

# BRAND BLUEPRINT

**Use Market Research to Understand Your Markets.  
Use Brand Research to Understand Your Customers.**

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## Use Market Research to Understand Your Markets. Use Brand Research to Understand Your Customers.

Senior executives engage in market research when they are seeking to quantify demand for their current products and potential demand for their new products.

These same executives should engage in brand research when they want to learn how their best customers perceive them, why those customers choose them over competing brands, and how to express their brand universally and crisply across all print and electronic media.

If market research is about benchmarking demand in the marketplace, then brand research is about creating differentiation in the mind of the customer. If market research is about identifying new products and services, then brand research is about why customers choose to purchase those new products. Finally, if market research is about determining price elasticity, then brand research is about commanding a premium price.

There are many firms offering market research. This research is typically quantitative, employing telephone, email and mail surveys. Sometimes this research is bundled with advertising services. Sometimes it is conducted by an online marketing agency leveraging the traffic coming to your website. Most often, market research is provided by companies that specialize in quantitative research have expertise in specific industries.

Firms offering brand research specialize in building, strengthening and extending brands. They are subject matter experts. Brand research is qualitative, employing one-on-one interviews with your most desirable customers and, when and where appropriate, utilizing focus groups.

Brand and market research are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes, by simultaneously employing both brand and market research, you can develop a multi-dimensional perspective of your business and your customers.

### When to Conduct Brand Research

There are five discrete moments in the life of a company when the new knowledge obtained from brand research provides competitive advantage.

#### *New Company. New Brand.*

When companies are launched, brand research is conducted to first define the competitive set as it exists in the minds of the target customer and then to understand how to position the new brand in that set.

#### *Existing Company. Brand Elasticity.*

When companies want to offer a new product or service, they need to determine whether the customer will allow the brand to travel from the existing products to the new products. For example, when the Caterpillar Corporation wanted to move from heavy road grading equipment to footwear, brand research informed their decision-making.

#### *Merging Companies. Brand Architecture.*

When two companies merge, they develop a business strategy. Similarly, when two brands merge, they need to develop a brand architecture that defines how the two brands will retain their current customers and attract new customers.

#### *Managing Companies. Managing Brands.*

As companies mature, they seek business consultants to provide expertise in areas ranging from pricing strategies, to developing supply chains, to defining organizational structures. When companies seek to

maintain the health and welfare of their brands, they should engage brand strategists to: develop brand-marketing plans that identify and measure customer choice; create new tag lines and logos; inform the development of Standard Guides that ensure universal expression of the brand; conduct 'brand coaching' with both executives (so that they become the stewards of their brand) and customer-facing employees (so that they become managers of their brand).

#### *Revitalizing Companies. Rejuvenating Brands.*

As markets change and customer needs evolve, companies often lose their most profitable customers to new competitors. As their offerings become commodities, their brands become diluted. In essence, both their business and their brands have lost their meaning and relevance to their target customers. Brand strategists can identify the remaining equity in the diminished brand. Next, they can define the new brand promise. Finally, they can reposition the brand to its target customers.

#### **What You Should Learn by Conducting Brand Research**

If any research is to have value, it must provide new knowledge and be actionable. So it is with brand research. Below are five critical success questions that brand research informs.

- **Why do customers choose you over competing brands?** Knowing this enables you to focus on the skills that help you make and keep your promise to the customer.
- **Are you competing in the right category?** To be clear, an example of a category is laptop computers. A brand in that category is Dell. Knowing in which category you compete in the mind of your most profitable customer enables you to strengthen your position in that category. You can strengthen that position by better delivering the benefits your customer receives when they choose you.
- **What specific new products and services can you offer?** Old Coke will not travel to new coke. Yet Virgin can travel from the entertainment industry to the travel industry to the soft drink industry. Brand research will identify the current state of your brand in the minds of your customers and what specific steps are required to move your brand to the desired future state.
- **What are the sources of trust employed by a customer when choosing a company like yours?** When making a buying decision, customers seek out trusted sources, such as colleagues, experts, the Internet or advertising. Brand research can identify those sources and the ways in which your customer prefers to interact with these sources.
- **What are the key messages that resonate with your most profitable customers?** Brand research will provide the specific messages that influence customers. These messages should create differentiation and describe the benefits of ownership.

#### **Harnessing New Knowledge**

Three hundred years ago, Descartes stated, "Knowledge is power." In today's rapidly shifting business and brand landscape, where entire industries can evolve overnight, it is appropriate to paraphrase Descartes and say, "Knowledge of the customer is power."

Brand research can enable your company to discover that new knowledge and learn how to harness that power.

### *About the Authors*

Messrs. Levinson, Benson, and Allison are principals of Brand Blueprint, a Brand Consultancy located in Boston, MA. Their key areas of expertise include, respectively, brand positioning, brand strategy and visual expression.

CEOs, CMOs and other marketing leaders turn to Brand Blueprint when they seek to reposition, fortify or simply update their brand.

Collectively, Brand Blueprint principals have over sixty years of experience advising category-leading brands such as Allstate, Bose, DeBeers, Disney, General Electric, Gillette, JP Morgan/Chase, Pitney Bowes, Rolls Royce, Seagram and Staples.

For more information, please visit [www.brandblueprint.com](http://www.brandblueprint.com).



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