

# Branding and Strategy: Get Them Together Fast

In the white paper we released last month, entitled "Is Your Brand in Your Plan?" we talked about the importance of viewing branding as integral to your overall strategic planning.

We defined branding as how your customers and the marketplace perceive you. We emphatically professed that brand equity is a real thing and should be an important strategic goal for any business. And we pointed out that too often branding and strategic planning activities are separate and that this divide leads to disconnects between brand promise and delivery, discontent among customers and employees, and the erosion of brand equity. In this white paper, our premise is that not only is it critical to integrate branding activities with strategic planning, it is becoming even more critical every day so you better do it fast. Here's why...

## Less Time and Fewer Chances

In today's world, consumers and business decision makers are over communicated to. Think about it. In addition to print advertising, TV, radio, telemarketing and direct mail; we now have popup web advertising, updated news each time we open a web browser, legitimate and illegitimate (spam) direct e-mail, telemarketing to our cell phones, text messaging, billboards that move, ticker tapes on the bottom of TV screens; not to mention the many sources that we like to frequent for meaningful information on topics of interest.

Not only is it harder to get peoples' attention, but because they're feeling bombarded and squeezed for time, they are getting increasingly skeptical of the claims all around them. That means you have less time to capture their attention and fewer chances to perform exactly like your brand promise says you will.

## The World has Gone Viral

It's not just political candidates whose gaffs travel the electronic world in lightening speed, but consumers have multiple methods at their fingertips to tell all about a less than satisfactory brand experience. Between e-mail, texting, IMing, twittering, social networking, professional forums and the incredible proliferation of blogs and vlogs; today's word of mouth commentary spreads like wildfire. Brands can be celebrated and denigrated in no time flat.

## Leadership Transfers

We know that demographic forces are already increasing the number of leadership transitions in both public and private companies. Branding must be part of an incoming leader's strategic planning efforts in order to understand the company's brand equity and brand promise. Any strategic changes must consider the brand impact so that appropriate strategies can be developed and executed to ensure alignment between brand understanding among employees, investors and partners; brand promise to the marketplace; and ultimately brand equity for the company.

## Tough Economic Times

Hopefully this is a temporary contributing factor, though in our view, the current economic uncertainty and difficulties will be with us for a while. Therefore, it's important to understand that both funders and buyers are going to be more conservative and more discerning. They are going to examine the brand closely before they fund or buy. They want to know exactly what they're spending their money on and they'll only do so if they're sure it is a good value.



For additional information, contact:

Michael K. Vann  
Michael.Vann@vann-group.com  
413.543.2776

819 Worcester Street  
Springfield, MA 01151  
[www.vann-group.com](http://www.vann-group.com)

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## Wrapping it Up

So what does all this have to do with branding and strategy? The issue is that it is getting more and more important every day for branding to be an integral part of strategic planning in order to:

- Understand how the marketplace perceives your business.
- Create and deliver products and services that are aligned with the way your company portrays itself.
- Have employees who live the brand with every customer touch point and who work productively together toward a clear and common goal.
- Have customers who use word of mouth tactics to sing your praises when you deliver on your brand promise.

All this contributes to brand equity, which contributes to the bottom line because:

- Customers will choose you over your competition.
- Customers will pay more for your brand.
- You'll spend less money educating customers.
- Customers will stay longer and tell their friends.
- You'll be able to hire more talented employees.

These must be strategic priorities.



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