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October 2005

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—Chip R. Bell, co-author, *Magnetic Service*



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Present a Clear Image

A v o i d i d e n t i t y t h e f t !



by Dan Jones

MANY COMPANIES commit identity theft by failing to protect the brand value and image they spent countless hours and precious revenue to create.

Your brand image should evoke an emotional response from your audience. Whether it is for internal purposes, such as training materials for new employees, or for external usage, such as a project proposal for a current client, your brand conveys the message you've created for your audience. That message can project an identity with qualities that include strength, quality, consistency, friendliness, trust, and speedy service. Your uniquely created brand conveys a unique message.

Some companies forget this audience exists both internally and externally. Internally, your own employees or new-hires have a mental impression of the image and identity. Externally, your client sees and hears brand messaging that is meant to stimulate purchases or reinforce customer loyalty.

Enforcing a consistent brand identity and image with employees serves multiple purposes: first, it gives them a sense of belonging, pride and ownership; second, it helps attract and retain top talent; and third, it helps them consistently communicate the proper brand message to your clients. When this understanding doesn't exist, communication becomes fuzzy at best.

When a company fails to strengthen the brand image with clear, consistent messaging, what does this "identity theft" cost? Brand value equals 35 to 40 percent of a company's market capitalization. If that brand value were to erode or disappear, that would constitute a heavy loss. No business owner can afford to damage 35 to 40 percent of their company's value.

Doing the Two-Step

Here are two simple steps you can take to avoid losing value through internal brand identity theft:

1. Achieve creative consistency. A successful brand identity exhibits strong continuity between all materials. Your company has invested a lot of money in

a logo and image, and consistency leverages that investment. It provides a clear image created and communicated through all of the "client-facing" materials you produce. Your "leave-behinds" (binders, brochures, hand-outs) should generate the desired emotion connected to your brand.

2. Enforce branch office compliance. Achieving creative consistency for client-facing materials presents quite a challenge. If 10 people sit down to create a physical representation of your brand image—including a logo, style, colors and materials—they will come up with 10 different ideas.

Reigning in this selective creativity and regaining control of your brand



image means controlling both the creation and distribution of your client-facing materials.

Focus on:

- Establishing policies and procedures
- Adopting systems to automate and streamline marketing purchases
- Centralizing marketing buying and
- Supporting aggressive supplier relations under preferred vendor contracts

The Pay-Off

The benefits of brand image compliance provide a pay-off for companies. Image is everything, but it's nice when protecting that image creates revenue and conserves expense and time.

We once worked with an environmental agency with nine different locations on the West Coast. This organization was sourcing the products they required from nine different suppliers. Each branch office was applying the logo and brand identity in different ways, designing their own identity.

Several negative factors were oper-

ating. First, with each office creating its own materials, there was redundant design effort. This diminished the brand image. The loss of purchasing control meant increased expenses. With printed materials, economies of scale are achieved with centralized ordering and larger purchases. Since there was no partnership with these suppliers, brand image projection was lost.

We created a partnership to develop a suite of corporate-approved products. All client-facing materials were customized, and while the image on the outside of any binder or folder was constant, specific client content was generated as needed. Centralized purchasing pulled the buying power of these nine offices into one. The result was fewer redundant design efforts and a 20 percent decrease in cost.

We also inventoried the corporate-approved products. As each location required covers, indexed tabs or imprinted CD-ROMS, they placed orders on the web site when they were needed, and it was shipped from controlled inventory at our warehouse.

On-line, centralized transactions instead of a hard copy purchase order meant cutting back from nine invoices to one—one summary bill, one invoice.

Centralized ordering and vendor-supplied warehousing ensures:

- Client-facing communications reinforce a consistent brand image
- Branch office compliance
- Reduced order processing costs
- Reduced order processing errors
- Savings in both accounting and purchasing experience time and expense
- And supply of vital communications materials never runs out.

Consider a communications company with more than 1,500 locations and 8,000 salespeople instituting such a program. They could realize an expense savings of \$420,000. Yet the greater value lay in protecting its brand value, an estimated \$7.5 billion. This figure should represent enough "bang for the buck" to anyone considering dealing with a national preferred vendor with a strategic plan for brand image solutions.

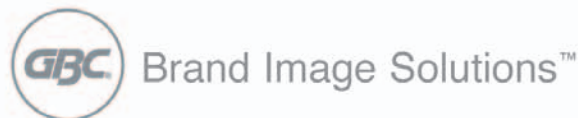
Unwittingly, corporations are stealing their own brand identity. Often this erosion occurs through a lack of creative consistency. Regain control, establish creative consistency, and enforce branch office compliance using these simple methods. You can save time, expense, and reinforce your brand image. **SSE**

Dan Jones is Brand Marketing Manager for GBC Brand Image Solutions™. www.gbc.com

ACTION: Harmonize your brand communications.

The last *THING* *your brand needs is a* *multiple personality* **DISORDER.**

When too many people get a hold of your brand, strange things can happen. What started out as your company's strongest asset becomes something else entirely. GBC® Brand Image Solutions™ understands that consistent brands are the most effective brands. Our consultants can partner with you to transform everyday pieces like binders and presentation materials into something more: a powerful, confident and fully integrated brand that speaks with a single voice and vision.



Presentation solutions



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