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# Marketing Smarts for the Growing Business

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## Monthly

## Boost Your Brand Identity

*Showing customers what you stand for can be a difference-maker*



**A**s a partner in the Fancy Club, a New York design firm working in the fashion and music video industries, Kim Swift focuses much of her effort on helping clients tell a brand story. But when it came to creating a brand identity for her own firm last year, she and partner Andrew Stevens turned to outside experts.

Swift describes the Fancy Club as a group of creative young “culturesmiths” that strives to communicate ideas through holistic narratives rather than through conventional ad campaigns. The approach results in “stories that

morph into strong visual brand identities, viral short films, luxurious experiential events, or all of the above,” Swift says. Yet it also raised challenges in setting pricing strategies, defining deliverables, and allowing the company to find its niche in the industry.

So the firm hired the New York-based brand identity specialist Muffin Cupcake & Associates, which streamlined the Fancy Club’s services and created a concise business strategy to complement its nonlinear creative process. “Their intuitive consulting guided us to the uncharted territory between art collective and ad agency,” Swift says. “That’s the brand identity we now convey in all our engagements.”

These days, it’s not enough for a growing business to rely on the products and services it offers and the prices it charges. Having a strong brand identity lends credibility in a crowded marketplace and gives a company a personality beyond the people who work there, says Jessica Resler, a principal at Muffin Cupcake. “Brand identity lets customers and potential customers see the lifestyle of your company,” she notes. “It helps them decide whether they want to do business with you.” Properly executed, a good brand identity program can also offset a small company’s limited resources for traditional advertising, Resler adds.

### How the Process Starts

Any brand identity project must start with an inward-looking audit, says Erin Ferree, principal and lead designer at Elf Design, a consulting firm based in

### INTERNET NICHE MARKETING

## The 5 Biggest Web Site Irritants

**Studies have shown** that one in five people who find a Web site through a search engine spend 60 seconds or less on the site. Some visitors determine that the content doesn’t suit their needs, but a large percentage flee because the Web site is confusing or difficult to navigate. Other big irritants include:

- **Slow loading time.** Remember, everything must be faster on the Internet.
- **Broken links and graphics.** If a visitor clicks on a dead link, your credibility will be called into question.
- **Carnival graphics.** Visitors don’t want Web pages blaring at them like a carnival at night. Avoid excessive animated graphics, busy backgrounds, multi-colored text, and loud music. Equally important, resist using Macromedia Flash unless you have a product that needs to be described visually.
- **Multiple banners and buttons.** Too much choice leads to paralysis by analysis.
- **Large fonts and hard-to-read text.** Attract people with your information, products, and offers — not with glitz.

For more Internet niche marketing tips, visit [fuelnet.com/netmarketing](http://fuelnet.com/netmarketing).

Belmont, Calif. Working with dozens of growth-oriented businesses since 1996, Ferree has developed a well-defined approach she calls “brand-storming.” She starts by having clients sit down and define their business. “An entire lexicon of marketing terms has grown up around this process, and big companies can devote lots of time and

### TOP 10 REASONS YOU NEED A BRAND IDENTITY

1. To convey that you are well established
2. To attract more clients or customers
3. To increase credibility
4. To be more memorable
5. To look “bigger”
6. To improve chances of attracting potential investors
7. To make the business more salable
8. To give clients a sense of stability
9. To differentiate you from your competition
10. To demonstrate commitment to and pride in your business

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## Stay in the Game

How to retain your most loyal customers

A growing business lives and dies by repeat customers or clients, especially in uncertain economic times like these. Studies show it can cost up to 10 times more to land a new customer than to keep an existing one. The problem is that most customer retention strategies are ineffective. To make matters worse, according to Allegiance, a technology firm in Salt Lake City, the average business hears from only 4 percent of dissatisfied customers — the rest just bolt. Here's how to get your customers to stick around:

**1 Check in with your best customers.** At least once a quarter, touch base with the 20 percent of your customers who generate 80 percent of your business to find out how they're doing. "You aren't trying to sell anything or be the bearer of any profound news, but are merely placing a courtesy call to convey a sense of calm and clarity," says Duncan MacPherson, coauthor of *Breakthrough Business Development*. As an extra personal touch, send a handwritten note.

**2 Find out how you're doing.** Robert Basso, president of Advantage Payroll Services in Hicksville, N.Y., regularly surveys staff to see if they understand the firm's customer-service strategies. He also talks to customers to make sure they're receiving the service they deserve. Surveys should be short, free of bias, and well structured, Basso notes.

**3 Teach your employees well.** Schedule a weekly half-hour meeting with staff to address customer care topics, such as how to deal with crabby or impatient customers. "A postmortem analysis on any customer interaction that doesn't go well can be an eye-opening exercise," says Lori Jo Vest, head of LJV Consulting in Troy, Mich.

**4 Offer your expertise as a value-added service.** "Remind your customers that you will make yourself available to answer questions that their friends or family members might have regarding the type of services you provide," MacPherson suggests.

**5 Send referrals your customers' way.** For customers who may own their own businesses, spread the word about their products or services, or offer to share resources if it makes sense.

**6 Gift creatively.** The best gifts for customers are those that subtly tout your services. New York-based Axis Promotions sent prospects and existing customers a "breakfast in a box" that included a plush blanket, a custom spoon, an original four-page newspaper loaded with custom articles, quizzes, and puzzles, and a card that read, "Relax. We've got you covered." The innovative package resulted in more than \$110,000 in orders from existing customers who wanted the items used in the mailing, or similar ones, to send as marketing promotions to their own customers.

**7 Go the extra mile.** Coastal Contacts, an online seller of eyeglasses and contact lenses based in Vancouver, British Columbia, includes an unexpected freebie with every purchase, such as a pair of sunglasses or a \$10-off coupon good toward the next order.

**8 Act fast when someone grouches.** Research indicates that a complaint addressed with swiftness and creativity can turn a dissatisfied customer into a highly loyal one, notes Kyle LaMalfa, best practices manager at Allegiance.

**9 Think long term.** "Think of a new customer as the beginning of a long relationship where you are going to help them get what they want," says Tessa Stowe, editor of the *Sales Conversation* newsletter. Positioning yourself as a resource for life differentiates you from companies looking for a quick sale, she adds.

**1½ Share your know-how.** Ben Chestnut, cofounder of MailChimp.com, a marketing services provider in Atlanta, suggests sending monthly email newsletters to customer lists. "These aren't newsletters full of marketing fluff, but useful tips showcasing your knowledge and expertise. That's why your customers love you in the first place." ■

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### Boost Your Brand Identity

resources to it," Ferree says. "But small businesses don't have that luxury. What it really boils down to is figuring out what your business is about, what your tag line should be."

Conveying a consistent, unified message is critical to any brand identity program, Resler admits. And that's one reason such programs should be rolled out gradually.

"First, you have to make sure all employees understand the new brand, or changes to the existing brand, and how to communicate that brand to customers," she says. "A gradual rollout reduces the risk of alienating existing customers."

Involving customers — especially

important ones — during the initial design process not only helps to reassure them, it also provides you with valuable feedback from the people who are most important to your business, Ferree says.

### Stay Abreast of Trends

In terms of the brand design itself, logos and marketing materials are subject to trends just like any other visual art form. While there's nothing wrong with being trendy, so long as the design reflects the qualities you want to project for your business, it's a mistake to choose a logo design on that basis alone, Ferree warns. "Your brand identity is going to be your company's wardrobe going forward. You don't want to

be stuck with something that makes you look dated," she says.

The cost for end-to-end brand identity development or a makeover (including both strategic and design elements) is based largely on company size, goals, and the extent of the materials you want produced. According to Resler, a good brand package for a growing business can usually be brought in for less than \$10,000.

Brand identity is a must-have, not a nice-to-have for growing businesses in a competitive marketplace, Ferree stresses. "If prospective customers don't know who you are and what you stand for, they're not going to do business with you," she says. "Brand identity is the rifle-shot way to deliver that message and make it stick." ■