

## Brand Power

Would you allow your customers to choreograph a championship routine determining your success? Without conscience effort and strategy toward building your brand, the outcome will be the same: catastrophic. Brand is how people see you and what you are known as in that process. You have a brand whether you know it or not. It may be a good brand or not. Either way, you do not determine your brand. The consumer does. You are the influence. So how do you influence your brand and choreograph your success?

1- FOCUS ON VALUE: Make it about them! The problem most of us make is trying to tell our customers what we "do". By promoting our core competence, we turn ourselves into a generic product, the same as offered by all of our competitors. We must show how we can "**better**" our customers lives, the ultimate value of our services. For example: Volvo doesn't tell you how their cars can get you from point A to B; instead they promote getting you there safely! Your families safety matters to you and that is where the "Brand Value" comes into play. You can promote certified instructors and national champions or safety and success! Why does it matter to them? That is the question your branding must answer.

2- STRENGTHENING YOUR BRAND: Determine your POE (Point of Excellence) and your POD (Point of Difference). Differentiation means being known for something, not a hundred things. Apple has had great success with their brand. It is COOL to own Apple products. Their strategy is to make consumers say "I want that!" What are you going to do to make people say " I want to cheer at \_\_\_\_because\_\_\_\_? How will the experience of being part of your cheer family will make their life better. Start by answering that question. Convey it in your marketing and social media conversations. If you fill in the blank with "because we attend more national championships than anyone else (business focused) then your tee shirts and literature should read "National Champ in the making!" If your message is positive experiences for athletes, then your shirt should say, "Elevating Cheerleaders- one stunt at a time!"

3- MAKE AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION: Hearts then minds. Give them a reason to believe in your brand. The emotional connection opens many more wallets than intellectual connections. Think about why you buy some of the products you buy. How many purchases are emotionally based. Nordstrom has my heart and my credit card number for this very reason. Seventy-five percent of Nike's clients have never used their product to exercise but Nike gave us all a reason to believe we could "JUST DO IT!" Nike makes an emotional connection- a reason to believe. By giving your customers a reason to believe, they will buy into your brand. Attributes of the brand will then become attributes of the consumer. You are what you eat has been a favorite saying but in reality- you are what you consume. What can your clients attain by consuming your product? Break it down one step further, what can your cheerleaders attain by participating in your program? That is how you define your brand.

4- BRAND IDENTITY: Your clubs brand identity isn't the entire brand itself, but in cheer -it's sure an important part. Without an experiential brand strategy, your brand identity will just be a pretty picture. With a grounded, differentiated brand strategy in place, your identity becomes the items that people associate with you, like your name, logo, and tagline. A great tagline can a creative expression of your mission. It leaves a single solitary message in the mind of the reader, and tells that reader exactly how to think of you. Great for initial contact with new consumers. Your logo paints a visual picture for them while your name is a strong first impression.

5- MAKE IT YOURS: Now that we have established your brand, how do you convey it to your community, future clients and the world? Your brand is in every touch point between you and your customers. This is where consistency is key. The brand message must be repeated in all literature, web, social media and all other points of contact. Your staff must understand and believe in your brand. They must resonate your brand. To help with this, watch the Zappos story on You-tube at a staff meeting. Ask your staff how they would describe your brand, you may be greatly surprised. Management must help your employees buy in to the importance of a consist, unified brand. Your brand will be working for you even if you are sick, on vacation or asleep. We can't say that about many other parts of our clubs.

Lots of other people do what you do. The key to success is to change the way people *look* at what you do. By changing their perception, it will build brand value and elevate you above the competition. This will not happen overnight, but it will happen. By focusing on your brand, you'll tap into a strategic advantage you've always had, but just haven't leveraged yet. Remember: don't sell the operations, they buy the brand. Harley Davidson isn't selling you motorcycles; they are offering you a lifestyle. Don't just be a known cheer gym, be the cheer gym that is known for something.

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