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# REBRANDING THE BRANDER

BY TIM PEDERSEN

CEO, Right Brain Branding Consultants

I remember years ago, someone at a conference asked me a simple question, “Does your mother know what you do?” How ridiculous, I thought. Of course she does, but I still felt compelled to pick up the phone and call her.

“You do those nice ads for people” is what I heard on the other end of the line. Innocent enough, but it felt like a blow across the face and a wake up call to my industry. Here I was, an award-winning graphic designer and creative director with my own newly established branding consultancy (not having designed “ads for people” since my college newspaper days) and yet I felt a huge void between what I thought I did and what others thought I did.

Two things became very clear to me. a) there were sure to be others who had the same view of me doing “those nice ads for people” and b) there would be many creatives suffering from a similar identity crisis. Remember the story of the cobbler’s children not having shoes? Why is it that so many creatives are shoeless when it comes to branding, and unable to brand themselves like they do their clients?

At Right Brain, we have created a term that we use to describe reactions to a company and their brand. It’s called visual listening, incorporating the visual images that spring to mind when mentioning a company, and what the listening of that company is. You know the visual images – those mental notes that infiltrate your brain when you think of a company: Starbucks and their green logo (warm coffee drenched atmosphere and a foaming, hot latte) or iPod with the colorful backgrounds and silhouetted dancers.

Combine the two and you have visual listening. This information is crucial in determining the direction of a brand. It has brought a greater understanding to our clients of the task at hand – and it isn’t just their logo.

We all know that branding is your promise to your clients and customers, right? But it is also your ability to fulfill on that promise, consistently. If FedEx didn’t “deliver the world on time,” if Tazo wasn’t “the reincarnation of tea” or if ZOOM wasn’t “for kids by kids,” then how would our perception of them be altered?

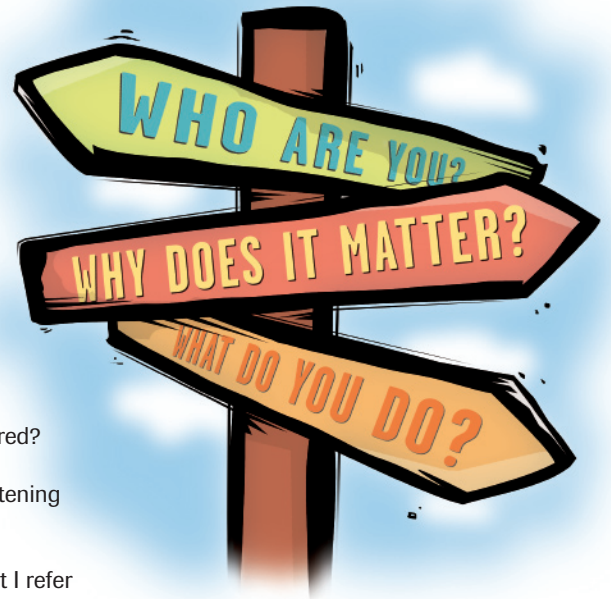
And just what would be our listening of them?

The listening of a company that I refer to involves the many filters that are used, based on our past experiences and knowledge of a company. If a company is highly respected and a leader in its field, news from them would be regarded in a very positive way. However, if the listening of a company told us that it was manipulative, uncaring and only out to make a quick buck, that same report would mean nothing to us.

## So how do you begin to do this for your firm?

Unfortunately, the answer isn’t one you are going to like and not something you can do overnight. It entails getting out there and finding out how people really see your firm. It entails finding out what they expect you to do for them, how you deliver on what you promise and finding out how effective your designs are. This information can be acquired in several different ways; via third-party surveys or mail-in surveys or simply through a conversation with a client over lunch (and be sure to let them know you’ll still be paying no matter what they say – honesty does pay).

All of the comments and data you gather from people’s perception of your company will form the basis for your brand. You will soon discover areas that you can build upon and what areas of perception need strengthening. Build on your strengths, build on what you are known for and



most of all, what people can expect from you. And through this process, you should be able to answer three brief, but all important questions taken from “The Brand Gap” by Greg Galle.

1. Who are you?
2. What do you do?
3. Why does it matter?

Have compelling answers for all three, and you’ll be able to move and inspire people to use your services.

The visual listening of your company will form a solid foundation that will become your brand. Deliver on it consistently and you will see momentum building for your company. Once you are clear as to whom your company is networking, marketing and creative talent searches become almost effortless.

And at last, your mom will finally know what you do!

Tim Pedersen, CEO of Right Brain Branding Consultants advises corporations on the importance of great design and usability in on-line applications and collateral material, and addresses corporations around the globe on how they can develop and preserve their most valuable asset - their brand.