



**For You, Your Blog, Your Product, Service, Vision ...  
and Pretty Much Anything**

# Branding

**By Shane Navratil**

*It takes an audience.*

It's true that great branding can't help you as much as bad branding can hurt you. And much of the worth of any brand is how well it's promoted. So a brand with mediocre appeal can hit a home run with enough cash and promotion behind it.

Truly great branding has a way of going viral. Of getting other people to stand behind it and promote it. It's on-message. It clicks. People just "get it". In the end, great branding can save you a lot of money and a lot of work.

It's a name, it's a logo. It's a message and a mood. Branding is a little bit art, and a little bit science.

Let's get into it ...

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## How Branding Works

Who you know, has its benefits. But maybe even more important is **who knows you**. Great branding helps you get known. Great branding builds a relationship between you and your audience. And for a business, a blog, or any kind of endeavor, that relationship is the key to accomplishing whatever you set out to do.

Whether you're trying to raise awareness, foster change, or increase sales, branding is an investment in making it happen. And when done well, you can leverage your brand for as long as you take care of it and keep it alive. Your brand **has a job to do**. And step by step, this is how it works to get you known:

### 1. Get Attention

Business is a competitive sport. You can have the greatest product in the world, but if no one notices it sitting beside a hundred others on the shelf, all is lost.

And whether your arena is the store aisle, the multi-billion page internet, or the hyper-competitive corporate ladder, your brand is your flag. It's what gets noticed. Its very first job is to turn heads.

**Hey, Over Here!**  
**Yeah! Over Here.**

Getting attention is tricky. It's not too difficult to get attention. All you have to do is be the most outrageous. But being the most outrageous doesn't necessarily translate into what you want to happen next. Because after you start turning heads, you want people to actually stop and take notice.

So you only have **one goal** in getting attention, and that's to get to the next step; sparking interest.

## 2. Spark Interest

Sparking interest is about getting some **face time**. The difference between getting attention and sparking interest is the time you get to make your pitch. You can only go right from getting attention to the next step, building trust, once you have an established brand. That's the power of branding.

But while you're building your brand, and when you're promoting new things under its flag, you need to spark interest before you build trust.

## Stop. Check This Out. This Means Something to You.

While getting attention may give you only a fraction of a second of face time, sparking interest can get you anywhere from several seconds to minutes or even hours of face time.

Interest gives your audience **ownership**. It gets them **involved** and **invested** in your brand. It can be interactive. Or a learning experience. It can show a way to solve a problem. You can spark interest by

associating yourself with something that's already known. Or by showing people something that's new, different, or evolutionary. Even revolutionary. Or imperative.

Sparking interest piques curiosity. Just long enough for you to make your pitch.

### **3. Build Trust**

This is where you make your **pitch**. So what do you want to say? Imagine having less than a second to say it. Aren't you glad you sparked some interest now?

Trust takes time. You've sparked some interest and bought yourself some time. So how do you spend that time wisely? Deliver everything you promised, and more.

**Here's Honesty. And Integrity.  
Here's Social Proof.  
And Value. Always.  
But ... You Decide.**

You must stay true to who you are. And true to what you're trying to say. And this goes back to how you got attention and sparked interest in the first place. Nothing erodes trust like the old bait-and-switch. It's a conversation between a brand and an audience that goes something like this:

*“Hey, over here! This means something to you.”  
“Wait a minute. This isn’t what you said it was. This sucks!”*

Stay true to who you are. Deliver what you promise and show that you’ve delivered before. Even better, provide social proof. If you can show that other people believe in what you have to offer, you’re miles ahead in the game.

To build trust, you need to deliver everything you promised, and **more** than what you promised. And even if you promise “the world”, as long as you can deliver the sun and the moon too, you’ll start to get recognition.

Now you’re really starting to create some zoom.

## **4. Foster Recognition**

The big payoff! After you’ve gotten attention, sparked interest, and built trust, you get recognition. And a widely recognized brand is a beautiful thing.

To foster recognition, you just build it and promote it. Keep getting it out there. You have to take care of your brand. Keep it **fresh**, keep it **on-message**, and make sure it gets plenty of time in the **spotlight**. Once you’ve gained some recognition, you just keep working to make it stronger.

## **Hey, I know you!** **Hello Again.**

Think about well known brands such as Coca-Cola, Google, Microsoft, and GE ... the list goes on and on. What if these companies stopped putting their brand on their products? Would you still buy them? You might, but their sales would plummet. They'd have to start all over again from square one. How?

Get attention, spark interest, build trust and foster recognition.

## Defining Your Brand

*“The best laid schemes o' mice an' men, **gang aft agley**...” ~ Robert Burns; To a Mouse*

What?! Okay, maybe that quote from Robert Burns' poem doesn't quite clarify the message. But that's the whole point. The best laid plans often don't turn out as expected.

Defining your brand is your plan. It's the foundation you use to design it and promote it. And even though it may not turn out as expected, you have to start somewhere. Let the conception begin!

### 1. Tell Your Story

Everyone has a story. Every thing has a story. And even if you're just in this for the money, everything worth selling and everything worth buying has a story. It's there.

It's in the **history**, it's in the **discovery** and it's in the **aims and ambitions** of what your brand means to people. And why. Why does it mean something? Why should it?

That's your story.

## 2. Define Your Offer

The offer you're making to people is not necessarily separate from your story. But it's such a critical part of defining your brand that it's worth mentioning as a separate point. People might just get it when they experience your story. That's always good. But if not, you have to spell it out.

At first glance, maybe you want to define your offer and then wrap a story around it. There's something wrong with doing that. It makes your story sound fake. It becomes just **a** story, not **the** story.

So tell your story, and somewhere along the way, define your offer.

## 3. Find Your Voice

Your voice sets the tone for your brand. It can be loose and free flowing or all buttoned up. It can be quirky and funny, or drop-dead serious. It can be both. Your voice might appeal to men or women. Or everybody.

Your voice is mood lighting. It's background music. It guides your audience to the way they're supposed to feel about your brand. It's the hand that reaches out to shake theirs. Or the teeth that bites it off. It's candor, rhythm, bombast. It's **how** you **connect**.



## 4. Tag It!

Take your story, your offer, and using your voice, boil it all down to a few words. Or at most, a short sentence. If you had to explain your brand to someone and this is all the space and all the time you had, could you?

Taglines are powerful. A tagline or slogan is your brand focused down to a laser point. And they sell multi-million dollar movies and define billion dollar companies:

**DeBeers:** *“Diamonds are forever”*  
**AT&T:** *“Reach out and touch someone”*  
**Yellow Pages:** *“Let your fingers do the walking”*  
**Nike:** *“Just do it.”*

A good tagline is not just **definitive**, it's **memorable**. It's **sticky**. And now it's time to test that.

## 5. Test It

The last thing you need to do to define your brand is test it. If you're small, ask some people you can trust to give you honest feedback. If you're huge, form a focus group and fill a room with a couple dozen people and ask them what they think.

The bare-bones budget way of testing a brand goes like this:

- Throw the brand name at some people and see what they say. If it piques their interest, then you're on track.

- Next, give them a quick description of what it is. And throw the tagline at them. If they don't get it, then it's back to square one.
- Finally, come back a week or two later and ask them if they have any more thoughts on your concept without telling them the name. If they still remember the name, you've got stickiness. And it's time to forge ahead.

So you have a story, an offer, a voice and a tagline. You've tested it. Now it's time to build it.

## Designing Your Brand

Branding is not just a name or a logo. It's an entire identity. Your name and your logo are part of that package. They're a big part, and the fun part, just not the only part. Let's build it.

### 1. Your Name

A few names probably popped into your head the minute you decided to build your brand. Sometimes these are the best names because they come to you intuitively. But they haven't been tested. It's the work you do to define your brand that tests the name against a set of criteria to make sure it has meaning.

But to really create a great brand name, you have to make sure it has great usability. There are some key things that make a name **user friendly** for people. These things are what your name really is because it's how people will experience it:

#### **It's a Definition of Your Brand**

The definition can be distinctive or descriptive. A **distinctive** name is new, different. It can be a completely made up word which means its only definition is the one you give it. A **descriptive** name literally tells you what it is or gives you a good idea of what it is.

**Distinctive Names**

*Dasani*

*Technorati .com*

**Descriptive Names**

*Career Ramblings .com*

*Life Hacker .com*

**It's a Sound**

How does it sound when you say it? Does it sound clunky or does it flow easily and have a nice ring to it? A good name has a pleasing sound. It's not a tongue twister.

Try to keep the whole name to 5 **syllables** or less. Use short, easy to pronounce syllables. The secret to a pleasing sound is to get each syllable to roll easily into the next one when you say it.

It's always wise to not get too tricky. But there are a few tricks that can help make a name sound more jingly and memorable:

**Alliteration**

*Al's Auto-parts*

*Jib Jab .com*

### **Rhyming and Assonance**

*Freaky Geeks*

*Funny Money*

*Smart Car*

### **Initializing a Long Name**

(Be careful with this one)

*Duncan, Umbers, Matthew-Barry, LLP.*

Good names are catchy, simple and easy to remember.

### **It's a Series of Letters**

Your name should be easy to spell just from hearing it. This is really important for both word-of-mouth campaigning and for type in traffic and internet searches for your website.

A name like **The Prescient Dichotomy of Thought** might be easily misspelled. And there are too many letters; there's just too much to read. People **scan** more than they read so short names are always better. But even a short name like **4 Piers** can be easily misspelled and misinterpreted if you're not careful. Is it 4, Four, or Fore? And is it Piers or Peers?

### **It's a Graphic**

Most of the time, a brand name is a logo. A brand might have a purely graphic logo also, but the name is the primary logo. You're creating art with text. And minimalist art is always best in this case.

It needs to be **easily readable** above everything else. If you look at the biggest brands on any shelf, they all use very simple and basic fonts; maybe with a little twist here or an accent there. Complex fonts are not easily readable and trying to incorporate pictures into the lettering really makes it difficult to read.

**Brand Brand Brand Brand**

You can see that the last graphic name is not easily readable. It's not a good graphic representation for a name. A name needs to be bold, simple and easily read from a distance. Some letters don't go well together. A "c" followed by an "l" can look like a "d" from a distance or if the type is too small.

Your graphic name should also be appealing and distinctive. To give a plain font a little something special, make one or two **small graphic changes** to the text. The changes should be simple and translate well in black and white:

**Brand!**

## 2. Your Logo

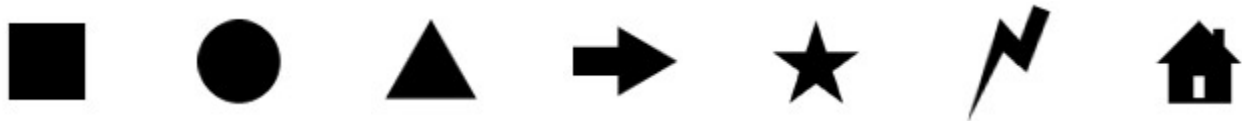
Even though the graphic element of your name is the best place for your logo, most companies have an extra logo; a purely graphic logo that represents their brand. Like the Nike swoosh, or Apple's apple.

Whether you want to stick with just a name logo or create a special graphic logo, these key design elements are what makes a logo a great and memorable logo.

### Simple Geometry

Basic shapes catch our attention much more easily than complex symbols. We can process, understand and remember what we're seeing faster and easier.

We want something unique too. By combining **basic shapes** like the square, circle and triangle we can make more complex shapes:



This is one of those things where less is more. As long as their simple, they're very effective, and this is why icons are so popular and street signs use very simple geometric shapes. The more complex a shape gets, the harder it is for our brains to process.

The way to understand the complexity of shape is to count the number of sides a shape has. A square has four. A five pointed star has ten. The “house” graphic has eleven, plus four more for the door for a total of fifteen separate lines.

Another thing that makes shapes easier to recognize is **symmetry**. The star’s left side is a mirror image to the right side. The arrow is symmetrical on the top and bottom. And while the lightning bolt’s not symmetrical, it only has seven sides so it’s very simple.









The last element that your graphics geometry conveys is a sense of **softness** or **hardness**. A graphic with soft and flowing edges is more feminine and is going to appeal to women more. Hard edges are more masculine. This is important because your brand has to appeal to your target audience. There’s no use in designing a logo for a women’s product that only appeals to men.

## **Color**

Just like shapes, colors can be masculine or feminine. But the big impact of different colors is the **mood or emotion** they convey. They can be calming or energetic. They can be wild or reserved or funky or classic.

There’s a lot to color theory, especially when using different colors together to create a theme or a set of corporate colors. To go in depth, you’ll find some links in the resources section at the end of this eBook. For now, here are some basic colors and what they convey:



Black	Red	Blue	Orange	Purple	Green	Yellow	White
							
<i>Power</i> <i>Sophistication</i> <i>Elegance</i> <i>Mystery</i>	<i>Passion</i> <i>Excitement</i> <i>Speed</i> <i>Seduction</i>	<i>Business</i> <i>Confidence</i> <i>Calm</i> <i>Clarity</i>	<i>Warmth</i> <i>Vibrancy</i> <i>Fun</i> <i>Energetic</i>	<i>Nobility</i> <i>Wisdom</i> <i>Inspiration</i> <i>Exuberance</i>	<i>Nature</i> <i>Health</i> <i>Fortune</i> <i>Vigor</i>	<i>Joy</i> <i>Optimism</i> <i>Hope</i> <i>Light</i>	<i>Purity</i> <i>Cleanliness</i> <i>Precision</i> <i>Peace</i>

Again, just like with shapes, it's best to keep your brand colors simple. The more colors, gradients, patterns and complexity you have, the longer it takes for someone to process. **Keep it simple.** Use one or two main colors and add a couple accents and simple effects at the most.

Good **contrast** between the colors you use, and between the logo and the background is another reason to keep things simple. Contrast makes a logo much bolder and recognizable from a distance.



## Descriptive Graphics

Your logo is your story, your tag and your voice all bundled up into one simple little picture. It can be a literal representation of your brand or it can reflect your brand's attitude.

For example, Gatorade uses a lightning bolt. It reflects the brands **attitude** which is all about explosive athletic energy. At the same time, Rayovac batteries use a lightning bolt as their logo and it has a more **literal** meaning; electrical power.

The key to making a great descriptive logo is making sure that people recognize the symbolism. If no one can figure out what it is, it's back to the drawing board. Keep it simple. Test it and see if people recognize what it is or get some sense of meaning from it.

### **Distinct Graphics**

A logo should be distinct. One of a kind. It has to be **different** to stand out in the crowd and it shouldn't be easily confused with some other well known logo.

It's okay to learn from the masters and emulate their techniques. But copying them is seldom rewarded. It might seem impossible to create a logo that's simple and distinct but remember this; there are only 12 notes in music. And they've been used to create thousands of great songs.

### **Putting it all Together**

The best workflow for designing a logo is to start by designing it in black and white. This helps you keep it distinct and descriptive and most importantly simple. Then add color. And then add your effects to really bring it to life.

Here are the different stages for my own logo for Zoomstart:



If you have a really good sense of what you want your logo to say, you can start designing in color and stop there without adding any effects. This is what I did.

But I created a black and white version afterwards to double check that it still makes sense without any color. The B&W version of your logo is a critical step, especially if you're using 2 or 3 main colors. I created a splashier 3D version just to illustrate what a fully fleshed out design might look like.

It's always better to start with a basic version before you create a full effects version of you logo. But if you start with a full effects version, tear it down to flat colors and B&W to make sure the fundamentals of good design are there.

### 3. Populate Your Brand

Now you have a story, a name, a tagline, and a logo. It might seem like you have everything a great brand needs. But there's one more critical thing. **Your brand needs people.** You need to populate it and give it a face and a personality. This is a step that's frequently overlooked.

Just as well known as many of the most well branded companies are the people behind them:

**Microsoft:** *Bill Gates*

**Apple:** *Steve Jobs*

Another way of populating a brand is by using celebrity endorsements. Strong personalities that are well recognized brands themselves lend a lot of credibility to a brand. Many companies populate their brands with well known people:

*Nike*

*Wheaties cereal*

*L'Oreal cosmetics*

You don't need to have a fortune 500 company to populate a brand. In fact, for a smaller brand it's probably even more important to make a **human connection** with your audience. We need to know that a brand has someone behind it who cares about it and believes in it. People make a brand real.

You can populate a brand in one of 3 ways:

**Real People**



**Caricatures  
of Real People**



**Mascots**



There are links to some great examples of each of these in the resources section at the end of the eBook.

And now we have all the components a brand needs. It's defined and designed and it's time to put it to work. It's time to get attention, spark interest, build trust and foster recognition. It's time to promote your brand.

## Promoting Your Brand

You can break a lot of rules when you're designing your brand and still build a great brand. It's just harder. It takes more time. It takes more money. It takes heavy promoting.

So, good design can save you a lot of money. But even so, to build a great brand you have to **get it out there** in front of people. It needs exposure. You have to promote it. So here's how you do that.

### 1. Target Your Audience

Where and how, right? Not so fast. The first question to answer is **who**. And not so much who it is you want to promote your brand to, but who's going to have an interest in it? Who has a need that it fills?

#### Build a Demographic

There are a few different factors that go into understanding your audience. All those factors add up to create a demographic profile of your audience. Every brand has a **core audience** and a **fringe audience**. The core is the most influential and strongest. They match most of your demographic markers. The fringe audience is scattered and each of them may only fit into a couple of your demographic markers.

To build a demographic profile for your brand, start by defining the needs that your brand meets within each marker. That tells you who your audience is. They're the people in each demographic marker whose needs you can meet:

Demographic Markers	The Needs My Brand Fills	My Audience
Age		
Sex / Gender		
Race / Ethnicity / Culture		
Socioeconomic Status		
Family & Marital Status		
Hobbies and Pursuits		
Mobility		
Religion		

If you have trouble figuring out who your audience is, use subtraction and first figure out who they aren't. As you narrow the field in each category, whoever's left is your audience.

It's important to **be in tune** with your audience. Does your brand's design fit your audience or does it fit the designer? If it doesn't fit your audience, it's time to go back to the drawing board and do a redesign.

Once you know who your audience is, you have a good idea of where they'll be. You'll know what grabs their attention. And it's time to get your brand out there.

## **2. Get It Out There**

A brand can't sit by itself in a dark room. You need to get it in front of people; especially your core audience. Getting your brand in front of people is a combination of sales, advertising, and publicity.

You can approach your audience actively or passively. Active promotion gets people involved and it's much more effective. It's engaging and interactive. Passive promotion works en masse. You need to do a lot of passive promotion to get results so it needs to be cost effective and well targeted to your audience.

Here's how you can get it out there:



## Active Promotion

- Affiliate marketing
- Blog writing and web applications
- Blog and forum comment networking
- Cold calling, door to door, and telemarketing
- Contests and competitions
- Community events and participation
- Conventions and trade shows
- Cross promotion with other brands
- Gifts of branded t-shirts, mugs, and pens
- Open house gatherings
- Product demonstrations
- Product or service samples and giveaways
- Professional and trade organization involvement
- Public performances and antics
- Seminars and classes
- Sponsored events, shows and tournaments
- Word of mouth campaigning

## Passive Promotion

- Billboards and bus stop ads
- Books and EBooks
- Building and Vehicle signage
- Business card handouts
- EBay and Craig's List offerings
- Flyers, brochures, leaflets and direct mail
- Google Earth rooftop signs for satellites
- Informational CD-Rom, mini CD, or DVD
- Newspaper, magazine and print advertising
- Product placement in TV shows and other media
- Press releases
- Retail packaging
- RSS subscriptions and Email newsletters
- Skywriting, lights, blimps, inflatables, and balloons
- Television and radio advertising
- Web advertising (flat rate, CPC, CPM)
- The Yellow Pages
- YouTube / internet videos and podcasts

Effective promotions are **bold**, **creative**, and **different**. You want to use promotions that will get your brand in front of your demographic audience. The best promotions give your audience something of **value**. It's about

them more than it's about your brand. Your audience should have something to take away with them; a tangible thing, an innovative idea, or a memorable experience.

Get your brand in front of **key influencers** in your audience. Key influencers are connected and engaged in their communities. They spread the word. They make a campaign go **viral**.

Test your promotions and monitor their success. If something doesn't work for your brand, try something else. You can also get **feedback** using surveys, questionnaires and networking which is one of the things that makes active promotions so powerful.

### **3. Repetition, Repetition, Repetition...**

Be everywhere. Promoting a brand is about **reach**. The more places and the more often it's out there, the more people you're going to reach.

Your audience is in different places, doing different things at different times. To find them you want a promotional game plan that gets your brand in front of them again and again. The more that people see it, the more it will resonate with them.

Make your brand available and accessible. Use a **diverse** number of promotional ideas. Put together a **blitz** campaign for a limited time and follow it up with a steady stream of standard promotions. Always being around and popping up from time to time in potent bursts builds brand awareness.

Get it out there, and often.

## Summary

So that's branding. Here's a quick checklist to re-cap:

### **How Branding Works**

- Get attention
- Spark interest
- Build trust
- Foster recognition

### **Defining Your Brand**

- Tell your story
- Define your offer
- Find your voice
- Tag it
- Test it

### **Designing Your Brand**

- Your name
- Your logo
- Populate your brand

### **Promoting Your Brand**

- Target your audience
- Get it out there
- Repetition, repetition, repetition



Have fun building your brand. Enjoy it and other people will enjoy it too. With time and attention it'll become recognized as an authority, a solution, or a must-have or must-do thing. Re-invent it from time to time but remember your roots and always remember; a brand is about its audience.

Happy branding.

## Branding Resources

Need some more help building your brand? Check out these online resources ...

### Advertising Ideas

[Adverblog](#)  
[AdverBox](#)  
[Advertising Lab](#)  
[Improv Everywhere](#)  
[Know This](#)  
[prologger](#)

### Color theory

[Colour Lovers](#)  
[Kuler](#)  
[Worqx Color Theory](#)

### Demographics

[Inc - Market Research](#)  
[How Stuff Works - Psychographics](#)

### Design and Web Design

[A List Apart](#)  
[Artzmania](#)  
[bittbox](#)  
[css Zen Garden](#)  
[dafont](#)  
[Page Plane](#)  
[Smashing Magazine](#)

### Find Pro Help

[Design Firms](#)  
[Freelance Switch](#)

### Logos

[logopond](#)  
[Logoworks](#)

### Marketing

[Creating Passionate Users](#)  
[Duct Tape Marketing](#)  
[Seth Godin](#)

### Naming

[a hundred monkeys](#)  
[Brighter Naming](#)  
[Igor](#)

### Smartly “Populated” Sites

[Dosh Dosh](#)  
[Freelance Switch](#)  
[Smart Wealthy Rich](#)

### Writing

[copylogger](#)

