



by TARA GUSTAFSON & BRIAN CHABOT

What is a Brand?

What does a brand mean to you? What are some of the most prominent brands that come to mind? A brand ultimately serves to create an image in a consumer's mind. With an image, comes a consistent recognition on the part of the consumer. And with that recognition comes added value. The American Marketing Association defines a brand as "a name, term, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition."

Vermont maple producers have worked hard over many decades to connect "Vermont" with high quality pure maple products. Vermont has become a preferred brand for maple products in the minds of many consumers.

The brand image you develop will embody everything your product is – it will portray your product in just the right way to your target consumer. A brand is more than the name of your company. The values that you build into your brand can be a major way to distinguish your products from those of other maple producers. As such, over time and with continued perseverance, the brand image you develop could do more for your business than you may have ever thought possible.

Why Develop a Brand?

Competition is typically the driving force in creating a brand image for your business. How do you stand out next to other maple syrup brands? However, competition is not always the only reason to develop a brand. For example, it may be in your best interest to create a brand that promotes your industry. In doing this, you may want to establish in the mind of your customers an association between quality maple syrup and New York, the Adirondacks or the Catskills. In both cases, your brand would not only promote your position amongst your competition, but also promote the maple industry as a whole. "Pure maple syrup" is a brand protected by federal and state laws. As more people begin to recognize the quality differences in your syrup and that generic syrup down the aisle in the retail grocery store, you should begin, with time, to see profits rise as a result of your clear brand image and increase in loyal customers.

A brand is your reputation. Even if you only sell syrup in bulk, you should pay attention to the reputation you develop with bulk purchasers. Also, use of generic packaging can make your products susceptible to what other producers who use the same packaging are doing. Having your own brand is a mark of quality that you control.

Brand Equity

A brand name is important to a business or a product because it creates brand equity. This means that a brand contributes something to your product beyond what the actual product itself offers. Brand equity includes all of the values you expect consumers to find in your products or business. It is worth repeating that a brand is more than a name. Thus, a brand image provides you with both a competitive advantage and also puts your product at an advantage in the marketplace because consumers are often willing to pay more for a product with brand equity.



How to Create Brand Equity

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Brand equity is the result of a great deal of careful thought and action.

- 1) First, you must develop brand awareness in your customers. The consumer should have a positive association with your product. This is the start of a truly successful brand identity.
- 2) Next, you need to give the product a brand identity. For example, maybe your syrup is renowned for its outstanding flavor, or the area in which it is produced, or the family business you have developed around it. Whatever makes your syrup special to your customers is probably what you will choose to emphasize in creating a brand identity for your product.
- 3) Now, you want to change consumer behavior. This is the point at which consumer's change their behavior and respond to the identity and meaning of the brand now associated with your product. To achieve this point, you must have effectively conveyed a positive association with your product. With this change in consumer behavior, you can, with time, reach the fourth step.
- 4) Ultimately, your goal is to establish an intensely loyal consumer-base. Usually, a deep psychological bond is established in this step between the consumer and the brand, and this is the foundation for the loyalty found in consumers of your brand. Maybe, as a child, a person develops a strong connection with your syrup and the brand that you have developed. Maybe your syrup, and the brand image you've developed, reminds the child of family values, rich flavorful syrup, or the outdoors. Whatever it is, your brand sticks in their mind, and the positive associations they have developed with your product have formed in the mind of the child and are now still present in the mind of the adult. It is your job to promote this – to establish those positive connotations in the consumer's mind that withstand time and last, hopefully, for decades into the future.

Creating the Brand

Now you understand the process and reasons for creating a brand and its implications for your business over time. But how do you establish those positive connotations in the mind of the consumer? One of the first steps in doing this is to choose an appropriate and effective brand name.

Qualifications of a Good Brand Name

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- 1) Keep it simple, easy to pronounce and remember
- 2) The name should convey positive values and images to the consumer. For example Finger Lakes Finest, Sugarbush Hollow, and Sprague's Maple each convey a different image or set of values.
- 3) The name should be appropriate for the product. Everyday Syrup does not convey a gourmet image. Manhattan Maple seems out of place.
- 4) The name should follow legal guidelines. It can't be pure maple or organic if it doesn't meet the legal requirements for use of these terms.

If you include in your brand name "New York" or a region within New York and other producers do the same, you gain the advantage of everyone working together to create brand equity that you can benefit from. This is what Vermont has done successfully. New York is already better known nationally and internationally than is Vermont, though not for maple products. This can change by working together. New York has some place names that already have considerable equity in the public mind: Adirondacks, Catskills, Hudson



Describing Brand Values

Valley, Finger Lakes, etc. When you adopt a well-known place name, some of the work of developing brand equity has already been accomplished.

An accompanying worksheet will have you think through some of the key issues in brand development.

Describing Brand Values

Beyond choosing a brand name, you need to consider what values you want to build into that name because you will need to describe these values to your customers in advertising your products. We will be covering this and related topics in more depth in other articles, but some examples here may help to further understand what the concept of a brand involves.

Wegman’s is a successful New York-based food retailer. Wegman’s is the family name of the founder and current owners. Wegman’s has become known for high quality and diverse products and a particular shopping experience from the displays, organization, and services in their stores. This is the customer experience part of the Wegman’s brand. They also treat their employees well and have become known for this by their customers. Slogans “Food You Can Feel Good About,” “Everyday You get Our Best,” and “Making Great Meals Easy” that appear frequently are intended to convey and reinforce all the values the company has developed.



Candy Man has two stores in the Adirondacks selling candy, coffee, and specialty food products. Their logo, Candy Man Hand Made Adirondack Chocolates, describes well the main focus of the company. Their reputation for high quality products is spread through direct customer experience in store locations that attract many tourists.



Ultimately, brand value rests on the experience that customers have with your products and your business. Your company name, slogans, word and picture images all serve to reinforce and remind customers of favorable experiences with your business and its products.

