

Identity Vs. Image[®]

by Kathy Ellis, The Business Lab Marketing Coach

There are two main factors present in any business relationship: your company's identity and your company's image. Your identity is what you and your company aspire to be. Your image is how your client's actually perceive you and your company. The difference between the two can tell you a lot about the relationship you have with your clients. This difference is the "equity" you have with your clients and it plays a significant part in how loyal your clients are to you and your company. Your ideal goal is to have your identity and your image in sync with each other. When your identity and image match, you've created a bond, a trust with your client. This then becomes your compelling, differentiating value proposition!

Your Identity: Your identity is what you and your company aspire to be. Your identity starts by understanding what you want to be to your clients and speaks to the promises you intend to deliver. A well defined identity consistently repeats its message thereby reinforcing its personality and promises. Your look and feel and the consistent application of this look and feel are critical to matching your identity with your image.

Tip From The Business Lab: Start with your look and feel. Is it the right look for who you aspire to be? With your team, define your company's personality by listing the qualities you'd like your company to embody. Tie these qualities to an emotional need (safety, peace of mind, sense of belonging, freedom, self-image, achievement, hope, expression, escape, laughter, etc.). Limit your list to no more than 10 qualities and then compare this list with your current look and feel. Next, determine if your look and feel is being consistently communicated to your clients and prospects as well as clearly communicated across all types of media.

A Word About Emotion: Incorporating emotion into your identity will help you create stronger and longer lasting relationships. Ultimately, your goal is to make a special connection with each and every client. To do this, you must build a relationship and building a relationship is a process, not a one time event. Keep in mind that making a special connection and building a relationship with a client is an investment in both time and money. Before you make this investment, get very clear on which clients you want to invest in. Then, spend the majority of your investment on your high-value clients and prospects; while maintaining and/or eliminating limited and low-value clients.

Your Image: Your image is what your prospects and clients perceive about you and your company. In many ways, your image is much more difficult to sustain. You can immediately tell when your logo is wrong or the ad just doesn't "feel" like you, but image involves things that are much more intangible. Image involves things like your employees and their attitudes, the scuff marks on your walls, how quickly telephone calls and E-mails are returned, etc. Disconnects between your identity and image will result in confusion, lack of rapport and mistrust.

Tip From The Business Lab: In addition to creating a plan to consistently convey your identity to your prospects and clients, include your employees in this plan. Conduct identity and image training programs each quarter. Use role playing to teach employees how you want them to act and react. Ask them to submit a quarterly report (with constructive criticism and suggestions for improvement) on how they think your company has performed in consistently "walking its talk." Randomly quiz and reward employees who are caught in the act of projecting your identity correctly. In addition, encourage an evangelistic approach to conveying your identity.

More Information? If you would like to learn more about this important topic or would like to receive our FREE Service Ideas Booklet, please send an E-mail to kathy@thebusinesslab.com, visit our website at www.thebusinesslab.com, or fax a note on your letterhead to 281-517-0789.

Author's Note: Kathy Ellis is a Marketing Coach and the owner of The Business Lab, a full service marketing and graphic design company. We specialize in creativity and helping you think outside the box. We then help you implement those creative ideas through programs including database marketing, websites, interactive CD brochures, company brochures, client newsletters and promotional marketing materials. We share with you our FREE newsletter to showcase powerful marketing tips, techniques and ideas to help you improve your business. The Business Lab is based in Houston, TX at 281-517-0998 or by E-mail at kathy@thebusinesslab.com