

Brand Yourself for Success!

By T. Scott Gross

The jeans you wear are branded. The company you run or work for is branded. And you, yes, you, are branded! In fact, you are multiply-branded. That's the good news. The bad news is that your multiple brands may not be working together. They may even be working against you!

No matter whether your brand is Wal-Mart; Fred Smith, CEO; Juanita Gomez, Director of Training; honey; or Mom, you have a brand. And not only do you have a brand, as we'll see, you have multiple brands! So you might as well learn how to make your brands work for you.

Most people confuse logos with the brands. Let's set the record straight: the logo is what you see, the brand is what you think. When you see the Nike swoosh, the logo, you think...sports for the masses, the brand. When you see a Lexus trunk ornament, the logo, you think...luxury cars for the lucky few, the brand. When you see red and white on a soup can, you suddenly begin to think...that soup is good food.

Got the idea?

A brand is mental real estate that someone owns in the mind of the target market.

Brands serve as mental shortcuts that help consumers make their buying decisions. Brands tell you who you are dealing with, what they may be selling, and predispose

your thoughts about the quality and price you should expect. The brand idea fills in all the blanks and allows the message to focus on new information. Strong brands are more efficient when it comes to using the media because premium message time doesn't have to be spent on introductions!

Microsoft can flash their logo and get right down to business. With any other software company by the time you have figured out who they are and what they do, the Microsoft boys would have packed up and headed back to the office!

What you may not realize is that most of the time there are smaller brands sitting on top of global brands. We call these little brands, MicroBrands.

MicroBranding™ Made Simple

Try these definitions on for size:

Any message communicated by any means that creates an expectation is an act of branding.

Any brand intended to dominate a micro-market is a MicroBrand.

A micro-market can be as small as a one-on-one personal relationship.

Everything you do impacts the value of your brand. If you manage a company or even a department you need to be thinking about how the individual MicroBrands of the players impact the overall brand.

It's a surprise to discover that in many instances a

MicroBrand is stronger than big name international brands.

For example, think about your local auto dealer. Outside you'll see the global brand of Ford or Toyota. Underneath the logo you are likely to see the name of the dealer principal. But what brand carries the most weight when you are deciding where to go for service? Probably the MicroBrand of the service writer who is your initial point of contact.

In the restaurant business in a bow to the power of MicroBrands there is a saying: There are no low volume restaurants; only low volume managers.

Applying the Concept of MicroBranding™

When the manager of a new Home Depot was interviewed, he showed a keen understanding of the power of a MicroBrand. "What's it like to work for a huge company like Home Depot?", he was asked.

"Home Depot?" The manager acted as if he had never heard the name of the company that wrote his paycheck.

The reporter continued to press while the manager continued to play before finally saying, "Oh, that Home Depot! That's their sign but the store is mine. It's mine to turn into a miserable failure or a runaway success!"

Over the door of a Subway sandwich shop hung a banner that is an anthem to the idea of a MicroBrand. It said

simply, “Open under Old Management.” Someone had figured that the MicroBrand of a popular former local manager was more powerful than the internationally known brand that is Subway.

On an even smaller scale, think about your brand as a professional at work or even as a partner at home. Your appearance, your language, everything about you serves as your logo and influences your MicroBrand in the mind of those you want to influence. Do you own and manage the mental real estate you want to own in the mind of your boss, your spouse, your children?

It’s All About You

Powerful MicroBrands are usually not built by slick marketing with high-dollar graphics. MicroBrands are more likely built with strategic networking, clever public relations, and sometimes event marketing. We’ll save the details for another time. For now, to put the power of MicroBranding to work for you, take these three steps:

First, take an inventory of all the brands that may be associated with you. In addition to your brand as a professional at work, don’t forget the brand you own as husband or wife, a mom or a dad.

Second, decide if your brands are in harmony with one another and who you want to be.

Third, stop letting your brands manage themselves and start being proactive about the mental real estate you want to own in the minds of the people you know and love.

In an over-messaged under-communicated world it’s getting more and more difficult to stand out. The good news is that you don’t have to conquer the world to succeed. All you need to do is own the micro-market that is your market.

And that’s why it’s critical that you understand the power of your brand, your MicroBrand!

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