



# 6 Steps to Effectively Launch a New Brand

# 6 Steps to Effectively Launch a New Brand

Your team has done all the homework, really deep thinking and soul-searching.

You know that your brand is about more than your logo and your colors. It's about what makes you different—how you distinguish yourself from your competitors.

In your mind, Robin Fisher Roffer's mantra (in the book *Make a Name for Yourself*) "if you don't brand yourself, someone else will" is a no-brainer.<sup>1</sup>

You're ready to make a name for yourself. You've planned your brand and identified your organization's distinguishing characteristics. The stuff that sets you apart from the other guys in your industry is crystal clear. You know what your organization stands for and what you want customers to experience when they work with you. As you've developed your look, your colors and your messages, you've incorporated that brand promise throughout.

## It's Time

Now, it's time to plan your brand launch. This is the fun part. And, it's a critical moment. It's the moment where the rubber meets the road. It's your first opportunity to bring your identity to life with your prospects, customers and clients. To be clear: We're not talking about the identity that comes with a logo and company colors, but the identity that comes when you know what you stand for as an organization. This is your big chance to show your customers what they count on from you. Every time.

This is going to take some creativity.

But, it's crucial. Strong brands last. According to *Business Week*, 30 percent of the top 100 Brands in 2003 were founded prior to 1900. So how do you win brand loyalists – the people who'll keep coming back? <sup>2 3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Make a Name for Yourself* by Robin Fisher Roffer. Published January 8, 2002, by Broadway. Cited October 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *Top 100 Global Brands Scorecard*. *Business Week Online*. Cited October 2006.

<sup>3</sup> [www.brandingonthenet.com](http://www.brandingonthenet.com) by Kristie Tamsevicius. Cited October 2006.



## 6 Key Steps

Whether you're a baker searching for customers who'll drive across town each week for your fresh rosemary olive baguette or a car dealer hoping you can convince families to have two Volkswagens in their garage, launching a brand that resonates with your prospects, customers and clients should include these 6 steps:

1. Consider your customer.
2. Define your first impression.
3. Create opportunities to show your differentiation points.
4. Build anticipation.
5. Test drive.
6. Check and double-check.

To illustrate these points, we'll share the stories of an independent hospital facing strong competition from far-larger health care organizations and a sporting goods company trying to take on industry leaders with a new product launch.

### **1. Consider Your Customer**

*This step should be obvious and easy.*

You've already done soul-searching and deep-thinking when you developed your brand, you know who your ideal customer is. You already have a good idea of what they like and dislike. Now, it's time to figure out the best way to tell them your story. And, depending on your brand, you might not be 'telling them' as much as you are involving them in it.

Ask yourself:

- Where is the best place to reach our ideal customers and prospects with our new brand? Is it at their desks? At home? Do we want them to come to us? Do we want to meet them halfway?

The answer to these questions will depend on how your organization distinguishes itself from the competition.

If you're an interior designer who has developed a brand to serve the home-decorating needs of 30-something professionals with affordable first-time design services, you'll want to reach them at home. By contrast, if you are a regional office supply store targeting local businesses with your value-added on-line offerings, you'll want to reach your ideal customers at the office in a way that encourages them to 'meet you' online.

## 2. Define Your First Impression

*You'll never get a second chance...*

It's cliché, but true. You only get one chance to make a first impression. As you plan ways to bring your new brand to life, think about what you want your ideal customer to think about you. Make sure every aspect of your launch strategy communicates your brand accurately.

If you are a small, non-profit organization emphasizing your fiscal responsibility, you don't want your materials to look too flashy. Contrast that with an MBA program that wants to convince prospective students that its degree will position them well in the corporate marketplace. The first impression needs to demonstrate that—making it look more corporate than college.

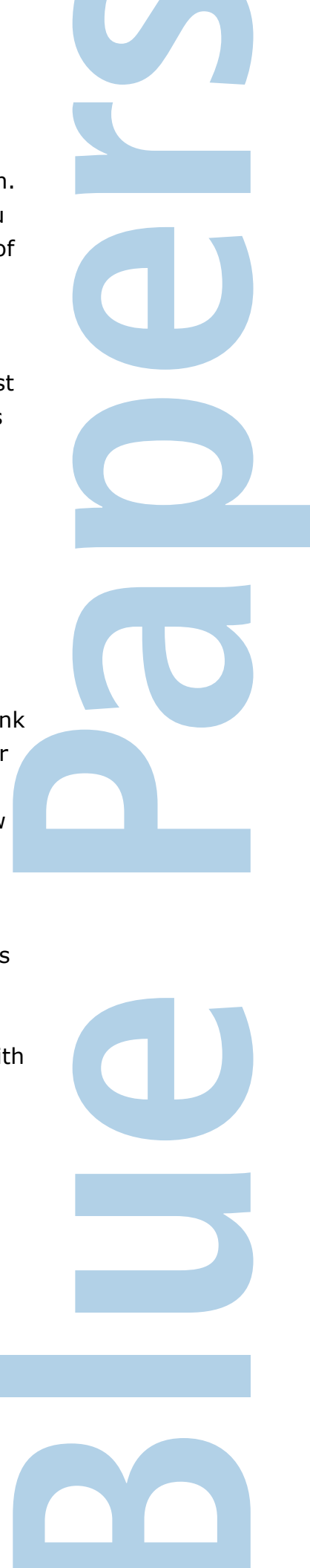
## 3. Create opportunities to showcase differentiation points.

Appeal to all the senses to distinguish yourself from your competitors.

You say you're different. But, how do you show your prospects, customers and clients that you are? A good way to tackle this is to think about all the senses and see if there are ways you can appeal to one or more to drive home your point. For example, if you are a restaurant distinguishing yourself based on your gourmet expertise, can you show people your expertise with photographs and let them hear about it, using video testimonials from your other customers? Better yet, what if they could see, touch and taste your favorite fare? This could work just as easily for a local government agency working to demonstrate its customer service. Can you make your service environment customer-friendly offline and online. Let your customers hear about your customer-friendly approach through testimonials. Let them touch it with easy-to-use forms.

## Applying Steps 1, 2, 3

Consider the story of a small, Midwest hospital, serving seven communities in a 25-mile radius. Despite a rich 70-year history of service to the community, the organization found itself competing with far-larger health care organizations operating in its marketplace. After an intensive brand development process, the hospital stood ready to launch a new brand and logo, emphasizing its deep connection to the communities it served and its commitment to keeping residents in those communities healthy.





*Mural under construction in Green Lake, WI*



*Completed mural representing Green Lake, WI*

**Step 1:** Considering the customers in the hospital's seven communities, the organization's marketing and development director developed a plan to launch the brand with an interactive artist-in-residency program. Community leaders and residents of the seven communities would each be invited to paint murals that told a story about their community. A smaller, mural would also be painted at the same time and eventually hung within the hospital, while the other murals would be given permanently back to each community for their own dedication ceremonies. Prior to the dedication ceremonies, however, all the murals would be unveiled and displayed at an anniversary party that would reveal the organization's new logo and brand launch – Connecting you with quality care.

**Step 2:** The impression the organization wanted to make was clear. By involving community leaders and residents in the artist-in-residency project, the hospital showcased its connections to those it served. Working first in each community and then inviting the communities to the hospital for its anniversary celebration, hospital leaders demonstrated the investments the hospital has made and will continue making to serve each community their residents.

**Step 3:** By involving the community in the brand launch, the hospital subtly, but effectively showcased what makes them different. The 'connecting with you' element of the brand message was clearly communicated through interactive, location-based mural painting. And by bringing the communities into the hospital for the mural display and brand launch, the hospital also showcased its capabilities and how it will deliver on its brand promise to keep the communities healthy through quality care.

These three steps alone will help you create a strong brand launch. But, if you really want to make your launch go down in the record books, read on.

#### **4. Build anticipation.**

*Get your prospects and customers excited about what is to come.*

If you have a favorite TV show, you know the drill. Weeks before the season premiere, the network or cable station begins to entice you with intriguing scenes from the forthcoming season. The show's stars will begin to appear in magazine stories and they'll drop hints about what is to come.

Can you do that before your brand launch? Absolutely! Find clever ways to make your customers wonder what you're doing. Involve them in a contest related to your new brand. Send them clues to an online trivia challenge. Reveal small nuggets and entice them to 'stay tuned' for the big launch.

#### **Applying Step 4**

In 2006, its first year in the footwear market, performance sportswear manufacturer Under Armour® managed to grab 26 percent of the football cleat market.<sup>4</sup> How did they do it amongst giants like Nike, Reebok and Adidas? Answer: They built anticipation and then made a big splash.

Under Armour® made every marketing dollar do the work of three, and the launch of their brand of cleats was a prime example.<sup>5</sup> They created an intense, one-minute TV ad that ran during the opening rounds of the highly anticipated NFL Draft. The ad ran frequently and was one of less than a handful of other commercials allotted to that time frame because the draft was presented relatively commercial-free. Teams could pick players at any time, so fans stay glued to the tube in anticipation – even during commercials.

Viewers saw top draft picks and well-known veteran players running drills in the cleats, stopping to say "Click-Clack" (the sound cleats make on concrete). The action shots and adrenaline-pumping soundtrack ended with a voice-over whispering "I think you know what's coming."

You'll note that these are tactics outlined in Steps 1-3, as well. But, here's where they really built anticipation.

<sup>4</sup> "Under Armour kept image under wraps to build success." Knight-Ridder Tribune News Service. Aug. 20, 2006. Cited October 2006.

<sup>5</sup> "Under Armour kept image under wraps to build success." Knight-Ridder Tribune News Service. Aug. 20, 2006. Cited October 2006.



If consumers weren't on the edge of their seats already, when they went to their local retailer to find the shoes, they found the cleats in museum-like glass cases saying the shoes wouldn't be available for over a month, but could get a free gift if they preordered.

It was the full package. Anticipation gets people buzzing. Buzz builds excitement. Excitement builds word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth builds referrals. Referrals build sales. It's not a direct path, but it can be a very prosperous one.

## **5. Test and Retest**

*Make sure you're saying what you want to say.*

You've invested so much time in getting your brand just right. The last thing you want to do is get the launch wrong. It's totally worth investing in a little test time, just to make sure your prospects, customers and clients are getting the message that you want to send.

There are some simple ways to do this.

- You could select key members from your target audience and give them a sneak peek at your launch materials or event itinerary and ask for their feedback.
- If you're concerned about news of your brand launch leaking, you could hire an outside research firm to bring together a focus group and conduct a 'blind' conversation about the launch. The focus group facilitator could say, 'what would your reaction to 'x' be if you saw it on your desk or in a store or in your mailbox? Strip away your name from the concepts discussed and you'll be sure that no one is being unnecessarily kind or cruel.
- You could also set up a test atmosphere, where you pilot the brand launch and see how it performs. For example, if you are a car wash chain and you want to differentiate on quality workmanship (e.g.: cleanliness), you could try handing customers at one location white gloves to check their cars after washing. If it seems to work with them, you can apply the launch tactics at all car wash locations.

However you structure your tests, if you find the results are inconclusive, adjust and retest again. It's more important to make sure your brand resonates at launch than to get it launched with your fingers crossed.

## 6. Check and Double-Check

*Infuse your brand everywhere.*

Your brand launch is not the end, but the beginning. After you launch your brand, you need to be vigilant, ensuring that your brand shows through in everything you do.

If you are differentiating on design, you must ensure that your product line reflects that. If you are distinguishing yourself on customer service, you'll want to make sure that your training program continues to instill customer-focused values and that your human resources team hires with those skills in mind.

Look around your organization to identify the areas that your prospects, customers or clients could experience brand inconsistency. If you're branding on convenience, do customers have a long walk from parking to get to your facility? Could you offer valet parking? If you're branding on quick turnaround, do your customers spend too much time on hold on the phone?

Your launch will ring hollow if you do not continuously and carefully guard your new brand, constantly working to find new ways to deliver on the promise you've made to your customers.

Launching a new brand is one of the most exciting endeavors any organization can undertake. For a new organization, it sets the stage for what is to come. It can give existing organizations new life, fresh energy and internal pride, helping you effectively tell your story.

Effectively launching a brand requires planning and diligence. But, the payoff will be seen as customers and prospects gain a better understanding of what you bring to the table and how that separates you from everyone else.

Ready? Set. Launch!

