

Want a Strong Brand? Get Your Story Straight

Business Development Best Practices Series

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If you are like many construction firms fiercely competing for attention to stand out and separate your brand from other companies, you might be considering a rebrand or a brand overhaul. Once you make this decision, you likely are going to take a look at your logo and rally the troops to examine what can be done to make your audience notice your firm. Conversely, you may have a marketing team who has been suggesting you “change things up” with your brand and has been trying to get your attention to make this a priority.

If this does not seem to hit the top of your priority list, you are in good company, but it is important. While your strengths may lie with operations, field issues, preconstruction efforts or client retention activities, having a distinct brand that makes your firm unique is the key to continued success as a firm as a whole.

Branding is largely misunderstood. It is often myopically associated with the firm’s logo, colors or brand “look”, but where the most powerful brands start is in understanding your own message and story. Once the richness of your unique story is uncovered, the brand that emerges is lasting, convincing, exciting and authentic. Here are a few tips on how to discover your true brand:

Know Your Past

We work with so many construction companies who have a history that truly defines the company they are today. There are people, projects, milestones and consistent behaviors that have shaped their team and built a brand that is unique. You need to capture that and collect those stories.

What Matters Most

As companies grow, they evolve and change, but there are “non-negotiables” that make companies who they are today and in the future. As service based organizations, construction firms largely can only sell three things — management, people and service. With our offerings being so limited, it is hard to find what differentiates us. Ask yourself the big “WHY?”— in the words of Simon Sinek, “Why do you exist?”, and then tell me the how and the what. Until your audience sees what really matters and feels it as true, they will not believe it. Take the time to determine what they should believe.

Bring In a Professional

As a marketing agency, we spend a lot of time gleaning the stories of our clients’ firms to help them build their brand. All bias aside, the reason this works well is firms are typically too close to their own great stories and have a

limited view on what makes them unique. I love seeing the “A-Ha” moments, when the brand messages come together. Most recently, I was working with a firm and they started the session saying “We are not big on glitz and glamour. We built the company on good business and a handshake with clients. We’re pretty unsophisticated in our approach, but clients are loyal”. That will no longer sell. So, I probed and walked them through the brand messaging process. This humble company, as it turns out had a leadership team that had a common background that was like gold in the pockets of clients! Another little fact, they had done interior work in over 80% of all of the office buildings in the city core! Can you believe the rich messaging they were sitting on? It was so exciting to extract that story and build a true brand around it. An outside professional can get to these stories.

The Litmus Test

In order for the brand to be effective, lasting and true, it has to be unique to the firm and something that evokes a response, both internally and externally. While many firms decide to dust off their mission statement and core values, by Googling the best mission statements ever written and searching a thesaurus to replace overused terms like Integrity, Trust and Relationships...this will only get them so far. A brand worth investing in will look to a behavior that the firm rewards, encourages, teaches and models consistently by all employees. Clients love it and can identify that behavior as unique to that company. A true brand is not easily replicated by other firms, it is operationally engrained in the culture and is valued by the clients. Once the firm’s true brand story is identified, everyone is so excited and convinced, they cannot wait to share it.

Why Does It Matter?

Once your brand is defined, the clarity you and your firm will have will be noticeable. Your internal conversations will align, your recruiting efforts will be more effective and your clients will have the vernacular to use to properly describe your firm. Your marketing initiatives will be more successful and harmonious. Your project interviews will be easier, because you have a distinct win strategy with roots in who you are as a firm. You will likely ask yourself why you haven’t done this a lot sooner!

Investing the time to build a powerful brand is well worth the effort. Your clients and employees long for stories that tap into their emotions, and give them a reason to relate. Richly telling your company’s story will evoke trust, belief and buy-in from clients and employees.

About the Author: Danielle Feroletto, MA, CPSM, President, is a nationally recognized marketing and business development expert and President of Small Giants, a full-service marketing agency for the AEC industry. Danielle works directly with general contractors on marketing strategies, innovative ideas to differentiate their firms and develop specific marketing activities to give companies a distinct competitive advantage. Through these efforts, Danielle has been recognized as a nominee for Marketer of the Year through the Phoenix Business Journal and most recently named one of Arizona’s 20 Most Influential Women in Commercial Real Estate.

