

When to work on your brand

Is it worth the cost and effort to change or improve your brand?

BRANDING SCORECARD

	YES	NO
1. Do you look similar to your competitors?		
2. Do prospects in large companies overlook you?		
3. Do you lack marketplace reach without the sales force?		
4. Does it cost too much to attract new customers?		
5. Does what your employees say or how they act fail to live up to your brand?		
6. Do you have to compete on price more than you want to?		

If you answered yes to any of these questions, maybe it's time to change or improve your brand.

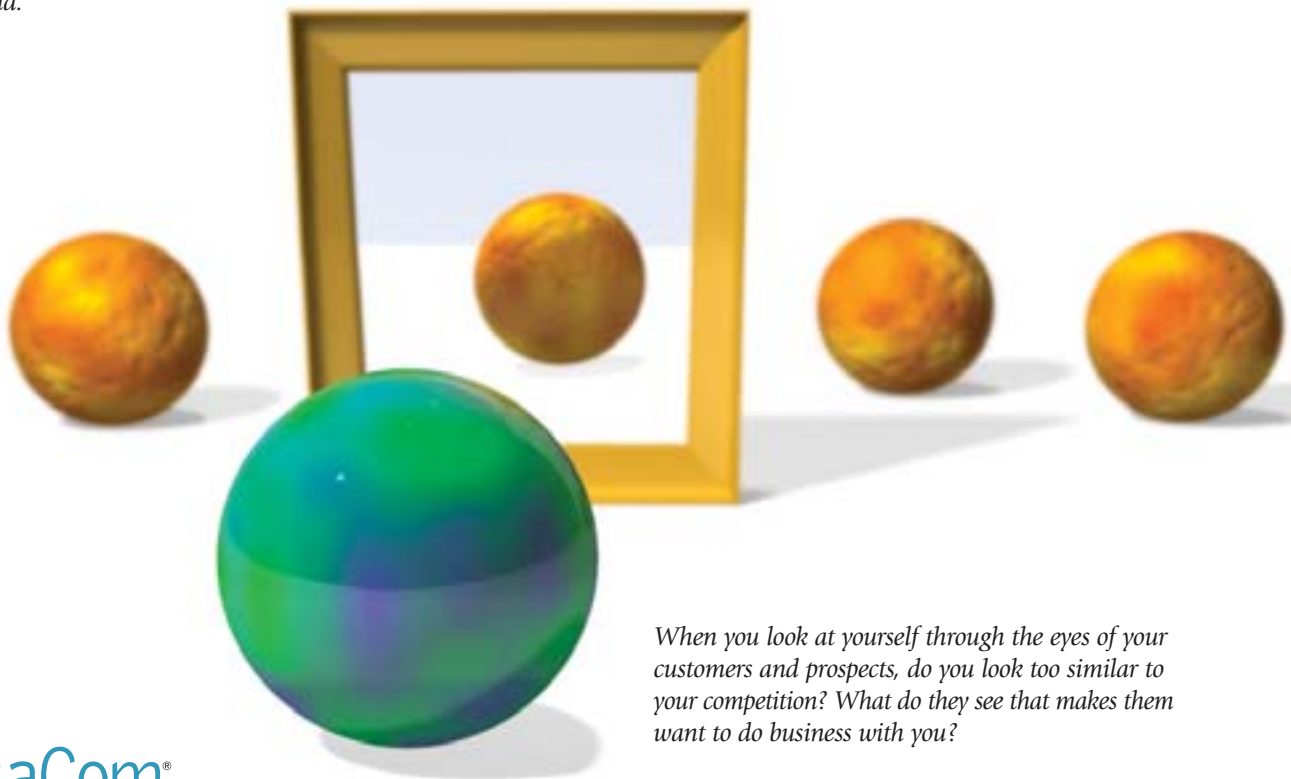
There's lots of talk about branding. What a brand is. How to build a brand. The link between your brand and how customers relate to your offering. If you've heard all this before, maybe now you're wondering what to do about it. How do you know when to spend the time, effort and budget on branding?

If you knew what other companies did to work on their brands, maybe it would help you decide what to do. But it's often difficult to gain this type of insight. Here's a sneak peek into the way some marketing executives have approached branding. If you find yourself in these situations, you could probably benefit from changing or improving your brand.

Six indicators to use to know when to work on your brand

1. When you look too similar to your competitors. That makes you just like everybody else. Then you're average. Average is average. How difficult will it be to get new customers and increase market share being average? To be above average or different, you can't look, act, or sound like others. Branding can help you look different and stand out.

(See the back for more indicators.)



When you look at yourself through the eyes of your customers and prospects, do you look too similar to your competition? What do they see that makes them want to do business with you?

What makes a good brand?

Just building a brand isn't always enough to set you apart from the competition. Having a good brand helps you look different. So what makes a brand good? When the brand is:

- **Durable.** You can live with your brand for a long time with some tweaks along the way. With a good brand, there's no need for a re-vamp every year or even three.
- **Accurate.** The brand reflects what you do and who you are. Customers and prospects will quickly discover a false presentation of what you stand for.
- **Understandable.** Your brand is very, very easy to understand. Audiences quickly and easily recognize what you do. Who you're for. Why you're different. And why you're better.
- **Interesting.** What makes a brand interesting? When the brand spends as much effort as possible talking about the customer or prospect. Many brands only talk about themselves. And that's often boring.
- **Consistent.** Without consistency, you lose the power of frequency in branding. If audiences see a different brand presentation each time, they'll likely feel confused.

Six indicators to use to know when to work on your brand *(continued)*

2. **When prospects in large corporations look past you.** Think of the decision-makers in large corporations you're targeting. They're usually in risk-avoidance mode. A well-crafted and presented brand makes you a safer choice. Why? People in larger companies tend to want to work with other companies with strong brands. It's defensible. It's safer.
3. **When you want marketplace reach without relying just on the sales force.** Lots of marketing and sales tools can help you reach into the marketplace. If you only use the sales force, you're somewhat at its mercy. You have to depend on your sales reps to have a good day to improve your marketplace reach. By using a marketing mix, you can use a number of tools to build a strong marketplace presence.
4. **When it costs too much to recruit new customers.** Effective branding is a process. It involves leading a customer or prospect through a series of milestones toward product adoption. In each step they travel (shown below), some marketing tools are more effective than others. For example, sales reps can play a big role in getting customers to try a new product. But mass communications are more cost-effective at creating initial awareness and interest.



Looking at branding as a system or process can improve the efficiency of adding new customers.

5. **When your employees don't understand or live up to your brand.** Companies don't always tell employees what they're all about. So employees come up with their own interpretation. Sometimes that matches up to the company's brand. And sometimes it doesn't. Explaining what your brand means helps employees live up to the brand in what they say and how they act. To see how this works, do a little test with your people who have public contact. Have them answer two questions in one sentence or less:
 - What do you do?
 - Who are you for?

Do you think their answers would match up to yours? Do you think your employees understand your brand? You might find the answers surprising.
6. **When you find yourself having to compete on price more than you want to.** If competing brands aren't well differentiated, price becomes the deciding factor. Customers purchase on price when they can't recognize the value-added benefits of one brand over another. Effective branding equals better communications. The goal: charge a higher price without changing the product.