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The name game--sound strategy is sound regardless of the "in" term

By Carolyn West Price

We hear the terms every day--the latest and greatest synonym for some business term. One week it is "in," and the next month, it's "out."

I was in a meeting the other day and discovered that some high-dollar management consultant informed the client that "strategic planning" was an out-of-date



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term, only to be replaced by some other fad label--kind of the way TQM came and went.

Does that mean a concern for quality went away as well? Of course not. So, the moral to this column is simple: regardless of the terminology, there are some concepts in business that simply stand the test of time, regardless of what you want to call them.

One, in particular, that seems to be a "hot" one now is "branding." While I'm sure this is simply a synonym for some term that was hot in the 80s and another in the 90s, the importance of the concept is simple: consistency.

Your brand, or firm's identity and everything that conveys it (including your people), need to be consistent so your target markets are not confused. So, whether you are a start-up planning your "branding strategy" or you're an established business and simply need a periodic check-up to ensure that all you do projects your "brand," the exercise is the same.

Look at everything that could possibly touch prospects, referral sources/influencers, members of the general community, vendors, employees, and current customers. Is the message you are delivering--what your company can do better than your competition--consistent?

Are your design elements consistent? Does your logo appear on everything? Is your company color consistent on all materials, including your website (as close as the web-safe colors can be)? If you have a slogan or tagline that articulates what you do or a benefit you provide, is it on all of your pieces? If you're doing a campaign (different from your corporate marketing effort), does it complement your image and reflect well on the company so people don't think it is out of character for you?

If you have multiple locations with varying degrees of decision-mak-

ing authority, do all decision-makers have a "style and usage" guide with regard to do's and don'ts related to the company's logo, slogan, colors, etc.?

If not, it's worth the investment to put one together to ensure everything is consistent.

Beyond printed materials, consider your uniforms, signs, on-hold message, fax cover sheets, the signature on your emails, vehicles, and the verbal way in which employees interact with your customers and prospects. If you have not taken the time to give the "party line" to your staff so everyone is explaining your services or products in the same way, you are missing an opportunity for consistency--an opportunity to reinforce the "branding" you are working so hard to convey.

You may even want to reward employees who "live the brand,"--letting other staff nominate and emulate the shining stars in your organization.

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