.

It can be a daunting undertaking, particularly if you have invested time and money in your current brand. But that's not a sufficient reason to hesitate. Investing in a new, refreshed brand can do wonders for your bottom line.

Summary

Branding is a must to set your company apart from your competitors. Choose and design your message carefully, use it consistently and relentlessly in-house and in the public, and don't be afraid to refresh it when necessary. It's an investment that reaps healthy dividends.

Do More with A-LINE.

If you'd like assistance with branding—including help with distilling your company's differentiators, translating those into graphics, colors, and messaging, and how to use your brand most effectively—[contact A-LINE](#). We have great ideas about how to set forward-thinking organizations apart, and we'd be honored to put them to work for yours.