Online Branding 101

5 Mistakes That Can Kill Your Start-Up

SJ STARTUP UNIVERSITY

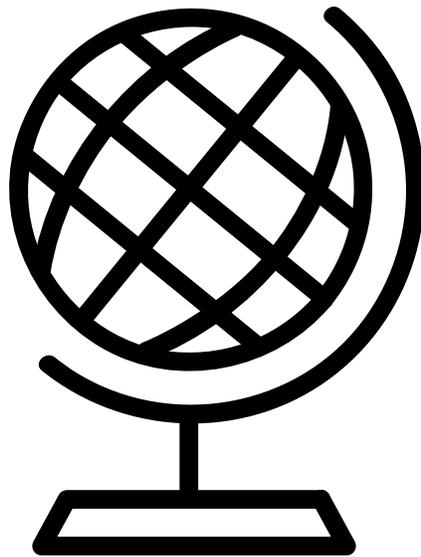# LEARN

The Basics to Get Started

Branding is an abstract concept that is easily misunderstood. It's often mistaken for your logo, your products, or service. But branding is much more than that. It's entwined with every aspect of your business. Whether you realize it or not.

Even if you're not consciously working on your brand image, you still have one. It's your customers and potential customers perception of you, whether good or bad.

Branding is Essential – Because You Are Your Brand

Unfortunately, many small start-ups assume branding is just a *big business* issue. Big brand names like McDonalds, Marlboro, Levi's and Nike all conjure an image in your head. Global brands have huge management teams that oversee every aspect of their brands image. They want you to connect their brand name with something positive so you'll buy their product.

For smaller start-ups, brand management may seem like something you'll do *someday*. A vague date in the future after you've established your business. But the biggest branding mistake you can make is not realizing that branding starts on day one. And if you're an entrepreneur, you essentially are your brand. Everything you do and say, plus every piece of content you publish, is a representation of your brand.

Brand management is not just for businesses, but all entrepreneurs. [Chris Guillebeau](), [Pat Flynn](), [Jeff Goins](), and [Jenny Blake]() have all grown their personal brands into thriving businesses. These are great examples of "you are your brand". They know their brand image is their bread and butter. They leverage their reputation to grow their business, and they understand they must project a certain image to increase the success of their brand.

Branding mistakes can kill your new business, or certainly damage it if you don't understand the important role branding plays. To build a professional brand for your start-up, avoid theses common branding mistakes.

1. Clipart Logo

One of the biggest misconceptions is that your brand is the same thing as your logo. Branding isn't your logo, but a visual representation of you. Branding is the perception behind your logo. It should be professional, not a common stock image.

Many small start-ups can't afford to hire a graphic designer. So they simply use a random clipart picture for their logo. Never use a common clipart pic to visually represent your brand. It's not special if everyone can use it. Instead, use your business name in simple letters until you can afford the real thing.

2. No Website

In this day and age, there is no excuse for not having a website. Google receives over [2 million queries per minute](#)! Customers expect businesses to have a website. Without a website, your business simply seems like a hobby or side job.

Some new businesses turn to Facebook or Twitter as a cheap alternative to a website. But this isn't enough to showcase your business. Thankfully, there are free and affordable options to build a strong web presence. For example, you can create free websites at [Weebly](#) and [Jimdo](#). These simple platforms can give you a professional brand image, without investing a lot of money.

You can also create free ecommerce stores with [Selz](#) and [Square](#). If you have a product or service to sell, these sites allow you to create a professional looking website for free. They simply charge a small percentage of the sale. These sites are easy to use and you don't need any special technical skills. It's a great way to showcase your brands image while increasing online sales.

3. Inconsistent Messaging

Your brand's message is any post, tweet, status update, advertisement, business card or press release. It's every piece of content you publish about your business. Your brand message should represent the core values of your business. For example, hardworking, dedicated, professional, or expertise – whatever message you want to convey the most.

This doesn't mean that you simply copy the same message into every piece of content. Rather, it means the intent of every message should be aligned. If your brand's core value is sustainability and social responsibility, then every new message should reflect these ideals. [Lush](#) and [The Body Shop](#) are two great examples of consistent messaging across all platforms.

4. Controversial Social Media Use

Love it or hate it, social media is here to stay. It can be a great way to showcase a brand, or it can be a nightmare. Many major brands have fallen prey to inappropriate social media use, including recent blunders by [Royal Dutch Airlines](#) and [Home Depot](#).

For new start-ups, the lesson is clear - it's okay to use social media as long as it sticks with your brand's core values. These are probably not the same as your personal values. Controversial issues spread like wildfire on the Internet, including same-sex marriage, medical marijuana, or supporting a specific political party. These are all polarizing issues that can have a direct impact on your brand's image.

Before proclaiming your personal views on social media, be aware that you could damage your brand's image. You are connected directly to your brands image. Before you hit send, be sure it's an issue you're willing to lose customers over.

5. Unprofessional Business Practices

Everyone has run into unprofessional business practices – not returning phone calls, showing up late to meetings, or ignoring problems. It can be annoying and frustrating, and can make customers run to your closest competitor.

All businesses are different. But there is always some type of transaction between the business and customer. Every step, from the first inquiry to any follow-up services, should be professional. Return emails and phone calls in a timely manner. Promptly address any problems or mistakes. Take responsibility and try to correct any adverse situation to the best of your ability.

You want your start-up to be perceived as valuable and credible. Not as a brand that is synonymous with unprofessional, time-wasting, or egomaniacal.

Manage Your Brand From Day One!

Having a strong, professional business brand is essential to the success of your new start-up. You could leave it up to chance, and let your brand image grow by itself. But that's a crapshoot.

Instead, start managing your brand image from day one. Consciously create the brand you want to project. Don't fall prey to common branding mistakes, but make choices every day that help grow your business into the brand you want to become.
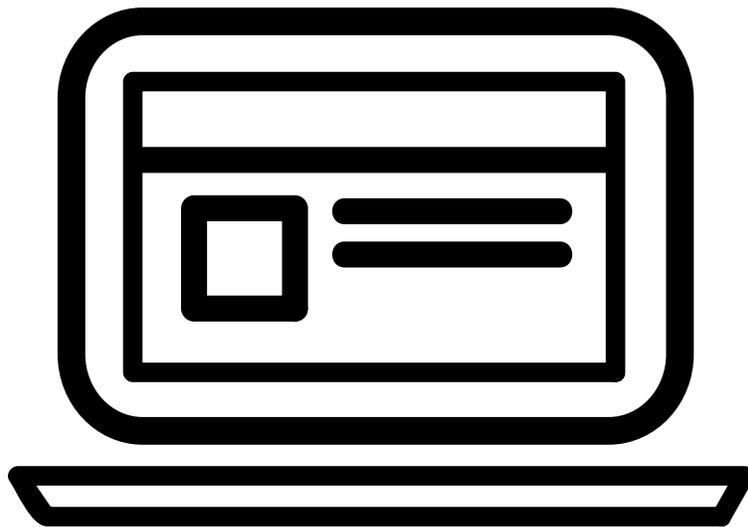
Branding is perception and reputation. Start with listing what values are most important to you. Create a set of unbreakable rules that guide your business. And never forget that you are the equivalent of your brand image.

Make sure it's an image that will help grow your start-up, not damage it.

HELP

Time-Saving Resources

Canva is one of the best small business sites ever. It allows you to create stunning graphics (the kind that used to cost hundreds of dollars) free or $1!

You can create logos, social media headers (including Facebook & Twitter), Pinterest & Instagram graphics, presentations, and a wide variety of advertising.

Weebly is a one stop shop website builder that will get your business website beautiful and running in minutes. It's drag and drop and you can get started for free. Don't pay thousands on a professional to build your website, you can do it yourself with our walkthrough and review.

Build your free website with Weebly.

Jimdo is another great option for building your business website. Just like Weebly, it is a drag and drop solution that requires zero technical skills and the need to hire an expensive developer. If you're looking for simplicity, Jimdo is where you'll get it.

Build your free website with Jimdo.

If you're looking to get serious and have an fully loaded ecommerce store, Shopify is hands down your best option. With over 100 SEO-friendly website templates to choose from, simple pricing, and an easy to use interface, you'll be blown away.

Try Shopify with your 14 day free trial.

section 3

START

Steps to Take Today

4 Action Steps to Take Today

1. Build a website if you don't have one

Try [Weebly](#) or [Jimdo](#) first if you don't have any experience.

2. Create a consistent visual message across all platforms

Use [Canva](#) to create a consistent representation across every social media platform you choose.

3. Create your brand's message

You don't have to make some traditional mission statement (but that's not a bad idea). Rather, figure out what you want your brand to stand for. Read Lush's [We Believe](#) for inspiration.

4. Create a set of branding rules – and stick to them!

Each business is different, but you'll have your own unique set of steadfast rules you'll never break.