

Brand – What Does It Mean, Anyway?

Before brand consultant-speak drives you crazy, take a few minutes to understand branding terminology.

It is important to realize that many branding consultants use terms interchangeably. Others take license to change the meaning of these terms, or recreate new ones because, well, they're consultants!

Special thanks to Elisabeth Sullivan of [Marketing News](#) for her column (1.30.09), "Branding Lexicon: Learn How to Talk the Talk."

What does "brand" mean?: Walter Landor, founder of Landor Associates, one of the most recognized brand consulting firms on the globe said: "A brand is a promise. It's about as simple and direct an explanation as you can get."

What is a "brand"?: A brand is often thought of as a consumer product and it most certainly can be that: like an I-Phone or a pair of Air Jordans. It also can be a consumer product company like Adidas, a professional services company like H&R Block, a manufacturer like BP or a consumer product manufacturer like P&G. It also can be a person like Tiger Woods, Michael Jordan or Madonna.

In each case, the image presented through various channels (advertising, news stories, collateral materials, annual reports, Web sites, etc.) represents the fulfillment of an expectation – a promise.

The following term descriptions may help:

- **Brand Identity:** Most experts consider brand identity as the physical aspects of the brand; its name, logo or signature – often referred to as the *marketer's depiction* of the brand.



- **Brand Image:** The brand image is most often viewed as the *consumer's perception* of the brand. To ensure a consistent consumer perception, marketers seek to control brand visual cues (logos, colors, typography, images, etc.) and verbal messages (word choice, tone of voice, etc.).

- **Brand Personality:** Brands can have personalities, just as people do: fun, inquisitive, energetic, friendly, serious, etc. Brand personalities are reflected in how they are communicated, in how they look and act.

- **Brand Attributes:** Very close to brand personality, brand attributes are subjective but very real. Interbrand refers to them as, "drivers of choice." Others refer to them as, "market differentiators." They are the reasons consumers choose one brand over another.

- **Brand Essence:** As with the essence of a person, the essence of a brand speaks to the core idea of what the brand is all about. A bit esoteric and often difficult to identify, a brand's essence is important to establish as the foundation for all information conveyed about a brand.

Brand owners and brand strategists need to be on the same page; it will make a brand strategy process more efficient and fulfilling. If the consultants are speaking language you're not certain you understand, stop them and clarify terms.

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