THE TECH BEAT I BY JAMES HARDING

Brand Back Together

f I sing, "Ba Da Ba Ba, I'm lovin' it!" which company am I singing about? What if I say, "Have it Your Way?" What do you ask for when you want a facial tissue or an adhesive bandage?

The most successful companies in the world spend millions each year burning their brands into our minds. Why? Because they know buyers are more likely to purchase items that feel familiar and easy to understand. It's called "cognitive fluency." Luckily for us, cognitive fluency can be an independent retailer's secret weapon.

> If we can make our stores feel familiar, we can pull customers from big-box retailers and build solid brand recognition in our communities.

When was the last time *you* did an unbiased business branding review? Here are five simple ways you can refocus and get the brand back together:

STABILIZE YOUR GRAPHIC IDENTITY. Every business needs a consistent graphic identity, including a logo, set of fonts, colors and design philosophy. This will dramatically improve the effectiveness of your marketing by making your store instantly recognizable to your client base. Once you establish your graphic identity, make sure everything your business does adheres to that design philosophy. You want people to instantly associate your business cards, YouTube videos and website with your store.

Consistency across all channels is key to building a strong brand identity

UPDATE YOUR WEBSITE. The majority of your clients will visit your website before your store. Does it adequately represent the look and feel of your company? Does it influence people to contact you? Do your customers get the same service and support online they would get if they came into your store? Don't be afraid to give information about your products and services

to online shoppers. If they find your website helpful, they'll contact you. If they don't, they'll contact your competition.

REMERCHANDISE YOUR STORE. Make sure your store "looks" like your website and promo material. If you're featuring certain products online, place them in strategic locations around your store and include "as seen online" signs to further unify the experience.

Your store should fulfill all of the promises your website makes and demonstrate your business's "personality" everywhere.

CLEAN UP YOUR INVENTORY. Make sure your inventory mix is consistent with your company's mission. If you carry pianos, all your pianos should be clean, in tune and ready to demonstrate. If that's not feasible, consider carrying fewer instruments to make sure the in-store experience meets your customers' expectations. It's better to carry fewer brands with integrity than to carry a ton of instrument brands that don't make sense together.

INSPIRE YOUR TEAM. People are the heart of every branding effort. Make sure your team is inspired to wear company colors, name tags and the smile you'd expect from a store that wanted to earn your business. By just inspiring your team, you'd be surprised how much your business will grow!

Always think about your brand — especially when you're trying to stretch your advertising dollars. Review your branding efforts this summer and make sure your clients are ready to "turn on the fun" with you. **MI**

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