



2007 Brand Notes – Number One

Choosing a Brand Consultancy

Engaging a brand consulting firm to assist in brand naming, strategy, or ideation is something most companies don't do that often, rarely have done before, and have little idea what to look for when doing so. Whether your ultimate choice is Brand Counsel, LLC or one of our fine competitors, here are a few things you may wish to consider:

Look at Creative and Intellectual Depth, Not Just Brands

While past client work can be illustrative, you might be surprised at how much work remains under Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA) and will never appear on a client list. Our industry has become Brand Forward, listing every accumulated brand they've ever worked on – even those at prior firms, or even if they just worked on a piece of it.

A much better factor in determining a good fit is the creative and intellectual fit you sense with the firm. Like-mindedness is a huge element in this business – will they reflect your values, or simply push their own? The president of one firm in our industry, whose sales force makes 20,000 sales calls per month, had an interesting job prior: selling pagers.

You Pay For It, Whether You Get It Or Not

The larger the firm, the higher the overhead – there's just no way around it. There are two ways to approach a branding project – fly in a team from the outside to lead things, or fly in a few (or one) (or virtually) who will facilitate from within and uncover your strengths and positioning. The end result may be the same – but the end invoice will be much more palatable.

*Most of your brand's knowledge lies within, not without.
A great branding firm will help you discover it.*

Price May Not Always Be A Sole Indicator Of Quality

Within certain parameters, you may find brand project pricing all over the map. And the major part of the puzzle – the ‘team back at the home office’ – is something you may never even see or have the opportunity to evaluate. It’s a little scary how many firms use new undergrads with zero branding experience as team leads on their projects. These same firms have embraced the panache of branding to charge \$100,000 + for a brand name, some simple translation work, a cursory trademark search, and a few logos.

In this business, getting what you actually pay for can be easier said than done. Ask a lot of questions, probe into the background of the project team, and don’t be swayed by the coolness factor if it’s unsupported by solid intellectual capital. Look for sharp people who really get you, your firm, your brands, and have a depth of branding experience.

Creative Control Is On Your Dime, Not Theirs

There are unlimited ways to approach the branding process, and they all work in some context. The real question is, ‘will it work in mine?’. Be careful if process takes center stage, or if eclectic outweighs interaction. While we’re working on certification in this industry, my cat can call herself a brand strategist if her website converts traffic. Proven processes are great things, but flexibility on the leading edge of culture is key.

They Either Get It, or They Don’t

Part of the growth of brand strategists and branding firms over the past decade is the growth of new products, but it also has a lot to do with the high margins of our industry. Nothing wrong with a profit, of course, but trust your intuition in selecting a firm. Is your ‘Account Manager’ really a salesman, or a seasoned agency veteran? Do they quote ‘the 4 P’s’ as if we haven’t actually invented more? Do they pronounce David Aaker’s last name as ‘acre’? If so, run *really fast* in the exact opposite direction.

And Finally, A Few Light-Hearted Factors ...

Do their animals/children have really boring names? My cats: Aimee Aimee Fluffinuffulous and Tiasyn Telvande. Top that, Spot, Ginger, and Fluffy.

Do they spend more money on books every month than food? Why not?

Do they think that Maytag Blue Cheese is really a Sears Roebuck product?

Does their own branding, well, just not do it for you? The most important branding project they’ve ever undertaken, and all they came up with was *that*? Two names of dead people, names of people who never even existed in the first place, or a group of monkeys? Monkeys? You’re paying that much to work with *monkeys*?

Questions? Comments? jgregory@brandcounselllc.com **704-806-6567**