

# Showcase Your Project By Treating It Like A Brand

**S**avvy marketers understand the enormous difference between “products” and “brands”. Simply put: Products are made in factories – Brands are created in the mind.

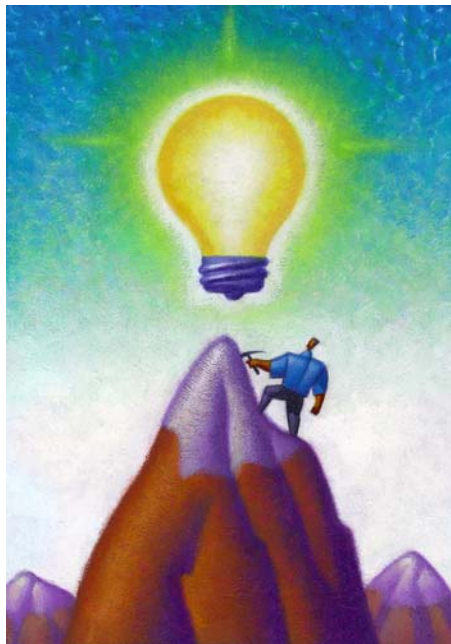
To effectively gain share of market, brands first seek to capture share of mind. That’s why “top-of-mind awareness”, “recall”, and “name recognition” are among the key metrics brand managers use to evaluate marketplace performance. They’re measures of how much space their brands occupy on mental desktops of their target market.

And space is increasingly limited.

So what do you do if your product is a “project” and your customers are inside the walls of the company? If you intend to engage your audience, you need to treat your project like a brand - or risk becoming the latest initiative to fade into the corporate woodwork.

Why? Attention is in short supply.

We’re living in an age where communications is based on what futurist Alvin Toffler calls “Soundbites & Symbolism”. Information overload has forced us to find ways to sift sensory input, just to get through the day. Our brains need shortcuts.



“Branding” is way to appeal to this response, and can be a powerful tool to keep your project front and center.

Okay – so “All I need to do is come up with a cool name then add some clip art and my project is good to go, right?”. *Not really.*

In fact, randomly strapping words and images onto your project without much forethought could actually do more harm than good.

Brands are inherently strategic and leave footprints wherever they go. As a result, if you’re imprinting inconsistent messages, without discipline and specific purpose you’ll end up confusing your constituents.

## Start With Establishing An Identity.

Branding your initiative begins with determining what the project truly stands for. This means stepping back from the details of activities and task lists to search for its higher order meaning within the context of the organization. A great way to discover this is to interview members of the management team and key stakeholder groups to get their perspectives. The more - the better.

What you’ll end up with is a rich collection of data from which key themes and messages will emerge. These patterns lead to broader insights that can provide the foundation for constructing an identity for the project. Be sure to tap into the emotional (versus purely rational) content of your findings – these are the universal threads that will help you to most effectively connect with your audience.

Now the fun begins. Once you’ve distilled the project’s core strategic significance, it’s time to explore concepts and ideas that capture the essence of the project’s reason for being.

Think in terms of pictures, symbols, and analogies that can be instantly understood by your audience. And keep things simple.

If an idea is too complex, it's not likely to end up being "top-of-mind" because it requires too much mental effort to process.

Don't be afraid to share your preliminary ideas with key constituents. Classic consumer marketers conduct "focus groups" to fine tune their executions and improve their chance for success in the marketplace – so why shouldn't you? In fact, "pre-selling" your project brand is a great way to both get feedback and create buy-in at the same time.

It is highly recommended that you employ the services of a professional artist or designer in creatively expressing the final "brand" identity.

They'll help bring clarity to visually communicating your ideas. Remember, your project brand will have a long life – so it's important to invest the time and money to get it right.



This is an example of an actual brand that was created for a complex, enterprise software implementation involving 150 team members and 1,500 users that took 18 months to complete.

The brand was crafted in collaboration with the core project team, and was announced via an internal press release with the explicit intent of explaining the meaning behind the words and symbols.

The tag line of "On Board. On Line. On Target" was detailed in great length, and served to mark the three major phases of the roll-out.

The brand was used extensively on all project communications, including progress reports, a project website, and awareness building artifacts.

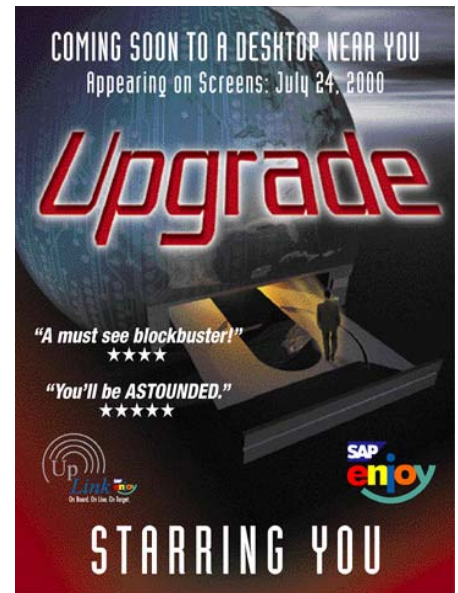
## Next - Generate Some Serious Buzz.

Once you've soundly shaped the soul of your project brand, the next step is to determine how to best get the word out. Like developing a good media plan, it involves assessing what communications vehicles already exist and inventing new ones where necessary to optimize your reach. What newsletters are all ready out there? How can you leverage the company intranet? Is there some exciting new way – like a custom screen saver – to make the project brand visible? These are the kinds of considerations you need to make to effectively spin your story.

Wherever possible, use multiple modes of communication to connect with your audience – because everyone learns differently, and messages need to be repeated many times before they are eventually absorbed.

This technique of imprinting similar messages across multiple media is called "overlap" in traditional media planning - and it's still widely used because it works! A word of caution, however: Make certain you remain sensitive to striking a delicate balance between leveraging existing media and creating incremental communications. The last thing you want to do is contribute to information overload. Your audience will thank you for it!

With the media identified, it's time to shift to the more tactical matter of overlaying specific messages and media onto the project schedule. Assuming the project you're branding has a detailed management plan – this should be a fairly straightforward exercise (Note – if there's no plan or



This poster was one in a series that were created to build awareness among users for new enterprise wide software that was being introduced.

it's extremely weak, don't bother promoting it. Savvy marketers also know that "The fastest way to kill a bad product is with good advertising" - so steer clear of taking on "bad business"). Isolate the key phases and milestones for the project and align your communications with each segment. Take into account the needs, concerns, and challenges faced by your audience as you go. Give yourself enough flexibility to adaptively tune your messages along the way – because things you can't anticipate will surface and need to be addressed in real time. And don't rely solely on the printed word. Town hall meetings, team meetings and even project training sessions offer tremendous opportunities to extend the brand. So make sure everything is aligned and you're echoing consistent messages throughout all of these interactions.

Kick things off by first issuing an announcement that tells constituents how the project brand was conceived and what it means – in painstaking detail.

Don't leave this to chance. Why? If you don't tell your audience the story – they'll make up their own, thereby diluting the purity of your brand and its strategic significance. And make a big splash – your first impression sets the foundation for all future project related communications.

### Then Leave Visible Traces.

To make your brand come alive, you need to leave traces of it throughout the workplace. When you do, you'll be creating new cultural artifacts around the ideals you're espousing about your initiative. This will reinforce the importance of the core message and serve as a constant reminder that the project is in play - in a big way.

Ideally, these work best in combinations where they connect on both business and personal level. For example, posters and signage are great attention grabbers for hallways, but don't have as much individual impact as a custom imprinted giveaway item. So budget permitting - do them both. And if you go the giveaway route, make sure you take the time to select an item that's appropriate for the nature of your



Project team members on this enterprise software Implementation were given commemorative Palm Pilots to help them keep track of progress and remind them of the new inter "connectedness" the install would bring to the company.

project and the dollars you can afford to spend. If an item doesn't "fit" with the identity you've established or your corporate culture of your company - you may weaken the project brand.

And don't overlook seemingly routine daily business activities as a way of making the good stuff stick. A simple, low cost thing you can do to amplify your brand is to create a shared folder on a network drive that you can post files to for your extended project team to use.

Fill it with jpegs, word processing, and presentation templates - and let the team run with them! You'll be surprised how quickly the brand will take on a life of its own when others discover these tools are at their disposal and they begin using them.

In addition, be sure you spread your communications out across the life of project implementation plan - you don't want to use up all your ammunition at once. Here again, cluster your efforts around major milestones and / or phases of the initiative to mark progress to bring context to the brand. These are the times when project participants' senses are heightened and your brand has the best chance to reaffirm its meaning.

Above all, remember that brands are about "differentness" not "sameness", and that every interaction with your audience extends the brand experience.



Awareness building artifacts don't have to be high cost to be high impact. This branded giveaway served as an invitation to a celebration marking the completion of a project phase and provided plenty of fun down the stretch of the final days of the project.

Legendary consultant / author Tom Peters offers this eye opening advice in his recent book, Brand You: "Be distinct - or extinct." So, if you want your project to stand out in the crowd and still be around when others have fallen by the wayside - treat it like a brand. Good things are bound to happen.



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