

Fundamentals are key to creating a strong and lasting brand

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"A clear understanding of the branding process is essential for entrepreneurs, business owners and brand managers when starting a new venture or developing a new product - doing this upfront just makes sense," says branding expert Raymond van Niekerk.

"By following the process of creating a solid brand for your company or product at the outset, you will have a clarity of purpose that will serve your business well," says the man who brought the zebra to the Investec brand. Raymond van Niekerk is former Global Head of Marketing at Investec and convenor of the Brand Creation for New Ventures programme at the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB).

Investec had already established their identity as an "out of the ordinary" financial institution, when van Niekerk was tasked with overhauling the brand. With his team they found the ideal icon in the zebra – each animal's stripes are unique, and the association with Africa and its diversity reinforced their South African origins as the company grew globally. Investec had established their core purpose, and the various branding elements fell into place because this fundamental was in place.

Be clear on your purpose, and get the naming right

This clarity of purpose and the naming of a brand, is one of the four fundamentals that van Niekerk suggests needs consideration - all of which form the core parts of the course he teaches at the GSB.

"You need to start by taking a critical look at the purpose of your business or product and make sure your naming receives the attention it deserves," van Niekerk says. He cites Snapscan as a fine example of a South African brand that has achieved this. "The naming of Snapscan is spot on," he says. "The name tells you what it is, the functionality of purpose is so astonishingly clear, and the simplicity of their communication reflects the ease of use of the app."

Understanding the branding toolbox

Knowing what brand architecture is and the tools used to create it, gives you a big picture view of the role branding plays in your business. The physical aspects of a brand include the logo or the typography, and an understanding of the purpose of iconography and the psychology of branding, provides valuable insight. The toolbox includes your advertising, social media and public relations, and how they fit together.

A brand architecture that provides room to grow

A strong foundation will stand you in good stead when your business grows - the structure created by this process helps you maintain brand integrity when developing new products and it facilitates brand extensions, partnerships and endorsements.

"Now that Snapscan is associated with Standard Bank for instance, their brand clarity ensures that it is not drowned out by the Standard Bank brand. They appear to be seamlessly maintaining their brand identity while partnering with a powerful brand," says van Niekerk.

Alignment of brand and corporate culture

The visual and verbal language you have developed using the branding toolbox, should then be used to convey the tone that

suits who or what you are as a brand.

“If you create a brand that says informal and open, and your corporate behaviour and messaging is formal and aloof, your clarity of purpose is lost, both for your customers as well as for your employees, who are an integral reflection of a brand,” says van Niekerk.

If owners, managers and product developers can be involved at the inception of a brand, and have “buy-in” to everything the brand represents, many potential problems can be avoided. Van Niekerk feels that branding therefore is not just for marketers, but also for top executives at big brands, small and medium sized business owners, as well as for the entrepreneurs who are about to go guns blazing into a new venture.

This solid foundation functions as a reference point for all aspects of running and growing the business.

Raymond van Niekerk teaches the Brand Creation for New Ventures programme at the GSB. For more information on the course, please contact 0860 UCT GSB or email execed@gsb.uct.ac.za.

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