



# wise bites

for those with a taste  
for smart marketing

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## What is “Branding” and why is it important?

There’s a lot of talk about branding, and a lot of misconception.

Some people think it’s a logo, a company color, consumer advertising or promotion. It is all of those things, but the overarching question is ‘Why is branding so important?’ This actually gets to what’s at the heart of the matter:

*Branding is what occurs when you make a heartfelt connection with your customer.*

Making that connection with a memorable visual ‘look and feel’ or a striking slogan, yes, of course that’s a core part of branding. But more than that — your brand is the recognition that, in your particular marketplace, you have actually stated the value of your product/service in terms that resonate with your customer. The value of your product/service is unmistakably yours. Why? Because your “brand” is the representation of your unique competitive advantage.

### ***The branding evolution***

Like so much in marketing, brand development has evolved over the past 20 years. Originally branding was synonymous with the visual interpretation and representation of a business. The symbol or logo was the manifestation of a company’s essence, as presented in advertising, promotions, on trucks, uniforms, signage and decals.

Over time, businesses have become much more sophisticated in how they represent themselves, both internally and externally. Today, the word “brand” connotes a range of emotive connections to the entity behind the brand. It has become increasingly the single rallying differentiator.

### ***An essential step you should not skip***

Too often companies rush to create and implement marketing campaigns without having done the up-front brand definition work. We call this brand definition the brand profile. The look, feel, tone and voice of a brand are communicated in all of the customer-facing qualities of your brand. This is what the customer encounters in an often crowded and competitive marketplace.

Thoughtful answers that flesh out the brand profile are very helpful to your creative and marketing team. Your brand distinction, the unique presentation of your company, is based on these insights. The brand profile, in turn, informs the marketing material and execution strategies.

### ***Isn’t it easier to just develop materials without this background work?***

Yes, certainly. But the brand profile provides critical input to your team. It can make all the difference between marketing that works...and marketing that misses.

### ***Expressing your uniqueness***

Sometimes a company’s executives are great visionaries and communicators and can verbalize the tangible differences and distinct advantages of their company’s brand. Many times — more often than not — a company’s brand qualities are verbalized in a generic way [e.g., we deliver quality, we are on time and on budget, we are the leaders, we are innovative, etc.]. While such claims may be true, they are not distinctive, nor are they specific and unique to **your** product/service.

Even with the most articulate executives, there's tremendous value in getting a third-party review and validation.

The end goal is messaging that describes the organization's differentiation in a singularly memorable way.

***Brand differentiators may be subtle ... but they're there***

Some may even insist that there is no difference from Company A to Company B. I've actually talked to people in sales that claim their products or services are no different from their competitors' products or services!

That mindset makes it hard to market the company or position its products/services in the customer's mind. How can you expect your customers to remember you if you're telling them there's nothing memorable about you?

***So that's why branding is important***

At its base, branding is a system to profile a company, its features and its benefits, within a context of the marketplace, competition and customer needs.

Brand development is the process of stating and visualizing the essence of your competitive advantage in a singular, memorable way that resonates both internally and externally. The role of brand development is increasingly strategic and facilitates the internal discussion to a distilled, singular document. It is this brand road map — messaging and visual direction — that the brand execution is based on.

## **WDC's 360 Brand Profile Process/Brand Strategy Consultation**

The Wiley Design Communications' 360 Brand Profile Process is based on current best practices. Our capabilities to assist clients include creation or refinement of brand voice, messaging and visuals based on research and interviews.

All brand strategy is founded on:

1. Internal stakeholder research via interviews
2. Review of the client's existing marketing materials (print, website, advertising and promotion)
3. External marketplace research into customer views and education/buying process, marketplace pressures, issues, segments, and hot buttons

Through this process we come to fully understand the context in which an organization exists and how it serves its constituent members.

Wiley Design Communications; 360 Brand Profile views a company, and its products or services, in a holistic manner. The process is highly interactive, relying on client participation.

### **INTERNAL VIEW**

Our process researches internal viewpoints, collecting input from executives, managers, marketers and sales people. Our role is to facilitate a discussion of who the company is and how it wants to be perceived within the marketplace.

Here are some of the questions we address:

***Your Product/Service***

What are the features and benefits of your products/services? Which products/services are bought by what buyers? Is this a niche [small] or large market, emerging or mature market? Do you have any metrics or statistics which define the efficacy of your product set? What are new, emerging trends that are possible growth areas?

### ***Your Brand Presentation***

How do you present your brand today? This includes your brand promise, visualization, messaging, and delivery system.

### ***Your Customer Profile***

Who is your customer? Are there different customer types [influencers, buyers]? Why do they use your product or service? What needs do you fulfill for them? What problem does your company solve, what pain is taken away?

### ***Sales Process***

What does your customer outreach process look like? What is the customer experience of your company? Where do they hear about you? What is your distribution system? How do you reach your customers?

To access this information it is helpful to gather and listen to the whole sales team: inside sales, direct sales, marketing research, sales manager, sales training, and marketers. Their input will be invaluable to creating material that covers and addresses customer issues and questions that arise during the sales process.

This valuable input helps the entire organization identify where stumbling blocks exist or loom — not only in sales, but even on the product side, so that marketing can position the product/service in the most relevant way for the customer.

### ***Marketing Materials Audit***

Most companies already have some form of marketing materials in place. During this phase we critique your existing materials to determine:

- Does the current marketing material depict the product well?
- Does it feature the important product features so that they resonate with the customer, or are there places for improvement?
- Are the pieces working in concert, aligning messaging with mission?
- Do customers understand and appreciate your communications – printed, online, event displays, email?
- Are there messaging or visual tweaks that would assist easier, faster comprehension and speed the sales process or product adoption?

### **EXTERNAL VIEW**

Equally important, we explore a variety of factors outside the company.

- What is the marketplace in which you compete?
- Are there unmet needs out there right now?
- Are there emerging pressures that could change how you market or deliver your product?
- Are there industry hot buttons or taboos?

### ***Competition***

Who are your competitors? Some clients tell us they have none, but the truth is, there are all kinds of competition – external organizations, internal or in-house departments who provide the same service, or even status quo [no change], since that's the absolute cheapest, however ineffective solution.

We look at competitor strengths, different service features, and value proposition. We also analyze competitor brand messaging vs. your own.

### ***Market Research***

As time and budget allow, we find it extremely helpful to query your customers or prospects about your product or product category. We call this external research the “reality check.” This invaluable information identifies opportunities to make your marketing materials, choice of marketing avenues and messaging more successful.

The answers to all of these questions become opportunities for differentiating your company and its offerings as separate from and superior to the competition.

### ***Clarify Brand***

Next in the process comes clarification with the client team. We collect emotive brand input (e.g., specific input regarding 'look and feel', brand visuals and preferences, messaging as relates to positioning in customers' minds, consistent implementation).

### ***Revise Brand Profile***

The refined brand profile provides an impartial third-party snapshot of the current state of the client's brand. This includes internal view, customer view, communications audit findings, recommended revisions and opportunities for communication refinements for improved program/product delivery and customer needs fulfillment.

### ***Brand Refinement***

Your target audience engages with your organization at multiple points through product research, education, assessment, product purchase, maintenance, replacement.

Usability assessments gauge ease of process; comprehensible information; logical process.

### ***Integrated Communication***

Execution of the brand typically combines traditional outreach with online web support, direct mail, events and email outreach.

The result is a consistent campaign or program presentation that integrates the company's brand. At this point we may also refine campaign messaging to drive specific outcomes and actions.

### ***Project Measurement***

Last, but certainly not least, is clarifying the client's Return on Investment (ROI) and parameters for measuring the branding project's success.

If you would like more detailed information about branding your business or Wiley Design Communications' brand strategy services, please contact us at **916-447-4633** or email us at [whatscooking@wileydesign.com](mailto:whatscooking@wileydesign.com).