

Understanding brands 101

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There is a plethora of definitions around what brands are. Here's a simple argument. In olden days, farmers would mark their cattle for identification of their animals. But this mark was not purely used as a physical mark of identification; it also communicated the ownership as well as the quality of the animal. The brand is not just a physical marker, it implies more than what is visible. If the above is still marketing gobbledegook...here's a simpler version.

Joe is a good farmer he marks his cow with a J logo, this means: 1.) It's Joe's cow, 2.) It's the best cow for steaks, and 3.) It also represents how people feel about Joe, so his behavior has an impacts on the brand. This is how brands work, they have physical aspects (product, identity and logo) and inferred value based on the owner/organisational values and behavior.

Why are brands important?

Brands are important because in the modern economy many Joes have many excellent cows (products, services etc) as well as similar abilities and budgets to market their cows. So what sets one Joe's cow apart from another Joe's cow? Branding, because branding builds meaning.

How to build brands

If products and services can be copied, how do you set your brand apart? Simple: Do good and be human-centric. "Good Branding" uses marketing and brand communications to clearly articulate brands and their products effectively but not just through broadcast media or advertising media. Our brand philosophy is quite simple:

- **Good** - The power of brands is bigger than the ability to draw sales. Brands are powerful influencers of societal norms and should be used toward social good.
- **Branding** - Or brand building is a process of distilling the individual "reason to exist" of the business or organisation and ensuring that every single action taken, resonates and communicates the "reason to exist".

Good branding doesn't happen in a vacuum, it requires that the organisation embrace new ideas of thinking about brand building:

1. **No formula:** Forget about brand building templates or formulas. Every brand must be built from a new tailored game plan. Each brand has different needs, objectives and should be built individually. There is no 10 point plan for brand building; it's a process of open engagement, discovery, insight building, responding to audiences and taking action. This means living in a state of Beta/a state of continuous improvements.

2. **Strategy, strategy, strategy:** Small actions can equal big impact if they are aligned with strategy. Brands can be built by small impactful and community focused actions. You don't need the biggest marketing budget, you need *strategy*.
3. **It's not about marketing alone:** Brands are not built by marketing alone. Brands are built by sustained and strategic action that advances its community's welfare. Brands are built by tangible action that embraces and advances its community. Brand building can be accomplished by small strategic actions that reaffirms the brand's values and its value to the broader community, i.e. Target audiences, society etc.
4. **It's about really knowing your community and audiences:** Central to brand building is the understanding of one's key community, its values and what actions would advance their cause.
5. **Developing small brands:** Developing small brands is harder given the financial constraints, but these brands can bring deeper meaning to their brands more easily. These businesses can move faster unlike their bigger counterparts. Do things that have meaning to your communities.
6. **Understanding the value of communication as a loop:** The value of brand communication is its ability to deliver and receive information. Closing the brand loop creates greater brand value. If communication is treated as a loop and not an event, the business or organisation can tap into the responses and feedback that is created with each loop of information or communication.

ABOUT LEBO MUKANSI

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