

THE POWER BEHIND

PERSONALIZATION

& HUMANIZING

YOUR BRAND

A WHITE PAPER

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Executive Summary

What makes you unique in a cluttered marketplace?

In today's noisy landscape, people are eager to make connections. Trust and purpose have become some of the key brand attributes valued by younger purchasers, and 57% of United States consumers say they want stores to serve a higher function than simply selling a product.

Regardless of the industry, it's in every brand's best interest to connect with their audience on a human level. In this white paper, you'll learn about disarming suspicion, distinguishing your brand personality, and making your business more relatable. Plus, you'll discover five strategies for showcasing your personality and enjoy examples of bold, playful, and distinct brands.



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Introduction

In today's tech-dominated landscape, individuals desire authentic interaction more than ever.

People crave connection, including bonds with brands they financially support. Younger consumers are put off by the idea of mammoth, faceless companies that exist only for profit. And these prospects no longer just wander the store grabbing products from the same brands they've always known.

Modern purchasers want to know more – who you are, why you exist, whether you're a good corporate citizen, and how you can offer buyers both value and a sense of community. Brand longevity is about more than familiarity; it's about trust. And the statistics bear this out.

Emotions Win Customers

Though most people think of themselves as rational creatures (absorbing information, weighing it carefully, and making thoughtful decisions), many daily choices are made by gut feelings or subconscious reactions.

Buyer decisions are particularly driven by emotions. According to one 2017 Millennial Brand Perception survey, emotional connections to companies are a key motivator when it comes to prompting purchases. According to those surveyed:

- ✓ Forty-eight percent said they are more likely to buy from a brand if they know the people behind it
- ✓ Forty-seven percent believe it's important for a brand to take ownership of its mistakes
- ✓ Forty-seven percent said they want a brand to take their feedback into account

In the past, brands sold primarily based on quality, but today, trust, purpose, and connection have become the key brand attributes valued by young purchasers. According to PxC's 2018 Global Consumer Insights survey, "trust in brand" ranked in the top three reasons a person buys a particular product.

The research is clear: brands in the future must win the hearts, minds, and now, most importantly, the trust of their consumers.

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Disarm Suspicion and Build Trust

When you want to gain loyalty and differentiate yourself from a zillion other messengers, brand personality is essential.

The feelings of your prospects act like the gatekeepers to connection. Once you've made it past the gatekeeper, you can work on building an emotional connection by creating a foundation of trust. If your marketing doesn't make people feel something, they will quickly forget about you.

But when people do feel something, they'll want to feel it again! Think how often you've rehashed a favorite Superbowl commercial with a friend the next day or shared a selfie of delightful food from your favorite restaurant. A good experience gets better when it is shared. When people come to know and love your brand, they'll want to stick around, invite others, and become part of your community.

This is where the power of personalization lies. Expressing the character of your business is an essential component of relating with your consumers. No one will have a strong connection with a brand that feels like it is run by robots. And with the progression of online communities (serving as virtual "town squares" 365 days a year), your business has a chance to become part of the homes, lives, and hearts of consumers in ways previous marketers could never imagine.



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A Living, Breathing, Human Brand

A brand's personality is the application of human characteristics to the brand.

Think of this as the personification of your company – your business in human form. At its best, brand humanization is a seamless blend of personal brand, company values, workplace culture, and social community. Describing it portrays how your brand thinks, acts, communicates, and engages with the world.

To distinguish your unique voice, ask these questions:

- ✓ If my business were to take on human characteristics, what would it look like?
- ✓ What tone or vibe would it communicate?
- ✓ How would it react to modern culture or behave in specific relationships?

To put a face to this voice, define the essence of your brand by imagining your brand as one specific individual. Then use that persona to frame up every touchpoint your business has with the public.



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Defining the Essence of Your Brand

Brand personality traits are based on several broad character qualities:

Sincerity – qualities that are sensible, honest, helpful, wholesome, natural, casual, authentic, heartfelt, or candid

Individuality – mannerisms that are bold, sassy, quirky, playful, weird, eccentric, cute, direct, or daring

Excitement – traits that are spirited, risky, exhilarating, carefree, thrilling, witty, or adventurous

Sophistication – qualities that are intellectual, mature, high-end, charming, romantic, sleek, elegant, or exclusive

Ruggedness – elements that are tough, athletic, edgy, outdoorsy, durable, sexy, unapologetic, or unrefined

Are you Disney? Then you're a magical brand that makes dreams come true. (Excitement)

Are you Gillette? Then you're the best a man can get. (Rugged Sophistication)

Are you Dove? You bring "real" beauty that radiates from inside out (Sincerity)

Brand essence is best described in one or two words that provoke intangible emotions from your target audience. Because customers are more likely to purchase from brand personalities similar to their own, keep your key customer personas in mind when crafting your voice. Is your target market tough and aggressive or mature and refined? The people you're talking to should define the communication style you use.

Trader Joe's: A Whole Lotta Honey for Not a Lotta Money

If you think groceries are boring, Trader Joe's will beg to differ.

Trader Joe's is a popular, privately-owned grocery store chain with a cult-like following of fiercely committed customers. Trader Joe's demonstrates a quintessential brand personality in action. In the crowded, competitive grocery space, the company has developed a unique branding and design language it uses in stores, online, and in print.

It's hard not to smile while you're at Trader Joe's. There's quirky music playing, a hidden stuffed animal for kids to find, and one employee roaming the store with a wacky question mark shirt (so you know where to go with product inquiries). Even the product labels are fun. Try your hand at Two Buck Chuck (\$2 wine), Everything but the Bagel Sesame Seasoning Blend, or a Colby and Cheddar platter that's "A Real Crowd Cheeser."

The brand essence here is gourmet on the cheap with a target market of over-educated, underpaid shoppers. From divine chocolate caramels to a diverse ethnic selection, everything about Trader Joe's is delightful. Even the generic brands seem cool. And this is what makes the difference: the brand understands its customers and knows how to speak to them. For example, the "Fearless Flyer" circular takes prospects on a storytelling journey: buyers don't just consider buying honey, they're beckoned into a tale of the three-pound "Oso Good" honey bear, whose product is billed as "pure Argentine honey," or "straight up liquid gold." The labels and print flyers boast of its benefits in the usual playful tone: for \$9.99, you can get "a whole lotta honey for not a lotta money."

From creative mailers to joyful employees, Trader Joe's exudes a laid-back, quirky, yet trustworthy personality. Ranking consistently as the top U.S. grocery chain, it's clear that this whimsical voice is one that customers have grown to love.

Five Strategies for Showcasing Your Personality

Being you means you can't be everyone else. So, be bold in your exceptional identity!

Once you've clarified the essence of your brand voice, you can get practical.

While it can be tricky to strike a balance between professionalism and a more informal style, here are five practical areas to relate to others in a down-to-earth way:

1. Avoid Mixed Messages

Did you ever meet someone who seemed "nice" but put you on edge?

Often, that's because you involuntarily noticed inconsistencies in their life or personality. Whether they are conscious of it or not, your audience is constantly analyzing your brand for inconsistencies. When these are noticed, trust is lost.

To keep your message straight, try to use the same language, tone, and terminology across every print, digital, and face-to-face exchange. Creating an avatar for your brand may help your team more easily maintain this persona. Strive to use coherent, authentic language in everything from posters to product descriptions.

2. Communicate with Color

You can't have personality if you're afraid to offend.

Being you means you can't be everyone else. So, be bold in your exceptional identity! While you want to avoid being unprofessional, embrace your core principles and flaunt them with fortitude.

Alfa Romeo, an Italian car manufacturer, does this with panache. The Italian brand represents style, sophistication, and the mechanics of emotion. The brand parades its ethnicity with a smug, sensual tone. Print ads ring out with phrases like "Mamma Mia," "Passion Realized," and "Power in the Hands of the Few." The brand features ads of its hottest sports cars with the words "Statement Made" and characterizes products with that same swagger: "In a world of bland SUVs, the 2020 Stelvio is a spicy Italian meatball in a Ferragamo suit."

The brand is unapologetically Italian. And it speaks like one.

3. Practice Transparency

To add character to your brand, avoid appearing corporate, secretive, or officious at all times.

Instead, be genuine and unfiltered. There are so many ways to add transparency to your image! People connect with others through weakness, so let down the perfectionist persona and share both the successes and struggles of your business.

Take off that shiny veneer as you:

- ✓ Highlight the story behind your company name, product, or journey
- ✓ Tie stories in with your mission, brand values, and innovations
- ✓ Post videos and testimonials about how your products are changing user experiences
- ✓ Hop on review sites and directly interact with customers
- ✓ Apologize or take ownership for mistakes
- ✓ Take people behind the scenes with stories, photos, previews, and sneak peeks
- ✓ Put your team members in the spotlight in newsletters or social media

Transparency creates likeability and gives people a reason to keep supporting you. Open up to others and let your audience be part of this journey.

4. Laugh a Little

Humor can go a long way toward making your brand more memorable.

Whether you use silly GIFs, witty comebacks, or light-hearted jokes, social laughter releases brain endorphins and builds bonds between people. How can brands use humor? The possibilities are endless. McDonald's crafted a print ad of a fat cow standing on a trampoline and labeled it "The Real Milkshake." Volkswagen touted its parking assistance feature by displaying a porcupine "precisely parked" between a lineup of goldfish swimming in bulging bags of water. On January 2, Charmin posted a meme with its logo and this caption: "It's the first number two of the year. Make it a good one."

Keep humor in line with your brand voice, and be careful not to overdo it. A little goes a long way in building social communities.



5. Make Customers the Star

Ever tire of someone who is the star of all their own stories?

Customers feel this way too. Instead of positioning your business as the hero, put clients in the spotlight with swag appreciation, client rewards, personal success stories, or even handwritten appreciation notes from your team.

You can also flatter and feature others by sharing user-generated content. American clothing company Outdoor Voices does this beautifully by asking fans to capture photos of themselves "Doing things they love," then reposts these online. These user-generated images bring the brand a sense of authenticity and adventure, primarily since the content is centered around individuals rather than the business.

Whether you use sell sheet testimonials or guest blog posts from your brand evangelists, this informal marketing is worth its weight in gold. According to a study by TurnTo Networks, 90% of consumers say that user-generated content (UGC) influences their buying decision more than any other form of advertising. That's because UGC is unbiased, unfiltered, and is created directly by consumers who love a business.



Conclusion

In the world of recurring revenue, you need engaged customers to grow a healthy, sustainable business.

When you engage your customers, you draw them closer to your business and your brand. With each enhanced customer touchpoint, engagement grows, and your influence expands. And that influence pays big dividends. Customer engagement is now the best measure of current and future performance; in fact, a dynamic relationship is probably the only guarantee for a healthy return on your marketing investment.

Whatever your approach and the tools you use – high tech, low tech, or no tech – customer engagement can take you far. Invite customer participation and watch the magic unfold!



About Your Sponsor

Want to win over your customers month after month so your business will survive and grow?

In a digitally saturated generation, print materials can be a welcome and refreshing change. When you want to mold a rich association with your customers, capture their senses with sensory coatings, fantastic finishes, or personalized packaging that is highly relevant to specific viewers. Whether you want to educate and motivate VIP clients or impress and flatter prospects, we're here to help you inspire those conversations with print.

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