



Brand Image Solutions™

Brand Compliance Essential to Protect Your Company's Emotional Connection to Customers

By Amy McManus, Director of Marketing,
GBC Document Finishing Division

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The Shortcut Between Customers and Companies

The essence of marketing is twofold:

- 1) finding something about your company or its products that is distinct and advantageous over your competitors;
- 2) exploiting those advantages through various media and communications.

Most marketing experts understand that branding is one such distinct advantage they have over their competitors and it is one of the best ways to communicate the subtle yet powerful messages to customers about their company.

A company's brand is influential in a customer's purchasing decision. While many of us like to think we carefully research our purchases and make logical choices with our vendors, the truth is that purchasing decisions – from cars to chewing gum – are often made because we, the consumer, believe in the brand promise the company is making to us.

This brand promise is part of an emotional dialogue between companies and their customers, so it's important to recognize the value of branding and how it can work for your company.

A long-term commitment to branding provides a shortcut between customers and companies when customers intuitively understand the company's brand. In today's economy where purchasing decisions of all kinds are made quickly, branding provides you a direct line to the customer's emotions behind the purchase. As Malcolm Gladwell writes in his new book *Blink*, "When you meet someone for the first time, or walk into a house you are thinking of buying, or read the first few sentences of a book, your mind takes about two seconds to jump to a series of conclusions." The level of brand awareness customers have about your brand allows them to make that purchasing judgment in this short

period. In this respect, brands serve as a synapse that allows messages to flow freely to the consumer and encourages and reassures them about their choice.

BMA Survey

With this branding background in mind, Business Marketing Association (BMA) developed a survey with the support of General Binding Corporation to determine the state of branding among BMA's member companies. The survey was sent to 687 marketing professionals via email in October and November of 2005 and included responses from 204 corporate marketing professionals. The survey has a 5.9 margin of error based on 95 percent confidence level.

The survey focused on the key role brand compliance plays in a company's overall branding efforts. For the purpose of this article, we shall define brand compliance as the time, effort and money a company spends to ensure its employees, satellites and franchises adhere to the branding strategy and initiative throughout the entire organization.

The survey found that almost 90 percent of companies are in the process of a branding or re-branding campaign, but that many companies believe brand compliance is a problem that may undercut their branding efforts. The survey also found that:

- 70 percent of the respondents believe brand compliance is important or very important to their organization
- 73 percent of companies have a business unit responsible for implementing brand campaigns

- On average, respondents said their branding budgets had increased 12.3 percent over the last two years
- 60 percent of the respondents reported that they have a brand standards manual for their employees to follow when producing marketing materials

While much of the survey reveals that most BMA members have given appropriate thought to branding and have set aside the adequate resources to execute a disciplined and effective brand campaign, there are still many companies who may be putting their branding campaigns in jeopardy.

An analysis of the more prominent survey findings suggests one potentially troubling issue. While a significant number of companies are undertaking branding or re-branding campaigns, only 60 percent of those surveyed said they have a brand standards manual, and 73 percent said they have a business unit responsible for implementing the branding campaign. The implications of brand compliance could be dire for marketing departments. If brand compliance falls under their responsibility and the department is already strapped for time and resources, brand compliance is not going to be enforced with the kind of vigor necessary to ensure a consistent brand campaign is conducted.

Consequences of Poor Branding Compliance

Branding experts estimate that a company's brand is equivalent to 35-40 percent of the company's market capitalization. Yet the care and feeding of a brand, especially on the brand compliance front, is not given the appropriate priority it merits. After all, can you afford to lose 35 percent of your company's value?

When brand compliance is not enforced or encouraged consistently, it can create a gap between how customers perceive your company and how you want to be perceived. The wider this gap, the more confusion occurs among your customers and potential customers. A good example of this occurs when a company is undertaking a re-branding effort but launches it in stages – first with trade advertising, then brochures and marketing, and, finally, the old letterhead is tossed out. Meanwhile, the company's customers are seeing trade ads with the new brand but getting invoices with the old logo. While some of this is unavoidable, marketing professionals should attempt to ensure that new brands appear on all communications and marketing materials at the same time.

Everyone would agree that advertising and direct marketing should use the agreed upon brand identity, but what about materials like binders, reports or folders? In our experience, it's common for companies to give short shrift on some of these items, yet every platform provides an opportunity to

enhance your company's brand and the image it conveys. Think about the impact of a sales presentation package. Done perfectly, it makes a complete statement about your company, and could earn millions of dollars in new revenue. Done poorly, it damages your reputation and detracts from bottom line growth goals. Which would you rather have?

Tips on How Companies Can Build Brand Compliance

How then can a marketing professional better ensure strict branding discipline? Here are few tips to help you navigate through a brand compliance initiative:

Conduct a brand audit. Collect all your printed materials from different departments, offices, locations and franchisees and compare them against your brand standards manual. Do they all conform to the recommended color, size, and logo treatment specified in the manual? Comparing materials this way gives you the ability to quickly assess where your brand might be straying from the intended look and feel. If you want to delve deeper into how the brand is used, send out a questionnaire to key staff throughout the company to assess how they use the brand. The survey can also reveal other issues employees may have about your brand that didn't turn up during the planning stages.

Appoint a brand champion. A brand champion is a key staff person, accessible to all departments throughout your organization, who can help you encourage proper use of your company's brand. Properly trained and empowered, a brand champion will work continuously with other departments to ensure the use of your brand in accordance with your brand standards manual. Having a central point of contact in your brand champion is essential to ensuring consistency in your brand's image.

A brand champion can help you investigate how your image and brand is being used in front of your customers on reports, folders and presentations. This key staff member can help you quantify what each department is spending on branded materials with each vendor. They can also help you assess whether these vendors are efficient when measured against time and financial resources spent on branding.

Brand champions can make other important contributions to your brand compliance effort:

- They can help you research other vendors or partners who can help you with brand standardization
- They can help manage brand compliance implementation through their close proximity to staff who work with branded documents and media

- They can report on compliance and savings measurements as part of an ongoing brand audit that is important for 360 degree analysis

Make Branded Materials Easily Accessible. As part of establishing a brand standards manual, it's important to take it 'on the road' and demonstrate how it is used and what policies and procedures exist for using the brand in various contexts. This internal road show allows you to clearly communicate your guidelines for using the brand and why they are important. Many staff will think brand use is arbitrary and that it's okay to adapt it to their use. This is an opportunity for you, or your brand champion, to establish guidelines on the use of the brand and demonstrate that the company faces strategic consequences (remember the 35 percent market capitalization estimate) if the brand is used inappropriately.

All constituents should be able to readily access corporate-approved materials using web-based solutions or branding sites. There are web-based solutions you can use to provide improved access to these materials while saving you actual trips to satellite offices.

Consistency is king. Using your brand the same way across all media ensures your customers' and employees' perception of your company are more closely aligned with the perception you want to promote. There are some excellent vendors you can hire to help ensure all your materials adhere to your company's branding guidelines.

Take a Cue From the Medical Community

Physicians recommend you have periodic check-ups to ensure you are in good shape and all of your parts are healthy and working together. We suggest the same idea applies to brand health. We developed the GBC Brand Wellness Check-up to help determine if your brand compliance is healthy or in need of professional care. Review and answer the questions below to determine your level of brand compliance:

1. Has your organization completed a branding/re-branding effort in the last 12 months or are you planning one within the next 12 months?

2. Is brand compliance important in your organization?
3. Does your company use binders, report covers, pocket folders, CDs, presentations or proposals?
4. Are the majority of your presentation materials used externally to generate new business?
5. Would your brand image be strengthened by consistent use across all your materials; i.e., binders, manuals, reports, proposals?
6. Would your brand be strengthened by widespread use of approved presentation materials in all your locations?
7. Are multiple locations producing their own presentation materials?
8. Does your company purchase presentation materials through multiple local or regional vendors?
9. Would your business realize savings—cost, time, resources—if a single source provided your presentation materials on a local, regional and national level?
10. Are you looking for ways to reduce your marketing spend while maximizing your brand value?

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Brands are living, breathing entities that capture the heart and soul of a company. Those firms that take proper care of their brands, from establishing a clear brand standards manual to ensuring brand compliance, are the companies that will reap the benefits as customers respond positively to the clarity the company's brand establishes in the marketplace.

These action steps to ensure improved brand compliance are measures you can and should take, not only to protect the financial stake your company has in your brand, but the emotional stake you, and more importantly, your customers, invest in your brand.

For more information about GBC Brand Image Solutions™ and how the expert consultants can help strengthen your company's brand image, call **1-888-240-4219** or log on to www.gbconnect.com/brandimage.

About GBC

GBC, an ACCO Brands company, has served a broad range of document communication needs for businesses worldwide for over 50 years. Our products and services, including binding and laminating solutions, custom presentation solutions and technical service, are critical to our customers in helping them distinguish their printed materials and achieve a professional edge in today's competitive market. ACCO Brands Corporation (NYSE: ABD) is a world leader in branded office products, with annual revenues of nearly \$2 billion. Its industry-leading brands include Swingline, Kensington, Wilson Jones, Quartet, GBC, and Day-Timer, among others.

About the BMA

Founded in 1922 as the National Industrial Advertising Association, today's Business Marketing Association represents a lifetime of expertise in business-to-business marketing and communications. For more than 80 years, BMA has been the pre-eminent service organization for professionals in this vital industry. As market realities so often prove, no one stays in business that long without continually meeting their customers' needs. For more information about BMA, visit www.marketing.org.

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800-723-4000
www.gbconnect.com

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