



Your Brand Signature

a tool for leadership

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Brand Signature: a powerful Integrated Marketing tool

A powerful leadership tool

The Stepping Stones Brand Signature tool is a unique and vital way to achieve brand leadership. Organisations need a clear sense of their core identity, value and purpose – the means to align behaviour, communication and policies to the brand. Most brands lack really clear articulation of this. At best, marketers generally have only a list of brand attributes or values, as positioning and a mission statement. The Brand Signature provides more. It is a technological and creative breakthrough for marketers.

It gets to the heart and essence of you and your brand, capturing your identity, purpose, uniqueness, differentiation, potential and value.

‘The Brand’ sums up everything you mean

Indeed, your brand lives in the soul of your customers.

And in your staff! A brand’s essence is as motivational to staff as it is to customers.

Hence, a Brand Signature is about true meaning, fulfilment, aspiration and purpose.

A Brand Signature guides action.

Brands are not only relevant to “marketing companies”. Any organisation with a heritage and a future stands for something in the world. This goes to the heart of what ‘brand’ means. NGOs, service companies, even Government bodies can benefit from a Brand Signature.

Clearly, your brand advertising needs to express and develop your brand. But this is not enough. Every act you make delivers a message and the most powerful messages are likely to be the private and personal ones, such as those in service delivery or handling a problem.

Whatever your brand identity, this essential personality should be the experience that customers and prospects have in each and every interaction with you.

It is our experience that to achieve this most successfully, companies first need a tool that imaginatively encapsulates the very essence of the personality and identity of the brand. The Brand Signature does this. It is not something invented, but something real. It is based on the absolute reality of customer experience and corporate commitment. It serves as a guide to action.

Your Brand Signature

Uplifting

The Brand Signature is entirely positive, as it focuses on the essence of what customers find admirable, emotionally involving, likeable and desirable. Unlike many consulting assignments which seem to point up weaknesses, this gives you strengths to work with.

Of course it also gives you areas to enhance.

One of the key deliverables from Brand Signature research is the “Brand Gaps”: the areas to work on.

Creating Meaning, Changing Culture

Leading companies have found that an instrument like a Brand Signature is an incredibly powerful way of creating consistent, coherent, insightful communication. They have also found it invaluable in enabling the marketing department to communicate both to its own teams and agencies and to other parts of the business such as sales and service. It becomes a focus for brainstorming new products and services. It becomes a check or audit on every communication piece. It becomes a tool to influence culture and competence.

In effect, expressing the living nature of the brand enables you to bring it to life in consumers and employees alike. Indeed, one of its most powerful applications is in culture change. It provides corporate leaders with a means to influence organisation design and culture to support brand development.

The Brand Signature is therefore a transformational leadership tool; i.e. a tool that empowers widespread change without requiring repeated personal intervention. Everyone owns the means to improve and the direction.

Standards for a 'Tool' for Brand Definition

1. Brings the brand's true character and values to life
2. Precise, accurate and insightful
3. Positive
4. Supports strategy making and reflects it
5. Supports operational and cultural benchmarking (standards)
6. Relates the brand to its market context
7. Energizes

Our experience with the 'Brand Signature'

Stepping Stones has been part of a worldwide project developing 'archetypal thinking tools'. Put simply, these are a set of paradigmatic or archetypal ways of thinking about almost any human problem (culture, character, styles of leadership, aspects of a company organisation).

When we applied this to defining a brand we arrived at a proprietary methodology, the Brand Signature.

This has been endorsed in client projects and in research by the Centre for Integrated Marketing.

The Elements of a Brand Signature

Essential Identity: the uniqueness at the heart of the brand

Guiding Values: what the brand stands for

Core Positioning: the customer vision of the value, the essence of the brand's competitive value strategy

Inspiring Vision: the brand's ambition and profound purpose

Core Satisfiers: the deep needs the brand fulfils

Blazon: the brand's promise to customers

Iconography: the rules of brand appearance

Brand Signature deliverables

The Brand Bible

Core Gaps: areas to work on

Training/briefing sessions on the meaning of the brand

Identity

This is the key benchmark element.

A poetic representation of the essential, perennial character of the brand. A word portrait. The signature which expresses itself in every brand true activity ('the image in its becoming')

All that is untrue dulls the brand

Ruling Values

The most common brand description employed.

The living keyword Values and Qualities you expect of the brand. What you stand for in your realm.

All that is untrue dishonours the brand

Positioning

The competitive positioning of the brand: its relative claim to excellence and distinctiveness.

The core value strategy based on the brand's core competencies.

The commitment, mission or purpose that the brand should be focused on (not a company mission statement).

Why it deserves to exist.

All that strays weakens the brand

Inspiring Vision

The brand ambition, profound purpose and employee inspiration.

The service ideal that encompasses a real yet audacious vision of the future

A statement of intelligence and emotive power (light and warmth) by the collective leadership which expresses their conscious will, to which the workforce community can and will connect.

The Leading Image

A brand disappears without committed people valuing its future

The Core Satisfiers

The root tool for customer community modelling

The fulfilment and value the brand brings.

The core desires it meets; what it cares for, nurtures or satisfies in the loyal customer's soul.

The deep needs it meets.

All that misses is of no worth

Blazon

The message which sums up the nature, reputation, aspiration or promise of the brand

Not wishful, but continuously striven for

That which stakeholders recognise, uphold and honour. This is often expressed in a visual image, motto or strap line.

All that is empty words breeds mistrust of the brand

Iconography (Appearance)

The rules for brand appearance: the brand bible

How the imagery, logos, icons, marques, typefaces, visual and aural appearances etc associated with the brand should be employed

The rules or standards for their design, use and representation – shop design, ‘uniforms’, report format, office layout and furniture, staff behaviour etc. as well as logos

All that is confused obscures the brand

How do you use such a Brand Definition?

Apply it as:

A discipline for design

To review of all customer interactions (moments of truth)

Internal development and training

To brief outside agencies

Customer Equity is increased when customer loyalty is reinforced through consistent brand true experience

Using existing investment

If you have already done enough research on consumer attitudes to the brand, it might be possible to develop your Brand Signature making use of your current data supplemented by sessions with your staff.

We would simply have to immerse ourselves in what you have already got, such as videos of focus groups and the output.

For further information

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