



Unlock the profit potential of your brand

5 stages of building growth
and profits through
corporate brand activation.

Foreword

Brands are not there just to look pretty. They have a job to do: to make businesses more effective and more profitable.

By putting their brands to work improving business performance, companies can unlock their brands' potential, turning an often-neglected marketing accessory into a vital strategic corporate asset.



The secret is brand activation. That means looking at all aspects of corporate behavior through a brand lens. This across-the-board brand orientation accomplishes three things.

First: customer orientation. Because brands by definition put the customer first, brand keeps the organization's focus where it belongs: on delivering value to the customer.

Second: strategy over tactics. Because brands are about a company's fundamental purpose – its reason for being – the brand is an easy-to-grasp

expression of corporate strategy. Making brand a part of all operations helps prevent day-to-day tactics from overwhelming strategic objectives.

Third: bridging silos. Because brands are the guidepost for all corporate activity, they serve as a bridge between functional silos. Brands keep the entire organization moving in a single direction.

This e-book is about the 5 key phases of brand activation, from creating and defining the brand, to deploying brand throughout the organization and measuring the brand's impact on business objectives.

We'll be discussing corporate brands, not product or service brands. Also, we'll focus on B2B brands, since B2C brands tend to be pretty hard workers already. That said, the basic principles of brand activation apply to all brands.

We hope to convince you to activate your brand and make it a key driver in your business. Companies that master the 5 stages of activation are fast on their way to growth, profit and success.

Eric Wedemeyer
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About brands

What exactly is a brand?

First, let's talk about what a brand is not: It's not a logo or a slogan. It's not your advertising or your latest press release.

A brand is more like a relationship that you have with customers and other people you care about. Here's a working definition:

Your brand is the sum of all the knowledge, impressions, emotions and images about your company or product as it exists in the minds of your customers and stakeholders.

So in a sense, your brand is who you are, as a company. Not who you think you are or who you would like to be or who your advertising says you are, but who you actually are as far as the world around you is concerned.

Here's a short-hand version of what a brand is:

*It's what people
say about you
when you leave
the room*



As important as brands are, it's tempting to think we should exercise complete control over them. But that would mean controlling the minds of other people – many other people – which isn't possible. Or even desirable, if you think about it.

What you can do is to nurture and guide your brand so that it aligns with business goals and works for you.

Branding is strategy

But before you can guide the brand, you have to define it. And that is a deeply strategic undertaking.

The first stage of brand activation is the process of identifying your company's core purpose, which is to say your reason for being (beyond profit) and the reason for customers to value your product or service.

What could be more central to your corporate strategy than that?

The later stages of brand activation are ways of fulfilling your core purpose by harnessing both internal and external corporate activity to the strategic brand.

The value of brands

Your brand is a profit machine.

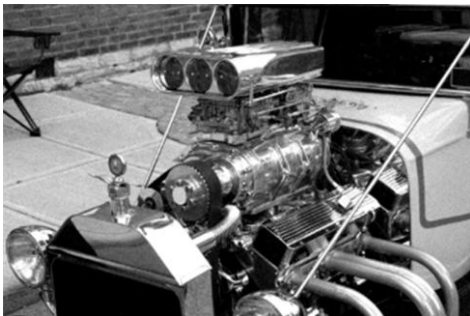
Properly managed, brands have a positive effect on nearly every aspect of business performance. We're not talking about a fuzzy feel-good factor here – we mean actual bottom-line business results.

Broadly speaking, brands accomplish this magic by aligning people and business operations with a single, sharply-defined strategy.

Think of it this way:



A solid, but maybe a little dull, business strategy: **Gets you where you want to go.**



A solid business strategy super-charged by the brand so that everyone understands the strategy and is motivated to follow it:
The fast track to success.

How brands boost bottom line

In concrete terms, here are some of the ways that brands produce business results:

- **Internal motivation**
Purpose is a stronger motivator than money. Brands tell employees what they're working for.
- **Sales (especially consideration)**
Customers use brands as a shorthand for reputation. As the saying goes, "nobody ever got fired for hiring IBM."
- **Customer loyalty**
Trusted brands are easy to stay with, and more likely to be forgiven when things go wrong.
- **Awareness & reputation**
By building high-quality awareness, brands help fill the sales funnel.
- **Recruiting success**
The best people entrust their careers to the strongest brands.
- **Shareholder value**
Companies with strong brands deliver consistently better stock market results.

The value of brands

Some facts to consider

The metrics are complex and sometimes controversial, but there is broad agreement that brands are major contributors to corporate value. Yet for B2B companies especially, there is vast potential to improve brand's role in building value and profits.

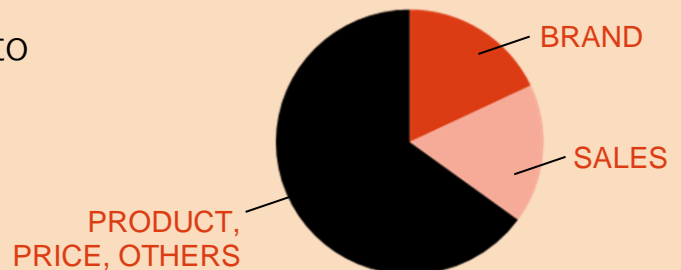
B2C brands contribute up to **70%** of total shareholder value for their companies.*



For B2B, brand typically accounts for **5% to 20%** of total corporate value.**



For B2B, brand contributes **18%** of the purchase decision, compared to **17%** for sales operation.**



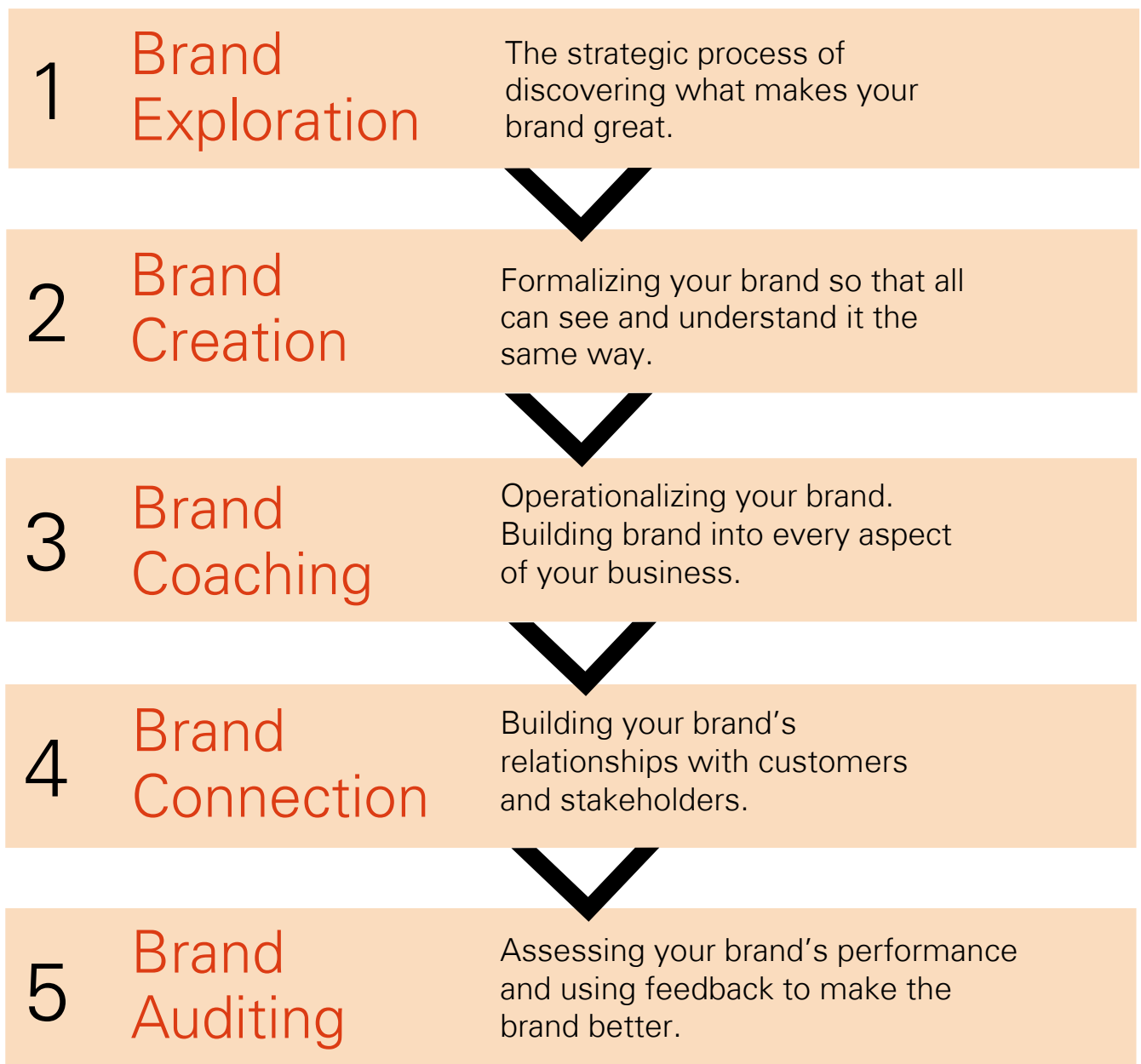
* Interbrand, "Best Global Brands 2014" ** McKinsey: "Business Branding," 2013

Brand activators

5 stages of brand activation

Brand activation is a major strategic effort that reaches every part of the organization. There are 5 stages in the process. Each provides ways to make your brand clearer,

compelling, more productive and more accountable. Together, they create a powerful momentum toward success.



Brand Exploration

Brands work when they tell a unique and compelling story.

Can you describe in a few words what's remarkable about your brand – why it's really great and why customers should choose you? Does everyone in your organization describe the brand in the same way?

Unless the answer is “yes” to both, your brand is not contributing as it should to business performance.

Brand Exploration is a strategic process that searches out what drives a company and what unique value it offers to customers. Ideally, the process invites input from all levels of the company, because when the entire organization has a hand in building and defining the brand, buy-in and activation improve.

Articulating that strategic essence in a series of clear, concise statements is the foundation for everything that follows in the brand activation process.

Let's look at how some of the key statements work:

Brand purpose (the mission)

The brand purpose or mission statement differs from the typical corporate mission

statement in its relentless customer focus. It states why you exist in terms of what you promise and deliver to a particular customer group.

Brand promise (the value proposition)

The brand promise is usually a compact version of the purpose statement, telling in a few words what the customer can expect from you.

Brand values

Brand values are what you believe in as an organization. They describe what you do and how you behave – and perhaps more important, what you refuse to do.

Brand personality

This describes how your brand *feels* to people

inside and outside the organization. It's your brand's culture. This may sound like decoration applied to the surface of the brand, but actually it's the brand's emotional core.

Brand story

Stories communicate in a uniquely powerful and memorable way – it's how humans have passed on ideas for thousands of years. Try telling about your brand in the form of a brief story. You may find it easier and more compelling than reciting the mission statement.



The search for brand essence is a strategic process involving the entire organization.

Brand Creation

Brands work when everyone perceives them in the same way.

An architect launching a project produces a prospectus, drawings and blueprints for a reason. He could try explaining his vision verbally to clients, builders and zoning bureaucrats. But he wants to make sure that everyone involved understands exactly what kind of building is going up, so he formalizes his ideas by writing them down clearly and in great detail.

So it is with brands.

As an idea, your brand is highly subject to individual interpretation by all the people who interact with the brand inside and outside the organization. This is true no matter how well you've thought out the fundamental brand concepts (see Brand Exploration).

Writing the brand down

So it's best to put the brand down in words and pictures that all can share.

Let's start with the most visible products of formal brand expression:

- Brand name
- Brand logo
- Brand slogan or tagline

By all means spend some time getting these right. But don't stop there.

Brand names and logos are everywhere – so much so that it's tempting to think that these familiar icons are what brands and branding are all about. They symbolize the brand and call it to mind, but they don't *explain* the brand.



Formalizing the brand is a creative process that make the brand easily and consistently understandable

The real work of formalizing a brand is in bringing all the elements of brand expression into one place in the form of a "Brand Manual", sometimes called a "Brand Identity Guide".

Don't confuse this with corporate identity (CI) or visual identity (VI) guidelines – those annoying (but

necessary) documents that insist you leave exactly 12mm of space around the logo.

A good Brand Manual is more comprehensive. It will set out in words and images:

- Brand mission
- Brand values and attributes
- Brand personality and culture
- Brand language and word usage
- Brand visual standards,
- Brand story

Brand Coaching

Brands work when the entire organization lives the brand.

The key to unlocking brand potential lies in recognizing your brand not as a logo and a series of marketing messages, but as a set of customer perceptions and expectations that arise from interactions with your company and products.

This understanding revolutionizes the job of brand management. No longer just a marketing function, branding becomes the far-reaching task of aligning all corporate actions, processes and investments to deliver what your customers expect from the brand. This process is known by the ungainly term “brand operationalization.” For the sake of simplicity, we call it brand coaching.

Getting employees on board with the brand.

Before you can begin to align processes and procedures with the brand, employees must not only understand the brand, but be willing to live the brand, represent the brand – even fight for the brand. This doesn’t happen by itself. You’ll need a dedicated internal branding program with its own goals, resources and success metrics. Typically, internal branding proceeds in 3 stages:

1. Knowledge stage

Immerse the organization in brand knowledge, most often through a system of training workshops and collateral material deployed at all levels of the organization.

2. Attitude stage

Reinforce brand knowledge and action

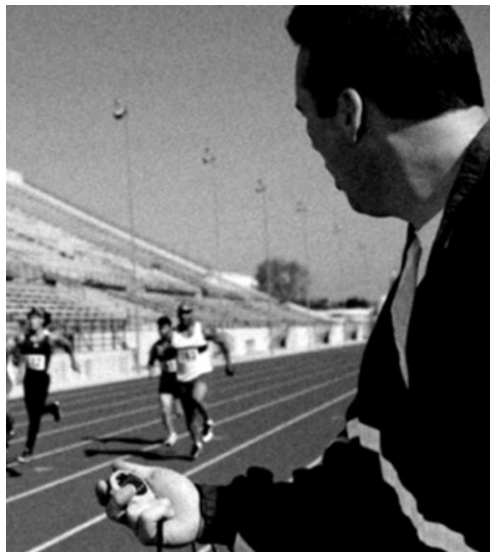
through incentives and motivational activities. These can come in the form of HR performance evaluations, coaching, internal communications, team activities, competitions and rewards.

3. Skills stage

Modify employee behavior in line with business processes and practices that have been overhauled to support the brand promise. This

is where personnel management meets brand operationalization on the organization level.

Brand coaching focuses especially on customer-facing behavior, external communications and internal business processes that directly affect outcomes for customers. In B2B companies, sales is typically the function where you’ll find brand coaching yields the most dramatic and positive results.



Operationalizing the brand aligns corporate behavior with what customers expect from the brand.

Brand Connection

Brands work not just by breaking through to customers, but by drawing them in.

Top consumer marketing companies already understand that all communication is brand communication. Look at any advertisement, website, video, promotional offer, catalogue, retail outlet or product package from Apple, BMW or Disney, and you can feel the brand's promise to the customer shining through.

There are exceptions, but B2B companies are generally less successful in creating a robust and consistent brand understanding among customers. Often that's because they haven't gone through a Brand Exploration or Brand Coaching process, and either don't have a strong brand to deliver or lack the organizational resources to deliver it.

Building brand relationships with content marketing

Brand Connection is the process of building a relationship between your brand and your customers and stakeholders. It's a marketing function but not only in the traditional sense of broadcasting, or pushing marketing messages outward. Instead, it concentrates on drawing customer into the brand.



Build your brand's relationship with customers by providing content that delivers on the brand promise.

This is the mission of *content marketing*. Also called inbound marketing or custom publishing or a variety of other names, content marketing can be defined this way:

Content marketing is the creation and distribution of compelling content to attract or retain customers and prospects.

Powerful brands and effective content are really about the same thing: fulfilling a promise to the customer. Content marketing does that in a direct and tangible way. Its starting point is not "what do we want to say to our customers", but "what information can we provide that will give our customer what they expect from us".

That same value-to-customer orientation is a discipline that can be applied to all out-bound communications. There's real power in this approach: if you deliver real value to customers, with no strings attached, they are far more likely to know you, trust you, like you, and even feel they owe you something in return.

Current online technologies, including social media, allow you to reach your customers more efficiently than ever, and for them to respond in kind.

Brand Auditing

Brands work when their impact on business is well-defined

Paraphrasing Peter Drucker: to manage is to measure. In the end, the effectiveness of your brand is determined by the metrics you employ to quantify it. Any successful program of building brand into your organization must include objective data showing how closely you've been able to align internal actions with what customers expect.

Brand metrics give a good overall view of your brand's contribution to business performance. But beyond that, they also provide actionable feedback for sales, product development, HR, customer service – and of course marketing.



Brand metrics don't just track your brand's contribution to business performance. They're a powerful management tool.

can be tracked separately and particular strengths and weaknesses of the brand addressed as needed.

Here are four key areas a brand scorecard should measure:

1. Financial metrics

Basic measures of business performance such as revenue, profits, market share, etc.

2. Internal metrics

Evaluation of operational performance, including efficiency, operating costs, utilization of assets, sales performance, etc.

3. Customer metrics

Measurement of brand awareness, preference, customer satisfaction,

loyalty rates, net promoter score, etc.

4. Culture metrics

Assessment of employee brand understanding and commitment, motivation, alignment of personal and team goals to brand objectives, etc.

Consider building a brand performance dashboard that presents metrics like these in a format for easy reference and regular updating. A well-managed brand is a well-measured one.

A balanced brand scorecard

It's never a good idea to try to pack all brand metrics into a single number. A sort of consolidated brand score that attempts to combine various data sources, and weight them appropriately, inevitably becomes arbitrary and misleading.

A better approach is to create a balanced scorecard that looks at brand from several different angles over time. Individual metrics

Activate your brand

Companies today compete on a new playing field of empowered and informed customers, fast-moving technology and competition that is open to all comers. Without a compelling story of who you are and what you alone can offer the customer, success will be harder than ever to come by.

In this environment, brands are a more powerful competitive weapon than ever – too powerful to confine to corporate identity and marketing. But the only way to unlock the full profit potential of your brand is to activate the brand throughout the organization.

Remember, brand is strategy. And the emotional potency of an activated brand aligns the organization to strategy in a way no other management tool can.

Putting your brand to work through brand activation is not something you can do overnight. It's a process, not a project. The 5 stages of brand activation presented here provide a framework for undertaking the process step by step, in logical sequence.

Try it. Turn your brand into a profit-maker. Make it work.



For more on brand activation and how to make it work for you, contact Eric Wedemeyer at Tactus Partners.

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