



By Michael A. Taylor

If you think only big corporate names need to think about things like brand names, think again. Your brand says a lot about you and your business, and that's as true for a local gymnastics gym as it is for a multi-national conglomerate. In this article we look at how creating a strong brand for your business can help you set yourself apart and lay the right foundation for the growth of your business.

### **WHAT IS A BRAND?**

Your brand is more than just your business name or the logo on your newspaper ad. It is your corporate identity. An effective brand tells people who you are, what you do and how you do it, while at the same time establishing your relevance to your customers.

Your brand is how your business is perceived by customers. If your brand has a high perceived value, you enjoy many advantages over your competition, especially when it comes to pricing. Why do you think people are prepared to pay exorbitant money for brand items? Perceived value; perceived value as a result of very effective brand promotion resulting in high recognition.

Now, I'm not saying we all need to rush out and start creating brands that are going to be recognized around the world. What I am suggesting, however, is that it is possible for your brand to dominate your niche market.

### **WHY DO YOU NEED TO CREATE A BRAND?**

The main reason for creating your own brand is to differentiate yourself from your competition. Gymnastics programs can be located blocks apart from each other. You need to constantly be looking for ways to set yourself apart from your competition. Your brand can do that for you.

Another good reason for creating your own brand is to make your marketing more effective and efficient. You don't have to spend your time with a new client explaining who you are, what you do and how you do it. Your brand can already communicate that for you. You can spend your time focusing on students rather than educating your customers about your business.

### **HOW DO YOU CREATE YOUR OWN BRAND?**

Your brand needs to say who you are, what you do and how you do it. It needs to do all these things at the same time as establishing your relevance to your prospective customers. It is absolutely essential that, you build your own brand, you have a firm grasp of who you are, what you do and how you do it. If not, you're going to send mixed messages to your clients and your legitimacy will be in question.

Start with your mission statement. What is the mission of your business? Obviously you're in business to make a profit. Making a profit is a by-product of a successful business. Focus on your core values and the profits will follow.

A good place to begin thinking about your mission is to put yourself in the shoes of your customers. If you're in the market for a gymnastics club, what things are important to you? Different people will be looking for different benefits but you can bet that they want their child to be safe and well cared for. Cost is also likely to be high on the list as is the training they will receive. These things will be highly important to some and less important to others. So focus on the benefits that are likely to be highly relevant to the majority of your target market. Let's settle for our purposes on safety and skill training education.

Your mission statement might read something like "We Create Champions in the Safest Gymnastics Training Center in the Midwest." That's a pretty general statement and if you decide to focus on a particular niche of the gymnastics market, such as Girls Compulsory levels, you may want to more narrowly focus on that group in your mission statement. Now that you've written your mission statement, you can begin thinking about creating a brand that reinforces and supports your mission. So, getting back to the fundamental questions of who you are, what you do and how you do it, you can now begin to think of your business in these terms. You're a gymnastics center; you safely teach children gymnastics and train them to compete successfully performing compulsory routines and earning championships.

When you create your brand, you need to keep the who, what and how firmly in mind but also use the brand to establish your relevance to your target market and build credibility with that market. List your business's key features and characteristics, your competitive advantages and anything else that sets you apart from your competition.

Using our Girls Compulsory example, you'll focus primarily on the objectives from your mission statement namely, safety, girls compulsory competition and championships.

Identify and Describe Your Target Market. Decide whether you want to target the entire gymnastics community or only a segment of it such as "six to ten year old girls."

Include the key elements from your mission statement. The key elements from your mission statement were safety, children, girls, compulsory competition and championships. Find names that are suggestive of these elements. Don't limit yourself to real words, though. A coined name with no obvious meaning is a perfectly legitimate name provided it conveys something about your business. You will find coined names easier to trademark and secure website domain names for too. Let's use GymChamps for our example.

Use tag lines that reinforce your mission statement. You could use something like: "GymChamps – Midwest Level 6 champions since 1999" or "GymChamps – Teaching Safe Gymnastics First, Second and Always."

### ***HOW SHOULD YOU USE YOUR BRAND?***

Your logo is not your brand but your logo should allow your brand to be instantly recognized by those familiar with it. To this extent, your logo helps create and reinforce brand awareness.

The logo you create should be able to be used consistently in a variety of different media. It should be suitable for corporate letterhead and business cards, as well as for your website and any signs. You don't want a confusing mishmash of logos and banners and heaven knows what else. Everything you produce needs to use the same, consistent style of logo so that your logo becomes

synonymous with your brand. Instant recognition is what you're going for, so don't dilute it by using several different logos for different purposes.

Establish consistent usage of your gym name, logo and tag line. Put the brand name and tagline together, the physical manifestation of your brand will be:

#### **GymChamps**

"We Create Champions in the Safest Gymnastics Training Center in the Midwest"

To establish brand awareness, this branding needs to be used consistently and frequently in everything you produce, whether that is letters to clients, business cards, brochures, invoices, advertising, promotions, on your website, on the front door of your gym and on any personalized products you sell or give away. Also be consistent in your use of fonts and color schemes. These can be powerful in making your brand easily recognizable.

Once you've created your brand, you need to market and promote it, in addition to your regular services. This is how you establish your credibility and relevance to your customers and potential customer market. Hopefully you can see why your brand needs to be suggestive of your mission statement. If, at the same time as you're selling your products and services, you also push your brand, your brand becomes synonymous with your products and services and vice versa. ■

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