

Wednesday
February 4

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL



Start searching the
Directory of High
Tech Companies

List your company in the
Directory of High
Tech Companies



OTHER TECHNOLOGY
NEWS

[Mass High Tech](#)
(news from the New
England Area)

Technology branding requires unique methods

8/30/2002 4:52:00 PM

"Marketer: 2: Marketer" is a biweekly advice column that answers marketing-related questions submitted by our readers. The public relations, promotion, branding and Web marketing experts at www.marketertomarketer.com in Denver will take turns answering your questions. To submit a question, please visit that Web site.

By **Jenni** Cooper

Q: Is branding different in different industries? How would branding for a business-to-business technology company differ from that of a consumer products company?

A: The benefits of a strong brand are much the same from industry to industry. It enables a company to rise above its competitors by occupying a distinctive and favored position in the minds of its customers. This, in turn, translates into stronger pricing power, lower customer attrition rates, forgiveness for mistakes, and most importantly, higher revenues.

But most of us, when we think about strong brands, think about consumer brands such as Starbucks, Coca-Cola or Nordstrom. What does branding have to do with business-to-business companies? Do

[American City Business Journals](#)
(news from 41 Business publications around the country)

brands matter in the world of technology? Has Microsoft built a meaningful brand?

The concept of brands originated in the consumer packaged goods world. Many say that Procter & Gamble invented marketing. The simple idea was to take a commodity product that everyone used, such as soap, and make it into a special branded product, such as Ivory Soap.

Commodities sell everywhere for the same price, and the margin available to the manufacturer is slim. Branded products such as Ivory, however, could command a premium to commodity competitors. Customers preferred Ivory because it was “99 and 44/100ths pure” (with the implied benefits of simplicity, honesty and cleanliness), and so Procter & Gamble enjoyed more loyal customers and higher margins.

But what does soap have to do with you? Many of the same concepts can be applied to technology companies. Business buyers may have different motivations for their choices (job longevity being an obvious one), but figuring out the needs and wants that exist in the mind of the potential buyer of your storage solution or router monitor, and positioning your product accordingly, is not so different from discovering that folks like clean, pure soap.

That being said, there are some differences to be aware of when branding your B2B tech firm:

- Accuracy and honesty — Because business buyers, especially technically savvy ones, are usually more educated than is the case with a mass consumer item, technology marketers must make sure their claims ring true. Are you using language that is spot-on in the minds of your customers? Are you telling the truth?

In today’s business world, this is more necessary than ever, and it has particular meaning in technology branding: no vaporware, no “almost-ready” demos or overstated uptime claims. Your copy will be under a microscope, competing for scarce dollars, and so you must test the language you use before putting anything out into the marketplace.

- Emotional impact — The emotional connection that lies at the heart of any strong brand is often harder to find in B2B research. After all, asking a bunch of engineers about their hidden desires probably will elicit groans and rolling eyes.

So you have to look under the surface. What are they hinting at? Which of their experiences have been meaningful? It often requires gentle follow-up questions to learn the answers, and most B2B research is best done one on one, where the interviewee can talk more freely.

- Product features — It is easy to fall into the trap of making your brand mean only a list of your product features, rather than focusing

on the central benefit to customers. After all, if you have a really sophisticated technology product that has taken years to develop, people think the features should be spotlighted.

However, there are problems with this approach. For example, product features can be copied by the competition, whereas a true emotional connection based on a differentiated benefit to your customer cannot. Also, it's hard to connect emotionally with a buyer based solely on the processing speed of your machine.

Eventually, most companies need to move beyond today's product lineup to remain relevant. But if you rely on product features for branding, this becomes hard to accomplish. If you instead develop a brand built upon a super benefit that ties your products together but transcends them in the mind of your customer, you can move your company and brand into the future.

For example, successful branding by Starbucks and Nike has transformed previously commodity industries into high-margin growth businesses. As technology becomes more of a commodity and more homogenous, then differentiated, consistent and benefit-oriented brands will become the basis for determining winners and losers.

— **Jenni** Cooper is a Denver-based independent marketing consultant who works with clients ranging from Fortune 500 to high-growth startups. She can be contacted at email@[jennicooper.com](mailto:email@jennicooper.com).

EMAIL ARTICLE TO A FRIEND... >>

[Home](#)

All Rights Reserved. Denver Business Journal 2003

[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#)