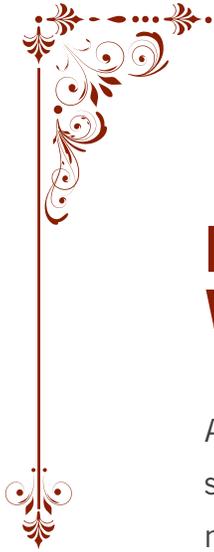


BRAND MANAGEMENT MADE EASY

What works for you, and what doesn't.





EVERY COMPANY HAS A BRAND, BUT WHAT IS IT?

A brand isn't a logo, website, business card or color palette. It's not something you can see, hear or feel. A brand lives completely in the mind of your customer, and is shaped by everything that the customer encounters. With word-of-mouth, culture, competition, personal beliefs and priorities to contend with, you can quickly see how hard it can be to maintain.

SO HOW DO YOU MANAGE WHAT YOU DON'T OWN?

Brand management - the act of romancing your customers, and fostering the intimate connection they have with your company - probably sounds pretty cheesy. It should. But how do you keep the flame burning? There are a few ways to do it, but all of them rely on the use of four simple words:

"HOW ARE WE DOING?"

It really doesn't need to be any more complicated than that. How you go about asking, though, can vary based on your business. In this white paper, we'll outline some common techniques and uncommon advice to help you in deciding what works best for you.

SURVEYS

People typically like taking surveys about as much as they like discovering a bleeding orifice. However, you can get a great amount of response if you build it right. If you want to get the most out of your surveys, and make them worth the effort, make sure to keep these in mind.

- 1. Expect negativity.** The unfortunate thing about using surveys is that people tend to be more vocal about complaints than they will about praise.
- 2. Stay away from offering prizes.** The increase in response isn't worth the type of data you get back, since a large number of them are just interested in the incentive, and will blindly check boxes just to complete the survey.
- 3. Keep it short.** Take the time to figure out exactly what you want to know, and refine your questions to a very limited number. Five questions and a space for comments should be enough.

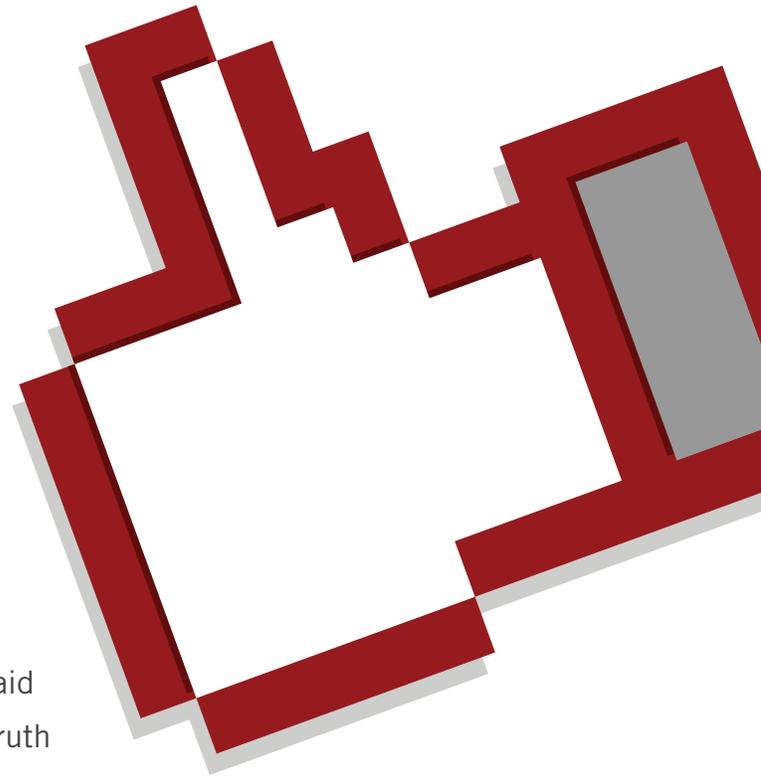


SOCIAL MEDIA

It is an indisputable fact that people talk about companies they like and, more to an earlier point, ones that they don't. And there's no better way to get a broad view of what people really think than by being active in social media. By starting conversations on your own accounts and being aware of what's being said on others, you can stay on top of the unfiltered truth about how well you're managing your brand. Here are some ways to go about it.

1. Monitoring your search results. However you choose to do it (Google Analytics, the occasional search for your name, whatever), you can uncover some solid, honest feedback. You can also catch and work to resolve any complaints before they make their way to everyone.

2. Start a conversation. Social media is a place for two-way communication (anyone that argues that fact needs some feedback of their own), and by asking fans and followers what they think of a new product/service idea, ad campaign, cupcake recipe, etc. can yield more than usable feedback. You'll be able to show that you actually care about the needs of your customers and aren't choosing to work in a vacuum.



ONE ON ONE

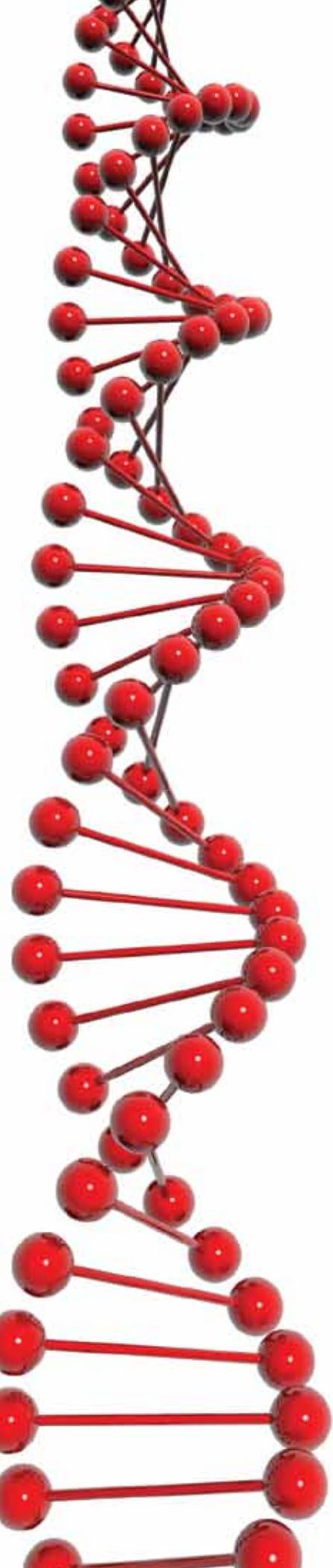
This one is my favorite, because it accomplishes everything I've mentioned, only quicker. It doesn't matter if you're running a coffee shop, electrical company, or if you're selling used doorknobs online. Every business has a direct moment of engagement with their customer, and that time is perfect to ask the question, "how are we doing?". Here are some ways to go about it so that you're getting the most out of the conversation.

1. Use it as a meeting wrap-up. Unless you're wrapping up a six-hour strategy session at 2am, this is a great way to bring a meeting to a close.

2. Make it about them. Looking for honest feedback has its psychological benefits beyond simple market research or concern for your customers perspective. People love to talk about themselves - it's a proven fact that it creates a strong bond between them and those they talk to.

3. Don't push the issue. Your customers - potential or existing - will only tell you what they want you to know. Don't try to draw any more information than what they readily offer. If all you get is a "you're doing OK", be content with that and move on to someone with more to say.





MAKE IT PERMANENT

Showing that you care about your customer's experience is a tremendous help to their perception of you, particularly if it's non-obtrusive. By incorporating it into your marketing tools with the intention of making the request permanent, you can see an ongoing stream of feedback.

1. If you email your invoices, add a link to the footer. Make it personable, and out of the way. If a customer has something to say, this gives them a chance.

2. Add a one-question survey and text field to the sidebar of your website. As I mentioned above, short surveys are best. Single questions in a low-pressure environment are even better. Just be sure to add a CAPTCHA to the form to eliminate the amazing amount of spam you'd get.





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IN CLOSING

Managing your customer perception will be one of the toughest things a marketer can do, but it's critical to the company's growth. And regardless of what tools you use, the point is to keep it light and simple, focusing solely on that one simple question.

That said, how did we do?