

# Business Advisory Group

The Small Business Doctors

## Identify Yourself!

### Ideas about branding your business.

Often we see small business operators get so focused on a particular issue that they neglect to reflect on why their business should be memorable. This "can't see the forest for the trees" inclination is something that most of us have personally encountered in our own business journeys. Our advice - return to the beginning. How do you want yourself, your product, your service, your establishment and your company to be perceived by your customers or clients? In other words, how did you want to brand your business?

Many assume that the process of branding rests in the domain of large corporations. Actually, it is part of your individual identity. Each of us has an image of how we would like to appear to others; each of us has an idea of the particular characteristics that we want to come together to create that image.

Creating your brand is a simple process that builds on individual characteristics and results in a favourable identity. This is as true for the corner store as for the largest corporation. If we don't start with a clear definition of, and commitment to, those brand characteristics we have established, it is impossible to move a business forward.

Brand characteristics are similar in many ways to human ones. In fact, these are what gives life to brand identity. To list a few: durability, comfort, honesty, quality, affordability, uniqueness, pleasantry, consistency, serviceability, attractiveness, dependability, "fashion sense" etc. etc.

The important first step for any entrepreneur is to decide what the business or product is going to represent. The second step will be to determine the target market consistent with your business positioning. Some will maintain that this is putting the horse before the cart but we disagree! Many businesses popping up today are "me too businesses". This group simply borrows the research, formulation and design of others thereby capitalizing on the market growth created by the originators. Because no expenses related to the service, product or market development have been incurred, they sell their offering for a lower price. This group does not pretend anything except "cheap knock off" offerings. It is difficult to sustain a business with based on "price" but it can succeed to a point: Honest Ed, a great Canadian entrepreneur, added "trust" to his "price" based identity and has maintained a landmark business ever since !

We do not in any way propose that there is one standard formula used to brand your operation. You will determine what is right for you only after you have identified what characteristics you want to clearly emphasize in your product and/or business communication. You can then move forward

The Business Advisory Group (BAG) is an incorporated, not-for-profit organization whose members volunteer their time and expertise to provide solid business advice based on a lifetime of experience.

We operate in Oakville, Burlington and Hamilton, offering meetings in a number of convenient locations.

One of our most popular service offerings is a half-day client meeting with typically three of our members who will develop an understanding of your situation, offer suggestions, and follow-up with a written summary of the major points. The fee for this is \$150, which provides funds to cover expenses such as liability insurance for our members, who provide their skills free of charge.

Call toll-free: 1-877-381-1990, or (905) 381-1999 which is local in the Burlington area. Leave a message (name, phone number and best times to call) and one of our volunteer coordinators will get back to you.

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and investigate the numerous communication alternatives available to you that will most effectively present you desired image.

So, create your identity by clearly establishing your business characteristics. Then you can build your business plan around this guiding light. It's called "branding" and it works!