

BRANDING AND VALUE PROPOSITION PRIMER FOR 2017

(Jake Sorofman)

SUMMARY

Brands that outperform peers share a common set of characteristics including a focused growth strategy, strong value proposition and differentiated positioning. Our research provides marketing leaders insight and best-practice advice on what it takes to build and nurture a world-class brand.

Scope

Gartner defines a brand as the combination of elements, including name, logo, positioning, stories and experiences, that differentiate a company and its offerings in increasingly competitive markets.

The agenda for branding and value proposition development focuses on:

- Developing a brand positioning that emphasizes clear points of differentiation and connects with customers through the articulation of resonant, powerful shared values
- Managing brand architecture and rebranding efforts to ensure alignment to a distinctive brand promise and delivery on a consistent and compelling customer experience
- Creating breakthrough brand messaging and brand storytelling to create engaging narratives
- Boosting executive confidence around the importance of brand-building investments and the potential for returns



A brand is the combination of elements that differentiate a company and its offerings.

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ANALYSIS

Marketing leaders seeking to build a world-class brand must begin with a strategy and architecture that ensures the brand speaks with a clear, compelling, coherent and consistent voice, and ensures that promises made are promises kept. Your brand is not about your logos and mission statement. It's the sum of all of the experiences you deliver both before and after the sale; the differentiation and relevance of your value proposition; and, crucially, the agreement between the two. The value you promise must correspond with the value you deliver to your customer.

Nike. Amazon. Coca-Cola. Google. These are examples of iconic, world-class brands. What do they have in common? They weren't created by accident. These and other great brands are the product of deliberate and coordinated efforts. They begin with a relevant, resonant and differentiated promise, and efforts to ensure this brand promise shows up in the lives of their customers at the right times and in the right ways.

Figure 1. Branding and Value Proposition Overview



Source: Gartner (July 2017)



The value you promise must correspond with the value you deliver.

Top Challenges and How Gartner Can Help

Gartner's 2017 research agenda on branding and value propositions will help marketing leaders forge a path to brand leadership with best-practice research, insight and advice based on the community knowledge of some of the best brand marketers in the world. Through a combination of primary research, case study examples, Toolkits, templates and how-to advice, Gartner will help you solve the most pressing branding, positioning and messaging challenges.

How do I define and deliver against a brand strategy and architecture?

Branding is often mistaken as a soft discipline, more art than science. But the best brand marketers are hardly gut-feel operators. They rely on both quantitative and qualitative data-driven insights — to integrate signals from the marketplace with drivers of the business. They have a clear strategy for their brand portfolio, which begins with its purpose, its differentiated value and a well-designed architecture to support distinct customer needs, messages and storylines. They also have a well-designed brand architecture. Are you a branded house or a house of brands? Your branding efforts should be accretive to overall company value, ensuring that a family of brands doesn't compete for internal resources and/or customer attention. Finally, brand management must be a closed-loop discipline, ensuring that you've defined the right key performance indicators and metrics, and have access to the right data and analytics to measure, optimize and continue to invest in maintaining brand health over time.

Planned research

- **How to identify the right brand architecture for your business:**
As companies bring increasingly complex offers and portfolios to market, marketing leaders struggle to build successful brand architectures. This research will showcase different types of brand architecture and their associated benefits.
- **Make the business case for brand-building investments:**
Many marketers still struggle to justify investment in development and management of corporate brands. This research will provide the core components of a business case for branding and help marketers convince executives to buy into and invest in a specific strategy or project.



Branding efforts should be accretive to overall company value.

How do I create memorable and differentiated value propositions, messages and stories?

Breakthrough brand messaging must extend well beyond functional benefits. Leading brand marketers boost their offers' relevance by enabling customers to see themselves in brand stories. Messages speak to range of benefits, intrinsic and extrinsic, that will accrue to the prospective buyer. Offers focus not on what you have on the truck to sell but on the role your products and services will play in your customers' lives.

For B2B companies, marketers must combine functional, business and personal needs to encourage key individuals to advocate on behalf of a specific supplier and its value proposition. For B2C companies, a values-based brand position that considers brand differentiators, emotional appeal, cultural trends and influencer appeal can boost commercial results and motivate consumers to amplify key messaging.

Planned research

- **How to find your brand story:** Marketing leaders know that capturing their customers' imagination depends on compelling and distinctive stories, differentiated positioning, and clear and coherent messaging. This research will show you how to find your brand's voice, value and storylines.
- **How to position your brand effectively today:** Gartner research finds that marketing leaders who use a value-based positioning are nearly twice as likely to be as high-performing as their peers. This research features the four elements of a shared value and includes best-practice case examples.



Focus not on what you have to sell, but on the role your products and services will play in your customers' lives.

How do I turn a brand vision and strategy into action?

Leading organizations are good stewards of their brands. They minimize the risks of deviation from its intended positioning by engaging employees in brand development and deployment while also setting out clear guidelines and governance structures to maintain consistency and compliance over time. They use data to define and optimize an advertising strategy to drive brand awareness and actively monitor ongoing performance by measuring brand equity, sentiment and lift. At the same time, they keep a close eye on the customer experience to ensure agreement between the brand promise and how that promise shows up in the lives of customers. Brands today must also consider how customers' digital preferences, behaviors and conversations can shape a brand. They must also thoughtfully design messages and stories that will scale through earned and shared media, and anticipate where customers may take brand stories in a new direction.

Planned research

- **How to monitor brand alignment and pinpoint opportunities for improvement:** Digitally driven experiences create an infinite number of possible brand interactions for today's customers. Learn how to use a brand-focused framework to hone improvement efforts and identify the most critical priorities.
- **How to tap into natural conversation scale:** As marketers struggle with the economics of promoting brand messaging through paid media, earned and shared media can present interesting alternatives. Learn how to design brand messaging that quickly scales by tapping into customers' existing interests and priorities.



Use data to define and optimize an advertising strategy.

GARTNER RECOMMENDED READING

Suggested First Steps

- [“How to Find Your Story: Understanding Positioning, Messaging and Brand Storytelling”](#)

Essential Reading

- [“Use Brand Strategy to Guide Advertising Planning”](#)
- [“Navigating the Intelligent Brand Framework”](#)
- [“Build a Content Supply Chain to Tell Your Brand’s Story Every Day”](#)
- [“Optimize Messaging’s Role in Your Mobile Marketing Strategy”](#)
- [“How to Build Segments and Personas for Digital Marketing”](#)

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Evidence

For this research, we gathered information on trends using analyses of Gartner’s client interactions, primary research conducted by the authors, and conversations with Gartner clients and other individuals.