

THE DO-IT-YOURSELFERS GUIDE TO BUILDING YOUR BRAND

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If you're like most small business owners, one of your biggest challenges is building an awareness of your company's existence. This is a two-fold process: telling prospective customers why they need your product or service, and promoting your company as the best provider of these products or services.



If there is already an established need for your business, as in the case of dentists or bankers, your task is that much simpler. Otherwise you must educate potential buyers about why they need your services, which can be a significant effort on your part.

As for promotion, to accomplish your goals you must be familiar, known and preferably, trusted. The process of establishing a reputation is called "brand building." It's a simple concept we're going to break down into five areas, all geared toward establishing your brand on a shoestring budget.



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FONT OR TYPEFACE

Select two typeface families for all your printed materials. Choose one rather plain, standard typestyle that you can use for text-heavy pieces, such as Times Roman, Garamond, Caslon, Helvetica, Arial or Futura. Standard typefaces are commonly available and come in a wide variety of styles, such as condensed, extended, bold, extra bold, etc. Then select a typeface for your accent. You can use a standard face with an accent attribute like bold, italic, small caps. Or you can select a display typeface. These are highly stylized and do not work well in large areas, such as long paragraphs.

Your typeface should be easy to read in any medium – picture it printed in black and white and color, on a shirt or the Web. Once you have selected typefaces use them on everything your client will see, including letterhead, envelope, invoices and checks. Remember to record the name of the typefaces you select. I cannot tell you how often clients ask us to create ads and cannot provide digital copies of their logos or fonts.

COLORS

Select two basic solid colors. You can pick unusual color combinations if you want to appear unique or stand out. One color should be a dark base color for large bodies of type or diagrams typically this color is black. The second color is for accent. Consider colors that are readily available in off-the-shelf items. For example, let's say you chose bright blue and dark brown. The bright blue can be used for all accent items and the dark brown is for large bodies of text, illustrations and charts, etc. Once you select your colors it is critical that you use them consistently. If you select bright blue, use the same shade of blue every time -- not light blue once, dark blue the next time. This will only confuse your brand, not build it.

LOGO

The dictionary defines a logo, or logotype, as an identifying symbol. As a graphic designer, I highly recommend you use a professional designer for this step. There are many reasons for this, far too many to cover here. Suffice it to say that the logo needs to be designed and constructed in a manner that can be used in many media, print (black and white, spot color and process color), Internet, on-screen and possibly TV. This is not easily accomplished by the

novice, and typically the money you save here could cost you much more later. A poorly designed logo can easily increase your printing cost by 200%.

But what if you simply cannot afford a professional designer? Consider bartering with a designer. Many graphic designers are small business owners and quite possibly are facing the same dilemma – affording outside services, especially in the legal, financial or marketing fields. If bartering isn't possible, try to create a very simple logo using your computer. I emphasize -- keep it very simple. Just because you can produce it on your computer doesn't mean you can get it printed or use it on the Web. Here are some guidelines: Use only one commonly available typeface and be sure to keep a record of what you used. Use only one or two solid colors. Do not use gradients, tints, shadows, photographic elements or fancy effects. A professional graphic designer knows how to use these effects in a way that will translate to various production methods. Typically an amateur creates them with menu-driven formatting features such as gradients and drop shadows, which could increase production budgets by 200-400%.

OFF-THE-SHELF ITEMS

Go to an office supply store and see whether you can buy off-the-shelf materials that reinforce your brand. Will you need binders or presentation folders, envelopes, boxes, etc.? See how many items you can get that are consistent with your colors. Since you haven't invested any money yet, you can select a new shade if you find that most of your stationery items are available in a similar shade. For example, instead of bright blue, you might need to switch to a light blue or a grayish-blue. Make these decisions early, before you start accumulating materials. Consider searching online -- you might get a wider selection of colors. Companies like Paper Direct and Paper Access specialize in creating pre-printed materials for small business owners.

BUILD THE BRAND

Now that you have selected your basic elements, use them relentlessly. Find every opportunity to reinforce your brand. When you select checks, include your font, color(s) and logo. Take a look at your email; create a standard signature that incorporates your complete business name, address, phone and Web address in the footer. Use your colors, your font and if you know how, add your logo. Evaluate all of your existing support materials – not just marketing materials. What do your invoices, estimate and contracts look like? Do they reinforce your brand and the professionalism of your company? Pick up each piece and ask, "Does this *promote* or *demote* my brand in the eye of the client?" More importantly, if prospective clients see this support material before they meet you, will it encourage them to contact you or to go elsewhere?

GRAPHIC MATTER, INC.

Graphic Matter, Inc. offers creative services to small businesses from our office in Somerset County, New Jersey. For more information or a consultative evaluation on your support materials contact us at Graphic Matter, Inc. 908.359.8760 or visit our web site at www.GraphicMatter.com