

# Now Open Under Old Management: MicroBrander's Stand Out in a Tough Economy

By T. Scott Gross

He was headed toward me, sweating and weaving his way down the aisle as he exhorted a roomful of executives with an unusual message. "You don't have to be outstanding to succeed," he stabbed at the air for emphasis. "But you do have to stand out!" His name was Bill Oncken and I will never forget his simple yet powerful ideas.

Now, several decades later I find myself standing in front of similar audiences with my own take on how to succeed in a tough economy. Oncken was right. You don't have to be outstanding but you sure do need to stand out, something not easily achieved in an over-messaged world. Not easy, but possible. And millions of businesspeople have discovered the combination. Now, I've given it a name—MicroBranding.™

Here's the problem. We see the mega-brands taking to the airwaves with sophisticated marketing messages and assume incorrectly that that is the only way to attract a market. Wrong.

Broadcast marketing is in many instances not desirable even if it were affordable. Why? Because while Nike and Ford, Denny's and Wal-Mart are bound to hit a potential buyer wherever they blast a marketing message, the same is not true for those of us who cater to a much smaller, call it micro-market.

We have MicroBrands and, no surprise, the best way to spend our marketing energy is to limit it to our highly targeted micro-market.

So how do we go to market when the world is not the target? Four simple, powerful, efficient tactics: compelling experience, strategic networking, clever PR, and event marketing. That's what the MicroBrander's toolbox looks like.

The MicroBranding concept is simple. Powerful, personal or highly localized MicroBrands supported by shoestring marketing budgets can, and often do, beat out global brands with infinite resources. How? By focusing on a narrowly defined micro market.

It's a given. Subway represents a powerful brand of seemingly global dimensions. Yet how do you explain these understated five words that recently appeared under a Subway banner, "Now Open under Old Management." Someone understood that personal brands, call them MicroBrands, often mean more to the market than those of global powerhouses.

While smart MicroBrander's may lack a substantial budget for traditional media, there is no limit as to what can be done when a creative mind reaches into...

## The MicroBrander's Toolbox

Tool number one:  
*Compelling experience.*

You know in your heart, there is no marketing quite as powerful as compelling, positive word of mouth and there is no better way to achieve it than by providing customers with an experience they have to talk about.

To improve your odds of getting positive word of mouth, do an audit of your business with the idea in mind that you want to provide an experience that is congruent with the promise that is your brand.

If your brand promises quality then check that every point of contact with your organization shouts quality. If price is your thing, then make the entire experience a study in economy for both you and your customer.

We recently saw an ad that promised "really cheap, not very well made store fixtures." For a quality brand, this misses by a mile but for a brand built on saving money, this one is right on target.

Tool number two:  
*Strategic networking.*

Awareness is a fundamental of marketing. You can serve as your number one promoter but only if you first think through your plan and decide up front who you want to target. Blindly handing out business cards at the monthly chamber social misses the mark. Attend many different events

and avoid mixing with folks you know.

Tool number three: *Clever public relations.*

Learn to think like an editor or a booker. Would this headline grab your attention? “Local business plans expansion.” Try this instead: “Latest look in retailing is coming to town.” Get it? It’s got to be interesting.

Tool number four: *Event marketing.*

Several times a year create marketing events that stand out. Make them fun, involve your product, get folks to your property and do something good for others. A restaurant can sponsor a cooking contest. A dry cleaner could sponsor a coat drive for the needy. Use your imagination; the possibilities are endless.

Make sure that the event is fun, involves your product, gets people to your property and does something good for others!

If you still aren’t a MicroBranding believer, just think about the greeter at your local Wal~Mart. Even the retailing giant recognizes the power of personal brands. They put one at every door. Shouldn’t you?

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