

# Does Your Business's Brand Need a Makeover?

The world of business is changing at the speed of light these days. That means that your business's brand can become outdated faster than ever – whether your company is new or time-tested.

Your brand is your business's image—the first thing that customers or potential customers think of when they see your company name, logo or products. A strong brand identity is crucial to successful marketing, because without it, your business won't stand out from the pack.

How can you tell if your brand needs a refresh? Often, we're so close to our own businesses that it's hard to see when our image needs a change. To get some feedback, start by recruiting people you think can be impartial and honest about your brand. These could include friends, family, existing customers or people in your target market. You can even ask your employees.

Next, gather all the marketing materials that convey your brand—from your logo to brochures, business cards, product packaging and your website. Ask your focus group to give you their first impressions of your brand.

- What words or feelings come to mind when they see the marketing materials?
- Do the materials convey what your company offers?
- Do they convey the advantages your company has over the competition?

If your business has a physical location such as a restaurant, retail store or office where clients visit, make sure to ask your focus group to assess how well that location conveys your brand, too.

In addition to evaluating your own brand, you'll also want to look at your competitors' marketing materials. While you don't want to copy them, you should pay attention to the brand image they're conveying. If you notice, for instance, that all your competitors have clean and simple websites while yours is complicated and fussy, maybe it's time to make a change.

Also assess what elements are missing from your competitors' brands that could offer points of differentiation for *your* brand. For example:

- Does your product or service offer benefits that differ from your competitors' benefits?
- Does your product or service solve a problem your competition isn't solving?
- Do you offer faster service, better guarantees or better return policies than your competition?
- Do you have specific suppliers or sell brands that your competition doesn't?
- Does your product have a unique manufacturing edge—for instance, is it “made in the U.S.A.” or handmade by artisans in African villages?

Evaluate your brand once a year, or whenever you add new products and services. For example, a restaurant that started out serving only breakfast and lunch but later adds dinner needs to make sure their branding reflects the dinner menu. An accountant who originally focused on business accounting but later added individual tax return preparation needs to be sure her brand speaks to both clienteles.

Once you've tweaked your company's brand so that it's fresh, current and appealing, update your marketing plan to detail how you will spread your brand message through online marketing, your website, social media, public relations, advertising and collateral print materials.

Source: <http://www.sba.gov>