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Your Logo Is Not Your Brand

Often, when orthodontists start out on their own, one of the first things they'll do as far as marketing goes is create a logo. For some, that's the end of their branding efforts. They might think to themselves, "I got a great looking logo! Now watch my business grow!"

That's far from reality. When I first started my company, I knew nothing about branding. Fortunately, I got a regular newsletter from Apple for developers and that's where I first learned that branding is far more complex a concept. A brand is more than a logo, and it's much harder to build.

A little story now – One brand that has stood the test of time is Quaker Oats. You know the one with the long-haired guy wearing the blue hat and white ascot? That logo was developed in 1877 as part of America's first commercial brand, Quaker Oats. Before that, you'd go to the store and just buy a bag of oats. You might have seen a label that simply read "Oats." But it was the Quaker Oats company that first created a brand linking the company name with qualities like wholesomeness and honesty, which helps drives sales even today.

Seeing the logo of an established brand brings an immediate image to a potential customer's mind. However, your brand is much broader than that. I think of it as flowing in two directions. First, if you have a strong brand, and someone thinks of your category of service or product, you come to mind first. For example, if I say beer, you might think Budweiser. Your brand is closely associated with that product or service. There's no need to do an online search. In that sense, you have developed a strong awareness among your customers/patients. Hopefully, it's a good one!

In the other direction, a strong brand works like this: when someone thinks of your company or business, certain images or feelings come up. This is similar to the Quaker Oats brand, evoking a sense of wholesomeness and honesty. So in developing your brand, you must answer two questions. Does your brand represent who you are? Do the images and feelings customers get when they think of you match what you want them to see and feel?

A brand is that feeling people get when they think of your company. Are you fun? Do you do good work? Do you provide well-made products or exceptionally good service? What feelings do people have when they think about your company? How do you compare with other businesses?

Every company, whether through a conscious effort or not, has a brand. Recently, the brand United Airlines took a big hit when it forcefully removed a passenger with a paid ticket from the plane after he had taken his seat. Rather than apologizing for it, the CEO first made excuses. Then, a viral avalanche of attacks

dropped the stock price significantly. That is what is known as a brand crisis. It might take years for the United brand to recover.

Another company that has always impressed me is 3M. Best known for creating Scotch Tape, 3M has always been on the forefront of innovation. They've given us a variety of adhesives, Bondo and one of my favorites—Post-It Notes! They create innovative products that really fill a need. So when I think of 3M, I think of scientists pushing the envelope of innovation.

The fact is that smart, powerful branding takes time. First, you have to figure out who you are and who you're not so you can tailor your brand to be a true representation. Your brand must fit who you are. You can't build a brand of fun if you're not. Nor can a brand build a reputation for safety or integrity if that's not in line with the genuine nature of that company.

It takes real consistency to build a brand. You have to stick to who you really are. Consistency is not only having the same look and feel across all of your marketing efforts (letterhead, social media, website, brochures and collateral) but also in the tone or voice of your brand. All written messaging will reinforce how customers look and interact with your business. All verbal and visual messaging must be consistent with your brand and be delivered with the same voice.

More importantly, all your team's actions must be consistent with your brand. Shakespeare was right to say, "To thine own self be true." So be yourself. Surround yourself with people who will contribute and advance who you are. You want to hire staff that will share your vision. Don't ever hire anyone whose thinking and behavior doesn't match up with your true nature.

Dr. S's Quick-Fire Branding Tips!

- Don't be afraid to be different. Some try to please everyone with their brand. You can't. This is why it's so important to know your target audience and address their concerns.
- What value do you offer? Or what is the unique selling point that distinguishes you from everyone else?
- Be accessible and respond quickly! People want to know you care.
- Build relationships. Not only with families, but local companies in addition to dental practices. Join the local Chamber of Commerce.
- Be willing to make mistakes. That means thinking outside the box to reach and retain new clients.
- Finally, be patient. A brand takes time to build. Protect it and it will serve you well for many years.

