

Building your brand on a budget



By [Anton Ressel](#)

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Unlike many leading brands, the average small business does not have millions in the budget to channel into high-level brand-building exercises such as event sponsorships, glitzy product launches or using famous sportsmen and entertainers as brand ambassadors. In fact, for most of us, even finding the 15% of turnover benchmark recommended for marketing and branding efforts by generations of branding and advertising experts, is a real stretch.

This does not mean you can just sit back and hope for the best, however. They say that the height of stupidity is doing what you have always done and expecting different results. Building a brand into something positive, recognisable and coveted takes hard work and effort. It requires you to look up from your product, from operations, from the daily grind and ask "what do I need to do today, tomorrow and for the foreseeable future to turn my brand onto something of value?"

Let's take a step back quickly and explore why having a strong brand is so important. Ask yourself the following questions: Do I want to sell more products, more often? Do I want to get a better selling price for my products? Do I want my business to stand for something that is important? If you answered yes to any of those questions, you need to be focused on building your brand. Research shows that a strong, visible brand delivers all of these benefits, and many more.

Start with the big picture

If one looks at the most successful brands in the world, such as Red Bull, Ferrari, Apple, Diesel etc, a common denominator is that they have all been able to create a brand identity that allows them to stand for something a level above the nuts and bolts of their product or service alone. When we think of Red Bull for example, we think adrenaline sports, active lifestyles and pushing the boundaries first, and 'caffeinated energy drink' afterwards. Rolex sells status, not watches. The list goes on and on.

The first step for you then, is to decide what you would like your brand to stand for, and take steps to make this a reality.

If green issues are important to you, then all the visual and intangible elements of your offering need to represent this clearly and unambiguously to your target market. If design and innovation is what you are all about, again you need to adopt a 360-degree view and deliver this message through all the elements of what you do and how you do it.

This requires you to start seeing your company as something more than just a sum of its parts. As noted in many articles on branding, your brand represents all the valuable qualities of your product, service and company in the eyes of the consumer, customer or potential supporter. It is so much more than a logo, a website, a product...it is all of these things, and much more.

Think out of the box

Once you know who you are, what you stand for, who you should be communicating with and what message you would like to send out, it is time to start thinking of innovative and cost-effective ways of achieving this.

Where a company like Red Bull will spend US \$1million to sponsor a big wave surfing contest or a Motocross circuit, you need to find appropriate platforms to help you spread your message. If you are a design-focused company, getting involved with initiatives like Design Capital of the World, sponsoring a brainstorming session at the Design Indaba conference or offering a prize to aspiring designers is a relatively inexpensive way of building your brand - this is something Carrol Boyes has done to great effect.

Using the media to your advantage is also a good strategy. If yours is a product or business that promotes green technology, writing and submitting opinion pieces (NOT advertorials) on latest developments in the sector are a great way to establish yourself and your business as an authority - and this paves the way for the delivery of your own message.

Go viral

A third inexpensive way of building your brand is to use the phenomenon of social media to your advantage.

While opinions differ as to the strategy required to establish a solid online presence, a sound understanding of how to leverage the maximum benefit from platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest is a prerequisite for anyone looking to build their business profile on a budget. Where you may need to spend a bit is on employing a professional to help get you started and set up, and give you some guidance going forward.

In my role as a mentor and business development consultant, I always ask clients to start with a vision for what they want to achieve, and then go into the brass tacks of how to go about achieving that vision. Building a brand is the same process - start with who you are and what you stand for, and then find ways of getting the message out so that others can buy in and support you.

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