

01.

Introduction

Purpose

If you're reading this chances are you're a small business owner, leader, or a decision maker in a small to medium sized organization. From the outset I want to salute you for the work you do. As you know, probably all too well, running a small business or organization is challenging stuff.

In a small business you don't have the luxury of a bloated savings account, a posh marketing department, or a "who's who" board of advisors. At times you struggle just to keep payroll from bouncing, and you've probably spent countless late nights crunching numbers while watching your to-do list grow ever longer.

The last thing you need is another set of abstract "how-to-grow-your-business" tips that may or may not help. Right?

I couldn't agree more. I'm a small business owner, my Dad is a small business owner, and I've spent most of my life around those managing and serving in a small business or organization — so as cliché as it sounds, I get where you're coming from.

And because of that this book isn't just another "how-to" manual filled with grandiose ideas with little in the way of practical application — those drive me nuts, and I'm sure you can relate. Rather, this book is designed to be practical at its very core. It's filled not just with good information, but also with easy-to-implement strategies proven to help you succeed.

Now you may be thinking, *"okay, great, but why do I need to learn about branding? Shouldn't I be focusing on how to increase my cash flow? Or get more customers through my doors? Or find better ways to manage my staff?"*

Yes.

That's why you need to focus on branding. What if I told you that the single most important thing you could do for your business or organization is to design, develop, and deploy a focused brand strategy? Maybe you'd think I was crazy...maybe you'd smile and nod and excuse yourself as quickly as possible.

Okay, let me try this one. What if I told you that by implementing 5 simple strategies you could increase your customer base, increase customer loyalty, empower your staff, reduce stress, and maybe just maybe start achieving a positive cash flow...would you be interested?

I thought so.

You see, branding matters. And it doesn't just matter for large corporations and organizations with fat budgets and a global reach. It also matters for every small business and organization. Let me reiterate that. When you think of branding, most likely 10-15 mega brands will come to mind — perhaps Nike, Apple, Starbucks, Toyota, Coca-Cola, etc. When you think of branding you probably don't think of small business, right?

This book exists to put branding back into small business. Frankly, the gap between successful corporations and small businesses in this area is astounding. You wouldn't disagree with me if I said it's important to learn financial strategy from large businesses and work to incorporate those strategies into your business. Or maybe it's management strategy, customer service, or HR. The bottom line is that small businesses often try to emulate large corporations on a variety of fronts — as well they should.

So why is it that strategic branding is one of the most often neglected elements in a small business or organization? If branding is so valued by large corporations and organizations, why does it receive such a low priority?

The key reasons are because small businesses A) don't understand it, B) don't see the value in it, and C) can't figure out how to specifically apply it. The purpose of this book is two-fold: first to outline why branding matters for small businesses and organizations, and more importantly, to learn how to harness the power of branding to position your business for success.

The reason I wrote this book is because I'm passionate about small business — small businesses and organizations are the engine of a healthy economy, and most of the world's best ideas are developed and refined in and through small businesses. But more than that, I wrote this book because frankly I'm tired of watching too many small businesses neglect proven strategies that larger, more successful organizations employ every day.

It's not just for the "big boys" and it doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg...or even a toe. Brand strategy can be done efficiently and effectively, and it's absolutely essential to any organization's success.

Clearing Up Some Misconceptions

I've interacted with many small businesses and organizations who don't integrate strategic brand initiatives for a variety of reasons. Part of the reason I wrote this book was to refute these misconceptions. Here are a few of the most common ones I've heard:

- I'm too "small" to need any brand initiatives.
- I'm a realist, and branding isn't proven. I'll just focus on what I know works for my business.
- Branding is over-rated.
- I'm in "X" industry and I don't see how traditional branding practices can work for my business.
- I don't need a brand, I've been in business for "X" amount of years. My customers already know who I am.

- I don't have a "marketing" budget, so I can't do any branding.
- I have a logo, isn't that all I need?
- Times are tight so we're cutting back on anything not essential to the bottom line.
- I have a unique product that's different from anything else on the market. That's all I need.
- I'm a non-profit organization; branding is just for those making profits.

Do any of those sound familiar? If any hit home I hope you'll give me a chance to show you why I disagree and why it's so important that your perspective changes. In this book I've attempted to take a bunch of high-level, and at times way too detailed branding strategies and distill those into a simple, practical guide that can make a real difference in your business or organization. If even one of these strategies helps your business or organization reach your customers better, build customer loyalty, or optimize the bottom line, then I consider it a success.

Goals

My goals are pretty simple and they're built around the premise of the book: *"the single most important thing you can do for your business is to build your brand."* After reading this book I hope you:

- 1. Have a better understanding of what a brand is and how branding works.**
- 2. Have a practical model for integrating strategic brand initiatives into your business or organization.**
- 3. Are inspired to grow your business through a range of new and creative ideas.**

Moving Forward

So where are we going from here? Well, we'll spend the first chapter getting our definitions in order, and we'll talk in general about why branding matters for small business. Then we'll get really practical and dive into the 5-Step Branding Matters process where we outline how to do branding effectively:

- 1. Discover Your Vision**
- 2. Define Your Strategy**
- 3. Design Your Identity**
- 4. Develop Brand Experience**
- 5. Drive Brand Interaction**

Each of these sections will include information and practical tips to help you apply each step to your business. This process is what I use with all of my clients and it's proven effective time and again.

So if you're a small business owner or key decision maker and it's been a while since you've looked at your brand strategy, or if you realize you've never given any thought to developing your brand, now is the time. Before you make one more sales call, print one more flyer, or try to come up with the next big marketing campaign, why not spend some time focusing on the most important aspect of your business?

Let's get started.

Why Branding Matters

It's always a bit humorous when I'm talking to someone for the first time about what I do. "I own a small branding agency," I usually reply. Normally that response generates a puzzled expression, as if I just said I consult with "sneetches" on how to make "whamboozles." Branding is almost a secret code word, used by many but understood by few. If you ask 10 people to define what branding is, only three would give you a decent answer, and each response would probably be different.

It's no wonder then that most small businesses and organizations don't understand or simply don't care to understand the practice of brand building. But the answer is not just to understand what a brand is and what branding does. If that were the answer, I wouldn't need to write a book on the subject — I could just point you in the right direction.

The key is not only to understand branding, but also to understand how to integrate a focused brand strategy into your business or organization. And that's where the disconnect comes in. There are a lot of books on building brands, brand strategy, and branding initiatives — some very good, some not so good. The very good ones are usually those written by folks who have done branding for companies for years — the bad ones are usually way too academic and impractical.

But one thing I've noticed about most of these books is they tend to share one thing in common — very rarely are they targeted at small businesses. As I've mentioned before small businesses and organizations are a totally different animal. Sure, large corporations face challenges, but what I'm simply saying is that the challenges that small businesses face are unique. As a result, any ideas, strategies, and recommendations for small businesses or organizations must provide solutions to those unique challenges.

We'll look at those unique challenges shortly, but before we get too far along, I'd like to provide some definitions to help get us all on the same page.

Definitions

Small Business — According to the US Small Business Administration, a small business is defined as "*one that is independently owned and operated and which is not dominant in its field of operation.*" Additionally, the SBA offers ranges for

the size of small businesses, which varies across industries, but usually employs less than 100-150 employees.

For the sake of argument, when I mention small businesses or organizations, I am referring to organizations that are local in nature, employing less than 150 individuals, and will likely have annual sales under \$50million. For the remainder of the book I'll just use the term small business — keep in mind this also means organizations such as churches, non-profits, and professional companies such as medical practices, law firms, etc.

Brand — Marty Neumeier has said that a brand is a *"person's gut feeling about a product, service, or company."*¹ "The Dictionary of Brand" produced by the American Institute of Graphic Artists says that a brand is "A person's perception of a product, service, experience or organization."² They say basically the same thing, that a brand is what a person "thinks or feels" about something.

A brand is not a physical entity; it's a collection of visual images, experiences, emotions, and senses that define a person's collective opinion on the subject. Marty Neumeier in his book "The Brand Gap" has likened this collective opinion to a computer desktop. According to Neumeier a brand exists in your mind, and each brand that is on file in your mind has a "mental file name" that shows up on your computer's desktop. The bigger the brand — i.e. the more you know about it — the larger the file becomes.³

Let's take Starbucks for example. When you experience the Starbucks brand — maybe by walking into a Starbucks store, or sipping a cup of slightly-overpriced-but-elegant coffee you mentally "click" on the Starbucks file name in your mind. When it opens the various images, experiences, emotions, and senses are set free. You feel something and you react in a certain way. Whether the collective feeling

is positive or negative depends on a variety of reasons. As Neumeier has said, a good brand is worth "saving" on your desktop.

What's the key point to take away for small businesses? It's that small businesses tend to base their brand image on what the key decision maker thinks it is. In other words, the brand is what the small business owner defines it to be.

One of the most important aspects about a brand that we must remember is that a brand is not what YOU say it is...it's what THEY say it is. ⁴ Ultimately it doesn't matter what you think or believe about your businesses because you're not the one making the final decision whether or not to choose your brand. This is a key benchmark because your perspective on this issue will dramatically affect the decisions you make about your brand and about your business.

Branding — If you understand what a brand is it won't be difficult to understand the definition of branding. Branding is the practice to get people to think or feel a certain way about your brand. From these thoughts or feelings, consumers will make a decision whether or not to purchase, use, or interact with your brand.

Branding is done on the business-side, with the goal of driving the consumer somewhere. Remember a brand is not what you say it is, it's what your customers say it is. But you have a role to play in the images, experiences, and emotions each customer collects when interacting with your brand. Branding is everywhere, and you are always branding whether you realize it or not. That is why it is essential to have a focused brand strategy built around a central brand idea, otherwise the signals you send to your consumers will be jumbled at best and irrelevant at worst.

When someone clicks on their mental file of your brand, wouldn't you rather the first thing that pops up be the brand idea that you want them to have? The more

control you have over a person's mental image or "gut feeling" about your brand the more effective you will be in turning that consumer into a customer. That's branding, and that's why branding matters.

Modern Practices

Without delving into a comprehensive history of advertising and branding, we'll hit the most recent shifts in branding practices.⁵ At the turn of the century, products (brands) were defined more by individual features, what the product "*has*." Think about the automobile — the car was a relatively new invention, so each added feature was a key brand element. If Ford produced a car that would seat three individuals, Cadillac would produce a car that sat four — and the company's advertising and branding messages would vary accordingly.

By the 1920s, more and more products were hitting the market with the same features, and brands developed into more of what the product "*does*." For instance, let's say there were 10 major types of household sewing machines on the market during the 1940s all with similar features. But only Singer's latest model contained every popular stitch technique so all a housewife needed to do was flip a lever and the desired stitch would be produced on the garment.

By the 1950s brand strategists were positing their products around the experience, or what you'll "*feel*" by using this particular product. The 1950s and 1960s saw a major turn in advertising practice most notably in the boom of Madison Avenue. If you've ever read about advertising during this time or have even caught a recent episode of AMC's Emmy-winning show "Mad Men", you'll notice that advertising's main commodity was "feeling". Advertising executives sold feelings, not products. It wasn't that you stayed in a hotel, it was that you stayed in a Hilton hotel. It wasn't about drinking soda, it was about drinking Coca-Cola. It wasn't about products, it was about feelings associated with those products.

This form of branding morphed and evolved but mostly lasted until the 90s. By the turn of the millennium, another phenomenon was taking place among consumers — in an information, product, and consumption-soaked world it wasn't enough to simply "feel or offer something different". Consumers began to change their habits and loyalties to brands that they identified with. It was important for brand managers to build identities around brands that spoke to consumers individually. This stage of branding involves more of the brand's identity — what it "is."

Now, with the emergence of the internet and social media in particular we are aware of a major shift in consumer habits and practice. What once was a one-way conversation from brands to consumers is now much more a two-way conversation. It's a shift from a monologue to a dialogue where consumers interact with brands in much more tangible ways. Tools such as blogs allow anyone and everyone to have a voice online, and social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter open up profoundly new channels for brand interaction and conversation. It's no longer just about what your brand "is" but also how your brand "*interacts*" with your customers.

What does this mean in real terms? Well, if you're a company, it's not enough to create a new product. It's not enough to create a new product that "does" different things. And it's not even enough to create a new product that evokes certain emotions. Your product will only be successful if you can get your target customers to build an identity around the product that they trust, that matters to their daily life, and that offers experiences where your customers can interact with the brand.

Take BMW for example. For many, a BMW automobile is more than just a car (*what it has*) that offers certain features (*what it does*) and that looks rich and sophisticated (*feelings*). For most BMW owners, their car is part of their identity.

It's part of their lives because a BMW is more than just a car, it's a statement about the owner, and a reflection of their lifestyle. Furthermore, a BMW owner not only finds value in their identity that is made up in owning the car, but they also find value in being a part of a growing community of BMW owners. So you see how branding has evolved and how it's important for brands to keep a pulse on the market trends in order to effectively target consumers.

As I've mentioned before, when we think about brands and branding initiatives, more often than not we think on a large scale. Global brands come to mind, or Fortune 100 companies. Rarely, when we think about branding, do we think about small business. And if you're a small business owner, chances are you haven't thought about branding either.

Small businesses have a myriad of challenges to face, and frequently have to face these challenges without the safety net that many large corporations have. As a result, I often see businesses and business owners drop their branding efforts before anything else because this seems the easiest to cast off and pick back up again. This couldn't be further from the truth, and is detrimental to success and growth.

Misconceptions of Small Business

Remember those misconceptions I mentioned at the beginning? Here are the top 5 and some answers to those misconceptions:

- I don't need a brand, I've been in business for "X" amount of years.
- I don't have a "marketing" budget, so I can't do any branding.
- I have a logo, isn't that all I need?
- Times are tight so we're cutting back on our branding initiatives.
- I have a unique product that's different from anything else on the market. That's all I need.

Answers:

- And while your experience and longevity in the local market are powerful tools, you can't rely just on that. Plus, it may be a time for a re-brand initiative, especially if your brand is outdated and a bit dry.
- Branding and marketing are different; don't lump the two together. Marketing involves driving attention to your brand. Branding involves expanding your identity, differentiation, and relevance. Marketing can be seen as an expense, branding should be seen as an investment.
- According to Paul Rand, a logo is the ambassador of the brand, but it's not the brand itself. Just because you have a logo does not mean you've built a brand. The tip of the iceberg still needs a lot of iceberg underneath.
- When times are tight, branding initiatives and brand positioning strategy should be the highest priority. Position yourself to explode once the market rebounds.
- While a different, unique product is one step in the process, it must also be relevant to your customers. Clear Pepsi was different, but nobody cared about it, therefore it was taken off of the market. Your brand needs to be different and relevant to be successful.

Branding is Essential

The last thing your customers need is more information, or more products. The world is cluttered enough as it is — it's estimated that the average individual is bombarded with over 6,000 advertisements and marketing initiatives every day. It's no wonder that most of it goes in one eye or ear and out the other.

But just because there's "too much out there" doesn't negate the importance of developing a solid brand. In fact, that should be proof enough that a different, relevant brand identity is vital to your success in the marketplace. Because you're a small business, branding becomes even more important. How are you going to set yourself apart from hundreds of other competitors? How are you going to provide a product or service that is different? And how are you going to convince your customers that this product is relevant to their daily life and needs?

That's branding. If you're not concerned with that, than you're not concerned with growing your business. The single most important factor in growing your business is how you create, grow, and manage your brand presence.

Get A Brand Aid

So if you're a small business or organization and it's been a while since you've looked at your brand strategy, or if you realize you've never given any thought to developing your brand, now is the time. You don't have to do everything at once. Effective brand development takes time, and once a brand identity is created, it must be faithfully managed so it can successfully evolve. You need to craft a long-term brand strategy, where you set your priorities, figure out what needs to happen and when, and work to harness the various brand touchpoints that will help grow your business.

Every small business owner wants one thing — to grow their business. I would submit to you that by participating in an effective process that discovers, defines, and deploys proven strategies to grow your brand, will, in turn, make your business more successful. How do you accomplish this? Let's start with 3 keys to branding for small business.

Three Keys to Branding for Small Business

In an information-soaked world, it is more important than ever for any business or organization to employ an integrated and focused brand strategy in order to be successful. And this is no different for small businesses. In a small business or organization, rarely do you have the financial support, time, or recognition in the marketplace to simply "plod" along. In a world where thousands of companies and products are vying for consumers' attentions, it is vital to make sure you are positioning your product or service to cause consumers to choose you.

Remember, it does you no good to just offer your customers another choice — you have to offer them a better choice. You can do that by employing three primary branding strategies to your business:

1. You Must Be Different

When creating a product, or thinking about how to market a service, it's not enough to just "dive" into the marketplace. Remember, it's estimated that the average consumer is bombarded by over 6,000 marketing messages every day. It's no wonder then why consumers tend to develop habits that they stick with — especially when it comes to purchasing products or utilizing services. It's your job to shift these habits and loyalties over to your organization, and you do that first through differentiation.

You have to be different. In your particular industry (unless you've created the next lightbulb) there's probably several competitors within a 50 mile radius. More when you consider the range of the phone and the internet. So what makes you different? Why are you unique from your competitors? What sets you apart that will make your target market pay attention?

We'll get to this topic in more detail later, but here are some quick questions to ask about your brand difference:

- A) Identify your main competitors in your industry — what makes your products or services different from theirs?
- B) Why would John Q. Consumer want to use your products or services over your competitors?
- C) Make a list of how your products or services are similar to your competitors. Now make a list of how they are different. How can you positively exploit the differences to draw attention to your brand and away from your competitors?

2. You Must Be Relevant

As important as it is, you can't just be different. As I mentioned before it's not enough to offer your potential customers more choices — you have to offer them a better choice. Your brand must be relevant. Your brand has to matter to the consumer — otherwise, you may have the most unique product on the market, but nobody will buy it because you haven't done a good job convincing them WHY they should buy it.

Take Clear Pepsi for example. Pepsi came out with the product in the 1990s and it made a big splash initially because it was different. How could something taste like Pepsi but be clear? It was clearly (no pun intended) a unique product. But Pepsi missed one important part of the puzzle, and as a result, the brand flopped a short time later. They didn't make the product relevant. People didn't care. They figured, if it tastes like Pepsi, why not just drink Pepsi? Or maybe they liked Sprite better.

The bottom line is that Pepsi created a unique product that people just didn't care about. And it wasn't successful. In the same way, you have to position your brand in such a way so that people will care about it enough to shift their purchasing habits. It's a challenge, but a necessary one in order to achieve success.

We'll get to this topic in more detail later, but here are some quick questions to ask about your brand relevance:

- A) Why should consumers buy your product or use your service?
- B) What will make the average consumer shift their habits and loyalties from your competitors' brands to your brand?
- C) What will the average consumer "GET" out of your brand that they won't get out of others?
- D) Why can't the average consumer live WITHOUT your brand?

3. You Must Be Able to Evolve

Finally, in order to achieve lasting success, and to not end up just a flash in the pan, your brand must be able to evolve. The first step is to create a unique brand idea. The second step is to define why consumers can't live without your brand. The third is to develop a long-term strategy for growth that allows your brand to stay ahead of the curve, and evolve with the changing market trends and consumer demand.

We're seeing this firsthand in the auto industry. With higher gas prices, economic challenges, and changes in consumer tastes, the SUVs are shifting from a product of high demand to a product of low demand. Several SUVs are very unique products. And several companies have done a good job convincing the consumer why they should care about a particular brand of SUV. But how many of these companies will make the necessary changes for the brand to evolve? How will the changing market trends and consumer demands affect the long term success and failure of this industry — that will be determined by which brands successfully evolve.

In your small business or organization, you must think long term. You must employ strategies and initiatives that not only keep your brand in the forefront of your customers' minds from a unique and relevant perspective — they must see your brand as one that is not affected by change, but rather as one that AFFECTS change. You've got to be a trend setter, a leader, not a follower. It may be different from business to business, from industry to industry, but if you don't pay attention to the shifts in market demand, you'll find yourself with yesterday's news.

We'll get to this topic in more detail later, but here are some quick questions to ask about your brand evolution:

A) What are the changes in market trends and consumer demand that I see in my industry in the coming years?

B) How can I position my brand to embrace change and evolve during those shifts?

C) How can I embrace technology to help my brand evolve — this can include the web, new media, and social networking?

D) Where do I want to be in 5 years? How can I position my brand now in order to make sure my brand is still different, relevant, and evolutionary at that time?

In order to achieve lasting success for your brand, especially for small businesses and organizations, you must do your due diligence to create a different, relevant, and evolutionary brand strategy. And you must have all three — it's an all or nothing play. But if you work to create a brand strategy that effectively employs all three elements, you'll go far in positioning your brand for success.

NOTES:

1. The Brand Gap Visual Presentation, Marty Neumeier, 14
2. The Dictionary of Brand, Marty Neumeier
3. The Brand Gap, Marty Neumeier
4. The Brand Gap Visual Presentation, Marty Neumeier, 18
5. In this section, I draw heavily from Marty Neumeier's concepts found in The Brand Gap

02.

Discover Your Vision

What Is Vision

A vision is a clear picture of what you want to do and where you want to be.

Why Is Vision Important

It Provides Direction

John walked into an architecture firm on an early Friday morning to meet with one of the partners of the firm. John and his wife Mary were finally ready to build their dream house, one they've always wanted to live in. After pleasantries were exchanged the architect asked John what his vision was for the project. John replied, *"well it's our dream house...it's what we've always dreamed of"*. "Okay", the architect replied, *"but what exactly do you want it to look like?"* "We want it to be great, we want it to be everything we've always dreamed of", said John. *"Right, but I'll need a little more information than that"*, replied the architect. *"I can't design your house based on your dream. I need some direction to go on"*.

It's a bit tongue-in-cheek but you get the point — no one in their right mind would walk into an architect's office and demand a design without providing some sort of direction. Sadly, too many approach their businesses this way, without a clearly defined vision, which results in a lack of clear direction. Zig Ziglar has said *"You need a plan to build a house. To build a [business], it is even more important to have a plan or goal."* A proper vision provides direction for your business. Without a vision how do you know if the direction in which you're currently heading is the right one? Without a vision, how do you know if the decisions you're making are beneficial?

Gives Purpose

For the most part, the things we do in life are done for a purpose. Most of us don't do things just for the sake of doing them — at least on an ongoing basis. Let's

revisit John in the architect's office. The architect asks John why he wants to build his dream house. John could respond in one of two ways — first he could say something like, *"We're building our dream house because we can...we have the means and now we can do what we've always wanted."* Okay, that's all well and good, but the architect is going to find it difficult to build a purpose around constructing a house just because one can.

Alternatively, John could respond, *"We're building our dream house because we want to adopt several children from third-world countries and give them a home to live in"*. Wow, now there's a purpose you can get behind. All of a sudden every aspect of this project takes on a new identity. The architect can now wrap his mind around this clear purpose and vision, and as a result, his design of the home will be much more informed.

Not every vision needs to be as humanitarian as John's vision, but the principle still stands. Does your perspective change after hearing John's second response compared with his first response? Which statement do you think will result in a better designed, more "successful" project?

A carefully defined vision is important because it gives purpose to the actions that you take in your business.

Influences Practice

Let's continue on that same thought. If John's vision for his dream house is to construct a place where needy children can find a home, now the architect can begin to develop direction around the design of the house, and the entire project is surrounded by a sense of purpose. Additionally John's vision influences the practice or elements the architect might use in designing. For instance, the architect may decide he needs more bedrooms than a standard house would, larger bathrooms to accommodate the growing family, an expanded yard and

outdoor area so the kids can play, unique rooms such as a play room, media room, etc.

John's vision affects how the architect designs the house — the practice — because of the specificity of John's vision. John describes what he wants to do and where he wants to be — in a house with adopted children from needy areas — and as a result is able to better direct, give purpose to, and influence the practice of his vision.

You're probably not building a house, but let's say you're trying to design a new product to bring to market. The same principles can apply. Without a vision of what you want to accomplish with your product, you will have a hard time providing direction to your decisions, giving purpose to the countless hours you'll spend in development, and influencing the various practices to bring the product to market (i.e. a website or direct mail campaign? Sales team or video blog?).

Philip Knight, co-founder of Nike said of his vision for the company, "*We wanted Nike to be the world's best sports and fitness company. Once you say that, you have a focus. You don't end up making wing tips or sponsoring the next Rolling Stones world tour.*" Because Knight and others in Nike had a defined vision, they were able to clearly lead and grow the company.

Define Your Vision

So we know that a carefully defined vision is important because it provides direction to our decisions, gives purpose to our actions, and influences our practice. Let's get a little more practical and talk about three important elements that make up a properly defined vision:

1. You Must Be Passionate

If you're a business owner, product designer, or key decision maker, you have to be passionate about your vision. You must carry the banner because you may be the only one who can effectively articulate your vision. Additionally, if you're not passionate about your own vision, no one is going to be passionate about it.

When John F. Kennedy announced to the nation that his vision was to put a man on the moon before 1970, he captivated the American people with his passion. Imagine the nation's response had he delivered his speech with the same gusto as Ben Stein in the movie "Ferris Beuller's Day Off". (Remember that part, when students are falling asleep left and right as the professor drones on about the Smoot-Hawley Tariff and the Great Depression...*"Anybody...Anybody?"*)

Passion is contagious and if you are passionate about your vision chances are you'll get others to be passionate about it as well. Your vision may not seem very grand to you, in the same sense as perhaps Kennedy's vision was. But that doesn't mean you can't be passionate about it.

2. Keep It Real

While passion is essential, it's always good to have a helpful dose of reality from time to time. Keep in mind, a realistic vision doesn't have to mean a mediocre vision. Kennedy's vision was far from mediocre, and it was a "giant leap for mankind" to be sure. But he was confident enough in the knowledge and drive of those involved in the project to get the job done.

It's important to be realistic in your vision because your vision needs to be attainable, otherwise it wouldn't be a vision, it would be a dream. But something that's attainable doesn't mean it has to have already been attained. Or just because something has always been done a certain way doesn't mean your vision has to call for the same process. I've found the best dose of reality usually comes

from those who care more for you personally than they do about your vision. This can be a spouse, a loved one, or a really close friend/colleague. You want to stay grounded, but not at the expense that you can't look above what's already been done.

3. Keep It Simple

The simpler your vision is the more attainable it will be. The more complex your vision is, the easier it will be to become bogged down in the details. But a simple vision doesn't mean an easy vision. Kennedy's vision was far from easy (putting a man on the moon), but it was simple enough that the American people could understand it, and simple enough that those around him could develop it.

If I could only speak one thought to every client I have worked with and will work with in the future, I would say this: simplify. Simplify your plan, simplify your strategy, simplify your design, simplify your vision. In our businesses it is rare that we ever get to the point of being too simple — in fact, we typically err on the side of the complex.

When it comes to your vision, be bold, be visionary, be passionate, be real — but above all be simple. This will allow you to easily remember your vision, easily communicate your vision, easily empower others to get onboard, and easily equip others to help you reach your goals.

Application: Develop Your Vision

This book is meant to be practical, and we're including elements from our branding process that we've used with our clients for several years. The next section contains a variety of questions and exercises that will help you craft a vision statement for your business or organization. We hope it proves fruitful and effective for you.

Answer the following questions about your business, brand, or idea. Do your best to answer them based on your vision for your business, not based on your current status.

1. What do you want to do in your business, brand, or idea?
2. Where do you want to be eventually with your business, brand or idea?
3. Where do you want to be in the next year? 5 years? 10 years?
3. What constitutes a "success" when it comes to your business, brand, or idea?
4. In an ideal world with no limits, what do you want to accomplish?
5. List 5 key values that make up your business, brand, or idea.
6. Please describe your business, brand, or idea as you envision it (not what it is currently)
7. Now describe your business, brand, or idea in only one sentence (50 words or less)
8. Now describe your business using only keywords (10 words or less)

Now compare your answers from above to the current state of your business, brand, or idea.

1. Are there any differences between what you currently are doing and what you want to do?
2. Are there any areas in your business that you would view as barriers/ hindrances to attaining your vision for your business? Describe these barriers.
3. What are the current limitations that you are facing in your business that is affecting your ability to attain your vision?
4. Are you compromising on your values in any way? Describe.
5. Does the current description of your business match the ideal description of your business that you wrote above?

Application: Crafting a Vision Statement

Now craft a vision statement for your brand, business, or idea. A couple of things to remember: a vision statement needs to be simple and concise, ideally no more than one sentence. Additionally your vision statement should encompass with some specificity what you want to do, who you want to be, or where you want to go.

We've also found it helpful to start a vision statement with the words, "*To Become*".