



by TARA GUSTAFSON and BRIAN CHABOT

Defined

What is Brand Awareness?

The ultimate goal of most businesses is to increase sales and income. Ideally, you want to attract new customers to your products and encourage repeat purchases. Brand awareness refers to how aware customers and potential customers are of your business and its products. Within a week after its introduction, surveys found that more than 90% of US consumers had heard about the iPhone as a result of advertising and news reports. This is exceptionally high brand awareness. Ultimately, achieving successful brand awareness means that your brand is well known and is easily recognizable. Brand awareness is crucial to differentiating your product from other similar products and competitors.

The Plan

Brand Awareness Plan

The major components of a plan to develop brand awareness are:

- Identifying and understanding your target customers
- Creating a company name, logo, and slogans
- Adding value through packaging, location, service, special events, etc.
- Advertising
- After-sale follow-up and customer relations management

Targeting the right audience is crucial to your success. Of similar importance is understanding that you need a plan along with specific actions that increase awareness of your brand amongst your consumers. Throughout the entire process of creating a brand, it is of utmost importance to consider how what you do will increase brand awareness.

Why is Brand Awareness Important?

You may be asking yourself, is brand awareness really all that important? You may be saying to yourself, I have plenty of customers and sales are decent, why bother? The answer is: There are few things more worthwhile than investing time in your brand's awareness. It can play a major role in purchasing decisions. The reality is, the more aware consumers are of your product and your brand, the more likely they are to buy from you.

Among the challenges faced in selling pure maple products are:

- Do potential customers know you exist?
- Why pay more for Pure Maple vs. an artificial syrup?
- Isn't Vermont maple syrup better?
- Why pay more for your products rather than from a less expensive alternative?

In the future, and for the sake of your business, it is in your best interests to take action to increase awareness of your brand.

The Goal

The Goal

Thus, it is a good idea to draw up a brand awareness strategy that you can continue to update throughout the development of your brand. To begin, for example, you can do preliminary



research to determine how aware the consumers of your brand are prior to any changes. Then, decide what you think and perhaps what others suggest that you might do to increase awareness and public recognition. Next, compose a strategy for how you would like to go about this. For example, perhaps your focus may be on your name, or perhaps the colors people associate with your brand, or even the way in which you promote and sell your products. Finally, decide upon how you would like to execute these changes and increase your brand awareness. Ultimately, you should be able to see a change in how consumers perceive your brand and the level of recognition your brand has acquired. For example, perhaps your consumer base expands to include nearby towns or attract a different core consumer.

Truly successful brand awareness often takes time to develop. First there is the time required to develop an effective awareness effort. Then there is the time required for your message to reach potential customers. A few customers will respond early, but most will take time to hear about your products, make a decision to try them, and even later return for more. Establishing customer loyalty takes the most time, as it requires extended experience with your business and products.

As a result of specific actions, positive brand awareness is promoted. Brand awareness is essentially the impression people have of your brand. Do they know your brand as reliable high quality? As well established and distinctive? As a bargain? How is it that they have formed these perceptions? Perhaps from your logo? Or maybe from the way your products are displayed or priced? These opportunities to make a good impression are what are influencing your consumers' awareness of your brand.

How to Begin Creating Brand Awareness

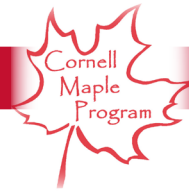
How to Begin Creating Brand Awareness

How do *you*, over time, establish positive brand awareness that promotes the possibility of purchase of your product in the future? There is always the initial impression of your brand that is of utmost importance. Beyond this, however, are all of the future impressions that may be formed regarding your brand.

In deciding how you will go about creating brand awareness, you need to consider and to be aware of how your product value becomes known to the consumer and the importance of consistency:

1) The message of what a brand is offering to the consumer should be consistent.

Wegmans, for example, offers fresh, high-quality foods for purchase and advertises the advantages, such as home-cooked meals, that their goods can provide for you. The layout of their perishable goods, the organization of complementary condiments and staple products, and the stands offering sample recipes to be cooked at home are all evidence of the company attempting to present a consistent message of what they are all about to the consumer. The presentation of Wegmans as a prominent player in providing quality foods for quality home-cooked meals is evident in each of the aforementioned examples. The company does not, for example, attempt to convey quality in its store layout and offerings and then convey cheap alternative in the mailings sent out. The impressions you hope to make on consumers and potential consumers should be consistent across various mediums, situations, and promotional attempts.



2) **Images** you present should also be consistent in order to increase brand awareness.

It is important that you are consistent in your use of images so that you maximize recognition and positive impressions. Wegmans logo, for example, can be found on its storefront, on the products it produces itself, on the receipt consumers receive after purchase, on the bags customers carry out of the store, and in many of its distributed informational material.

3) **Slogans and taglines** should also be consistent throughout mediums and material.

Once again, consistency is important in conveying a message that promotes awareness of your brand in a organized, recognizable manner. Wegmans' tagline, "Helping you make great meals easy", is consistent throughout its promotional materials, website, and logo, to name a few.

Consistency cannot be emphasized enough. It presents the consumer with an image that in the future the consumer can continue to associate with your products. For example, if the materials you distribute, the set-up of your sale table, the packaging of your product, and the logo and tagline are not all relatively similar, regularly consistent, and repeatedly recognizable over time, it is likely you will get nowhere with your brand. Creating brand awareness, through a collaborative, well-developed overall image, is essential to developing a success brand that achieves maximum benefits.

Maintaining Brand Awareness

It is important to keep working at the issues and activities identified above. Pay attention to how customers are responding to products, packaging, displays, and messages. Look for ways to improve the image you are trying to get across. Ask your customers for suggestions.

Work to maintain a consistent presence in the market place. This can mean a location and regular times where customers can reliably expect to find you. The NY Maple Producers booth at the State Fair has been in a prime location for many years. They need to move to gain more sales space and will have to have a plan to help customers find their new location. If your business is wholesaling maple products to retail locations, you need to stay in regular and reliable contact with your customers. They should not have to come looking for you when they need to re-stock or they will turn to suppliers that make it easier for them to operate their businesses.

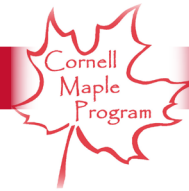
Purchasing Decision Process

Understanding the decision-making process helps you to better understand how to structure your brand awareness process. What makes them buy your product? Do they decide, upon an impulse, to purchase your product? Do they need several hours to mull over the possibility of making the purchase? To what extent does product type, price, and environment affect the purchasing decision. Marketing specialists recognize five stages to a purchasing decision.

The first stage in making a purchase decision is to perceive a need. The range, complexity, and severity varies in regard to this need. It could range, for example, from a need to purchase a gift for a friend's birthday to a need to eat something sweet to a need to drink something refreshing. It is easy to see how different containers would appeal to someone thinking about

**Maintaining
Brand
Awareness**

**Purchasing
Decision
Process**



a gift vs. buying syrup for personal use. Messages with your product display about possible uses can prompt a need-based decision.

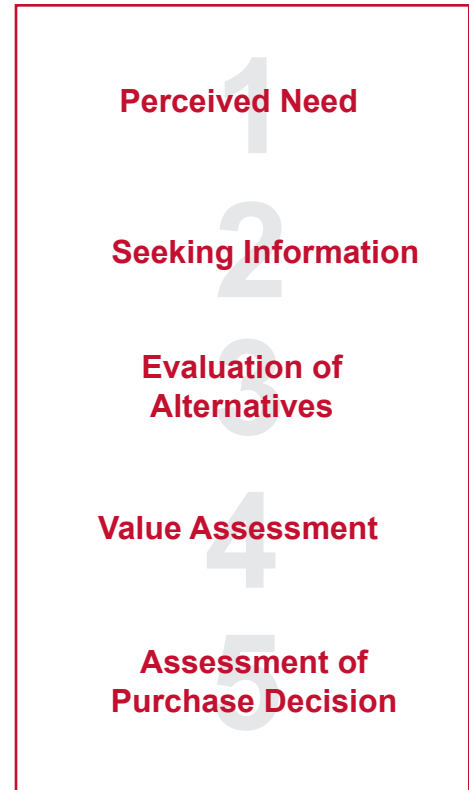
The second stage in making purchasing decisions is to seek information. This may be simply reading an ingredient list to an internet search to an inquiring call. Providing information about your products and their value can be important to making a sale. Why is “pure” or “local” important? What flavor experience or possible uses await the purchaser? Might the history and tradition of maple products be important to some consumer decisions?

The third stage is where the potential customer evaluates alternatives to your brand or product. This, obviously, is the stage in which your product is compared to those of competitors. It may also include other products that you may have to offer or other products they remember from the past. Essentially the potential buyer is assessing the qualities of your product that might make it worth the purchase. If the signage, slogans, and literature does not address the more obvious questions, then you need to be ready to do so when asked. If you want to sell at the premium end of the price range then type of products, packaging, display, and product messages must be consistent with the price.

The fourth stage involves an assessment of the buying value. Is the product worth the price? Do the values it possesses make it a worthwhile purchase? This is the culmination of the previous stages and results in a decision to either buy or pass up on an offer.

The fifth and final stage involves an assessment of the purchase decision. This can occur a day, a month, or a year or more after the sale. Essentially, the customer is either reaffirming or doubting their purchasing decision. For example, seeing other people enjoying the product reaffirms their decision or makes them wish they had bought more. Testimonials from satisfied customers may help to shape these after-purchase expectations. Or perhaps they discover an off-taste or crystallized sugar in the syrup, in which case it may be more likely that the person would doubt that they made the correct decision in making the purchase. If the consumer decided not to make the purchase, they may later regret such a decision if the value of that product to them, for example, were to increase.

Understanding that the stages of a purchasing decision vary both in time and whether the stages really are distinct, one can better assess where they might be able to have an influence on someone’s decision to purchase. For example, it may help to offer the person more information or to tell them about all the other people that have been really impressed with your product.





Advertising

Advertising

Obviously advertising is an important way to have your brand and products become known to consumers. This topic is covered more in CMP Bulletin 106. Some of the topics covered in this bulletin may be valuable ingredients in external advertising. But the messages conveyed at the place of purchase are equally important and should leave your targeted customers with a consistent impression of your business and its products.

