

RainCastle

**RAINCASTLE eBook:**

# How to Avoid the Seven Common Mistakes of B2B Branding



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## **The Purpose of B2B Branding**

Doing business in the B2B arena often requires a long sales cycle and success is dependent on building strong relationships and the perception that you are providing value. To that end B2B branding is about creating the right messaging, content, offers and perception of value for your customers, which helps you close business easier, faster, and more often. This mantra must run the communications gamut – from big picture corporate branding through each campaign, the website and down to the most granular datasheet.

## **B2B Success Looks Different than B2C**

While consumer products branding works when products fly off the (often virtual) shelves, B2B branding succeeds when key account teams and sales forces recognize that their jobs have become easier, that prices and margins are improving, and that winning sales is value-based, not merely a lowest priced vendor proposition. Yet, as observers and practitioners in the B2B branding field, we too often encounter companies large and small that fall victim to the same seven branding mistakes. If companies could avoid them, they would find themselves (and their investors) much more satisfied with the return on their branding and marketing efforts.

This eBook identifies the seven bad habits in B2B branding and how to kick them (not literally).



# Don't Mistake a Mission Statement for a Brand

Revolving your whole brand around a Mission Statement is generally a bad idea unless you've gone through a considered brand strategy exercise.

Many B2B Mission Statements go something like this, "We want to be the #1 provider of X, the result of which will be to become a Y million dollar company by \_\_\_\_ (year)."

This mission-statement-as-brand presents no compelling value to customers nor does it engender a better world because of your products or services.

So why would prospects be motivated, let alone intrigued? Why would they care? The company that brands around a mission statement is making a common, yet dangerous mistake of looking inward, rather than outward.

For companies selling into a B2B market, building a brand that doesn't resonate with buyers can usually be avoided through a clear understanding of how a brand strategy works. Like developing a product, developing your brand follows a logical process. A well-considered brand is composed of three primary elements:



## Three elements of brand defined

- The **Vision Statement** is about the future, it is aspirational and sets long-term goals for the company.
- The **Positioning Statement** offers, to whom it is directed, the value proposition and how it differentiates from the competition.
- A **Mission Statement**'s key purpose is to ensure that everyone in the organization is aligned.  
A Mission statement:
  - differs from a Vision because it lives in the present, while the Vision is about the future.
  - is unlike the Positioning in that it doesn't answer how a company will realize its Vision.

A solid understanding of the elements of your brand strategy will result in buyers knowing clearly why they want to buy from you vs. your competitors.

**Key Takeaway:** The mistake B2B leaders often make is not understanding the three elements of branding: Vision, Positioning, and Mission. They confuse a Mission for a Position, which is the real place where a brand lives and dies. The result is an inward-focused brand that doesn't resonate with the buying audience.

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## Don't Build a Brand around Features and Functions

Because of the technical nature of many B2B brands, companies tend to go to market with a features and functions story. These days, functional advantages are increasingly fleeting as the pace of technology change allows competitors to imitate or improve upon product advancements. In this way B2B brands should take a cue from B2C brands.

### It's About Pain and Emotion

Two keys to success for any business, B2B or B2C are:

- Understanding their customer's pain and presenting the solution to solve it
- Forging an “emotional connection” with those customers to be perceived as the solution they intend to purchase.

Pharmaceutical companies are great examples. They exploit the emotional power of their brand by appealing directly to the consumer on an emotional level, causing the consumer to lobby their physician, the target audience for prescription pharmaceuticals. Look no further than those ubiquitous Cialis commercials for an example.



This is a well-planned brand strategy that concedes that there are viable competitive products available, thus it creates brand affinity based upon an emotional appeal. It relies less on how the drug works or if it works better than the competition, instead focusing on the sense of well being patients get when using the company's drug.

Why are Apple, Google and Amazon such innovative brands? Is it because Apple products can “do” more things than competitor devices or Google's search engine is so much better than Microsoft's or Amazon's ordering process is one step easier than everyone else's? No, none of these behemoth brands are built on features and functions. Instead they walked in their customer's shoes and envisioned how their products and services could improve everyday lives of their customers sometimes intuiting what their customers would want before their customers even knew.

The selling of reliability, confidence and imagination appeals to us on an emotional level. We don't often care about the technology behind it, we just want it to work unfailingly and simplify our complicated lives so we can get on with our business.

**Key Takeaway:** A brand is not what you “do” with the product; it's what you “are” in the mind of prospects and customers.



## Don't Build a Brand Without Telling Your Employees

After working with senior management of a company on a major rebranding strategy and effort, I had the opportunity to present the new brand strategy to middle management.

I discovered immediately that they were unprepared to evaluate our work and expressed a lack of understanding about why we were undergoing a brand development process. Sound familiar? In the rush to get things done and keep employees focused on their revenue targets, senior management had not enlightened their employees— the actual link between their company and their customers — about the need for rebranding and the new vision behind the rebrand.

It had not occurred to senior management that employees are the most critical messengers of the brand at all times. Because the brand is the conduit for bringing a company's strategy to life, it needs to permeate the organization's culture and the employee's responsibilities.

### How to Brand from the Inside Out

- Involve employees from the beginning. Explain the business value and their role in making the new brand a success.
- Select brand evangelists within the company, those people who serve as information conduits.
- Communicate frequently with consistent emphasis on the key components of success.
- Provide a means to measure branding success qualitatively and quantitatively.



### The success of employee brand affinity has been be quantified<sup>1</sup>

- Fortune magazine's "Most Admired Companies" stock prices appreciated 50% over peers after instituting employee motivation and alignment efforts.
- Satisfied employees are on average 30% less likely to leave, saving 1 to 1.5 times annual salary per employee turnover.
- Employees with a high level of engagement are 38% more likely to have above-average productivity.
- A significant improvement in communication effectiveness is associated with a 29.5% increase in market value.

**Key Takeaway:** One of the biggest challenges in B2B Branding is ensuring your employees deliver on the promises your brand makes to the market. Before this can happen, they need a seat near the head of the table.

<sup>1</sup> [www.brandchannel.com](http://www.brandchannel.com) by Gary Oakner



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## Don't Build a Boring Brand

B2B does not stand for “Boring to Banal,” so why are most B2B brands so generic? Do they lack vision? Are they positioned poorly? I’m sure the leaders of the companies don’t think so.

Perhaps it is an assumption routinely made by both companies and their branding agencies that because the B2B audience is often technically-oriented, there is no point trying to appeal on an emotional level. “After all, high-tech engineers, medical professionals and financial experts are data people and don’t respond emotionally,” they opine. Once you make that assumption, let the snoring begin!

### The Job of Your Brand

The job of the brand is to stake out a region of the customer’s mind for your business. Your brand then becomes the foundation upon which your marketing and communication efforts rest. If your brand is like your competitor’s, it stands to reason that your marketing will do little to distinguish you from them.



Consider the case of **Goody Clancy**, an Architecture, Planning and Preservation company. Goody Clancy is an example of B2B branding that appeals on both a rational and emotional level.

We built the brand for Goody Clancy based on the following idea:

The brand foundation is the tagline, “Inspiring Transformation,” which works on two levels:

- Verb - as a team they inspire their clients to aim higher and transform the way they conduct their business
- Noun - The result of their collaboration is — for their client — an “Inspiring Transformation.”

With this foundation in place, the language used on the website takes on the Goody Clancy brand of aspiration:

For example, the headlines work like this:

- “Aspiration to Realization” to define the trajectory of a project
- “Digging Deep,” to describe their work in the basement of the venerable Trinity Church in Boston
- “Inspiring Works” is the moniker for “Case Studies,” which like the tagline, can be perceived in two ways

The overall impression is that of a unique, compelling brand that hits the right emotional notes while doing all the rational heavy lifting.

**Key Takeaway:** When building a B2B brand it is important to remember that B2B audiences are made up of people who, like most of us, are influenced through their emotional as well as rational side.

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## Don't Build a Brand Without Consulting Customers

I often encounter businesses— most often in high-tech — that want us to do a branding or rebranding but are in too much of a hurry to involve their customers.

“We know our customers,” they may say, and don’t want to bother them. Thus, we are asked only to interview internal senior management to attain their views of what their customer needs and how they fulfill those needs.



### What's Missing From This Picture?

A brand means nothing if it isn't based on up-to-date customer insight and desires. Too often branding is based upon unverified and sometimes mistaken assumptions. Before a company can develop a meaningful brand, they must demonstrate how well they understand and solve a pain the customer is feeling. Only then can a company's brand make that understanding a visible, targeted and memorable program of communication.

Some of the ways to involve your customers in the branding process include:

- One on one meetings or teleconferences...
- Surveys
- Focus groups...
- Value proposition testing

## How an Objective Partner Can Help

In choosing to work with a branding agency, among the most important things a company buys is objectivity. An outside party carries no agenda or preconceived notions and is not afraid to ask tough, penetrating questions or maybe deceptively simple ones like “Give me your 30 second elevator pitch,” which more often than not is not crisp, clear or differentiated.

Customer consultation often proves to be the inspiration behind a successful brand. The way in which a company’s customers talk — about their own businesses and its challenges — can often be the catalyst to inspire a concept that develops into a brand program. Customers can speak in many voices: metaphorically, anecdotally, or nuts and bolts. In what they say and how they say it, often resides the kernel of an idea that, if you are listening, can be teased out and developed into a brand message.

**Key Takeaway:** It’s never safe to assume you understand your customer. An objective third party is often the best way to gain that knowledge and uncover the clues and insights essential to building a differentiated brand.

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## Don't Build a Brand That Speaks with More Than One Voice

The Web, email Marketing, Search Engine Marketing, Social Media, Webinars, Word-of-Mouth, Trade Shows, Events, Collateral, Advertising, Direct Mail and PR are among the many channels for reaching customers.

With so many possible communication channels, it is easy to see why companies can find themselves with disjointed messages going to the same customers. How many times have you gone to a company's booth, heard their pitch, collected their literature and then visited their website only to discover a disconnect in the messaging or visual design?

### Why a Brand's Voice is Often Inconsistent

Perhaps a new tradeshow booth was too expensive and the company wanted to get the most from their prior investment. Maybe there has been a change of leadership and things are in flux. It could be a case of "The Cobbler's Shoes," everyone is so busy taking care of customers that the brand has taken a back seat.



Whatever the reason, if you are not speaking in one voice, you may be saving money in the short term, but confusing your customer, which will affect the bottom line. It is essential for marketers to conduct communications audits regularly on their own materials as well as those of their competition.

Don't enter the dangerous territory of introducing a new or revitalized brand in a piecemeal way. The key to creating a "One-Voice Brand" is to execute a well-designed brand launch program that coordinates internal awareness, digital and offline communications and social media.

**Key Takeaway:** Without taking a step back to view the ever-widening panorama of your communications, you risk fragmenting your brand by presenting inconsistent messages and images.

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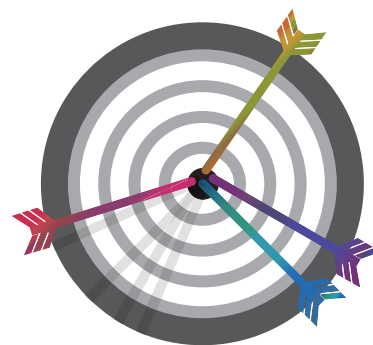
## Don't Build a Brand and Then Have it Sit in a Box



The point of branding is not cool graphic design, although that can be useful. It's about getting a message in someone's head. Make sure you know how you are going to get in their heads before you start spending money on logos, taglines, and messages. If a new brand is created in a box with nobody around to open it, has there really been a brand created?

A good rule of thumb is "The point at which you grow tired of your brand due to constant repetition, is the time your brand is becoming effective."

Targeted repetition of messaging is the job of marketing. Marketing your brand includes connecting with your audience online and offline through multiple channels. Wherever your customer sees you, the message is reinforced. Assuming your brand is speaking in one voice consistently and over time, it will resonate with your audience and you will gain their trust.



## Brands Need to Be Socialized



IBM understands this better than most marketers. They have successfully branded “Cognitive Business” as the successor to the “Smarter Planet” campaign. IBM began

with an eight-page insert promoting Cognitive Business in The New York Times and Wall Street Journal. Digital efforts including display, paid search and social media ads followed to complement the print insert and television spots. The ubiquity and consistency of message, which is that “Digital is not the destination but the foundation for a new era of business called Cognitive Business” is helping to make it a self-fulfilling prophecy.

While ubiquity can seem tiresome, when you think of “Cognitive Business,” you think IBM and not the multitude of other cloud-based technology providers out there.

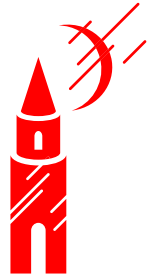
**Key Takeaway:** You don’t need to have an IBM budget to have your brand make a powerful impact, you just need a powerful vision and a plan for how to disseminate it relentlessly and consistently to the marketplace.

**To learn more about how RainCastle can help you with your website and inbound marketing needs:**

**Please call us at 617.965.2681 x225**

**Visit our website at [www.raincastle.com](http://www.raincastle.com) View our blog at <http://blog.raincastle.com>**





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