

The most meaningful attributes of a successful brand

Everyone tosses around the word “brand” — but not everyone seems to agree on what a brand “is.”

Here’s what we, at Cowley, consider to be a solid definition of the term brand, followed by a listing of what successful brands have in common.



First the definition. While some refer to a brand as being a name, logo, or maybe a positioning tagline — it’s actually much more than that. In our view, a brand is a set of associations or promises that key audiences have with a particular company, product, or service. (By contrast, your name, logo, tagline, advertising, and balance of your marketing efforts are — or should be — conscious efforts to distill, dramatize, and emphasize those associations.)

What’s it take to get there?

1. **Consistency:** A successful brand is consistent in its messaging, visual identity, types of stories told, voice, and tone across all channels and touchpoints. Consistency builds trust and helps customers recognize and remember the brand.
2. **Differentiation:** A successful brand has a unique value proposition that sets it apart from competitors. High-level examples (first articulated by [Jack Trout and Al Reise](#) back in the 70s, and still promoted today by folks like [Andy Cunningham](#)), include: Exceptional customer service; unbeatable performance; technical excellence; optimum value relative to price, among others.
3. **Authenticity:** A successful brand is authentic and true to its values and purpose. It is honest, transparent, and sincere in both its actions, interactions, and its communications.
4. **Customer centricity:** A successful brand puts the

customer at the center of everything it does. It listens to customers, understands their needs and preferences, and (as much as possible) delivers a great customer experience at every touchpoint.

5. Lastly, but also importantly, a vital part of ‘branding’ is telling a positive, meaningful, and **resonant story** which conveys the marketer’s values, purpose, and mission in a compelling, emotional, and authentic way.

Some examples of successful brands

- **Nike** has built an iconic brand image based on its “Just Do It” tagline and iconic “swoosh” logo. The brand’s story is focused on empowering both professional and amateur athletes to achieve their full potential through hard work, determination, and perseverance.
- **Apple** has established itself as an innovative and aspirational organization based on its design-focused products, user-friendly interfaces, minimalist aesthetic,

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and extraordinary experiences. The brand's story is focused on providing a seamless, high-performance, and individualized user experience that simplifies people's lives, enhances creativity, and enables personal expression.

- **TOMS** is a socially responsible shoe company that has built a brand around its "One for One" giving model which involves donating a pair of shoes to a child in need for every pair of shoes purchased. The brand's story is focused on leveraging business as a force for good and making a positive impact on people's lives — both customers and kids in need.
- **Water.org** is a non-profit organization that provides clean and safe drinking water to people in developing countries. The brand's story is focused on creating a world in which everyone — regardless of their geography or demography — has access to clean water and benefits from the critical impact that clean water has on people's lives and communities.
- **Patagonia** constructed its brand around its commitment to sustainability and environmentalism. The brand's story is focused on protecting the planet and using business as a force for positive change.

But we'd be remiss if we didn't include some of our own clients in that mix

- **Hematology Oncology Associates of Central New York:** Known by its shorthand name **HOA**, this comprehensive and CNY-focused provider of care for people with blood disorders and cancer has established itself as a thought-leader and robust resource for expertise, most recently (and with our assistance) through doctor Q&As on **WSYR/Bridge Street** and the **Ted & Amy show on Q93** — our market's favorite electronic media outlets.

- **ECR International:** A U.S. subsidiary of Quebec-based **Granby Industries** — and the parent company of numerous well-known and respected brands like **Utica Boilers**, **Dunkirk**, and **EMI** — ECR's brand is centered on high-performance, energy-efficient technology that's easy for contractors to install — and equally easy for end-users to operate and maintain.
- **OnTECH Charter High School:** An innovative and independent charter school that offers non-traditional and underserved students in the Syracuse area an alternative to the traditional high-school experience. OnTECH's brand is firmly founded on differentiating attributes like small class sizes, hands-on learning, and a genuinely caring community of teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, and fellow students.



**Need help developing your brand – from exercises that lock down your organization's position to development of the full array of marketing-communications that bring your brand to life?
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