



# what you need to know about branding

Imagine it's 100 years ago, and you're a cowboy out on the open range. In front of you are 1000 head of cattle who all look alike. You have to cut out the herd belonging to your ranch—but how will you know which are yours? By the brand, of course.

What is brand? At its most basic level, the reason for branding now isn't much different than the reason ranchers branded their cattle—so you can easily be recognized in a crowd. But many people confuse brand as being ONLY about the mark, as being about an image campaign. In reality, brand is much, much more:

## **Brand is your business strategy made visible.**

At Creative Abandon, we look at brand as the fusion of the relationship between your customers and your company. It's about matching their needs with your strengths, matching the promise to the experience. Unless you know who you want to serve and what they need, you don't know what to promise. And unless you know your business strategy and strengths, you can't ensure that the promise will be met when the customer responds. Brand, at its best, creates a synergy between your company and your customers that takes on a life of its own.

## **Target Audience**

*"It's not about you, it's about them."*

This quote by Rob Frankel—a self-acclaimed brand guru—is one of the key premises a company needs to remember when it comes to branding. The first step of successful brand strategy is to know who you want as a customer and whether they're profitable. You can expend a lot of resources in getting a customer, but if you don't make sure they're a profitable customer in the first place you can put yourself out of business. Once you find out who's a profitable customer, you need to know *what they need*. Otherwise, you won't know how you're going to serve them in a way that makes an emotional connection. The goal of brand is to get people to see you as the *only solution to their problem*.



*How much do your customers love you? Is there a connection that transcends typical intellectual reasoning?*

At Creative Abandon, we start by looking at who loves you and why. Who are your most profitable, enjoyable customers, and why is it they do business with you? Are they loyal? Or would they switch at the drop of a penny? What are the needs of this group, and are you meeting those needs in a way that no one else can? And finally, are there a lot more of them? Sometimes, your business strategy needs to recognize there aren't enough of your profitable customers filling the pipeline to continue having a healthy company, and it's time to expand your base.

Which brings us to the other half of brand: *it's your business strategy*.



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## What business are you in?

If the first side of the brand coin is knowing who you want and what they need, the second side is knowing how you're going to serve them. What are your company's strengths? Can you serve your target audience in a way that no one else can? Do your products and services meet their needs, or do you need to change them? Does your business strategy enable you to match the "promise" to the actual experience when a customer makes contact?

This is where the fusion occurs. Let's say your brand promise is based on providing cheery, personalized service. This requires having staff on hand who are cheery and personable. But what if you employ a staff of people who were surly waiters in a former job? Chances are high you won't be able to deliver on your promise. This means you either have to change your staff, change your brand promise, or find a group of customers who *want* to be treated with contempt and disdain. Otherwise, any money you spent getting the customers in the first place has been wasted.

Knowing what business you're in clarifies how you're going to serve the customers you want, and becomes the litmus test for everything your company does. It's not a mission statement which sits in a pretty frame on the wall and no one can remember it. At Creative Abandon, we like to distill it down to a few words, a rallying cry for staff and management that can be used in making day-to-day decisions which reinforce your brand. In other words, short, sweet and gets used.

## How does that look?

Since actions speak louder than words, let's look at two real-life examples. The first is an international brand of which I have the pleasure of owning: the MINI Cooper. The second is a brand Creative Abandon developed for CME Federal Credit Union, helping them to expand beyond their traditional employer-based audience to a community charter.



*The MINI Cooper:  
fun from start to finish.*

### MINI Cooper

If you've seen the recent remake of *The Italian Job*, then you'll have a good idea of the redesigned, reintroduced classic British car, the MINI Cooper. The first challenge facing BMW was how to launch the new MINI in the U.S.—the land of SUVs. Their second challenge was how to keep the MINI from becoming a fad. So BMW's business strategy is to position the MINI as an icon. They target people who enjoy style, who typically choose their own path, who are fully engaged in life, and love to drive. To ensure that the MINI doesn't become a "chick" car, they show the car in a mostly masculine context. The promise they make with the MINI is "unique exhilaration at an attainable price". How that gets promoted to the target audience is with "Let's motor."



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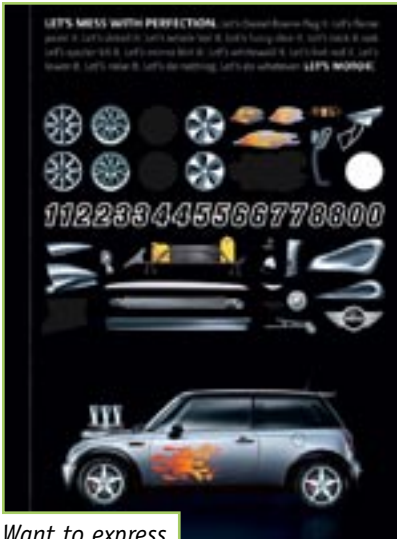
From billboards promoting the exhilaration of driving, to oversized objects emphasizing the difference in size, MINI's brand is all about the joy of driving a fun, smaller car.



Everything that touches the customer reinforces that owning and driving a MINI is fun, while also promoting personal style and the concept that smaller is better. From the billboards to the showrooms, everything is branded. But the real strength of MINI's brand is that once you've purchased the car, the fun continues: there's an Owner's Lounge on the web site that only MINI owners can access; I received cookies and a thank you card in the mail; I can purchase MINI gear to wear while driving. I was even given the "Unauthorized Owner's Manual," complete with stickers to personalize the toggle switches in my MINI to look like a James Bond getaway car!



If everybody else zigs, then zag. What better way is there to show you're the SUV antidote?



Want to express your individual style? This magazine insert from MINI let potential buyers do just that with a page full of stickers.

When the promise matches the experience, then—and only then—have you truly built your brand.

### CME Federal Credit Union

Branding can be easier to understand sometimes when it's based on a specific product. But what if you're trying to brand an organization?

If anything, the key brand principles are more important when applied to a service organization. This was the case with CME Federal Credit Union, one of our clients in Columbus, Ohio. Many credit unions—CME included—have been faced with a brand crisis. Recent legislation allows them to move beyond employer-based members to community



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charter, which means they can serve anyone within a specific geographic boundary. However, that geographic boundary contains hundreds of financial institutions, all with the same basic products and services. So how does CME FCU possibly compete?



We started with their business strategy. Two key points of the strategy were to increase mortgages and to increase checking accounts. In reviewing who already uses them for these services, we developed the following target audience:

*"Mike and Sue"*

- 30-45 years old
- Employed (public service sector, white collar)
- Household income: \$100,000
- Families, most married with grade school kids
- 4 services per household

Then we looked at what this target audience needs. Many of them have small children, so they need to upgrade from their current car or house. They want to move beyond the starter stage.

*What do they need?*

People in this lifestage have the basics.

**They have a good life.**

But they want more.

**They have good. They want GREAT.**



So what business is CME in?

*"CME is in the business of providing our members with the financial tools to take their lives from good to great."*

This was developed into the brand promise and the rallying cry for staff:

**Life is good. Make it great.**

Every decision staff makes is now based on whether they're going beyond "good" to "great". CME has also been reviewing internal products, services and processes to make sure they're at least delivering "good", and developing a plan to get to "great". It also helps them decide which products to offer, and which vendors to partner with.

Then it gets communicated in every piece that touches the member, as shown on the next page.



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MEMBER SERVICES

Good is becoming financially secure.

Great is becoming a member of CME.

Life is good. Make it great.

CME AUTO LOANS

Good has a seat for each kid.

Great has a row for each kid.

Life is good. Make it great.

From branch signage, to the member services brochure, from ads to the ATM machine, the CME brand promise is about making life great.

ATM

ATM

Good is becoming financially secure.

Great is becoming a member of CME.

Life is good. Make it great.

CME HOME MORTGAGES

Good is a fixer-upper.

Great is all fixed up.

**Good has creaky stairs.** Good has closets the size of a phone booth and a sign-up list for the bathroom door. Good is a work in progress. Good will be better...someday.

**Great has a grand staircase.** Great has walk-in closets and enough bathrooms to handle Monday morning without a single fight. Great lets you spend weekends practicing baseball, rather than practicing home repair.

**At CME, we have the tools to make your life great.** Like Home Mortgages that help you afford not only a better house, but more quality time together.

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Life is good. Make it great.

NCUA



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Let's summarize the key points on developing a successful brand:

1. Know who you want as a customer and what they need.
2. Know how you're going to serve them, based on your business strategy and strengths.

And most importantly,

Make sure that what you promise  
is what you deliver!