

How to audit your brand

Feel like your brand says one thing but people are hearing something else? This brand audit tool is for you.

A brand audit will help you decipher if what you promise within your key brand messaging is what actually gets delivered to customers. Done well, the implementation of new practices derived from the audit outcomes can help to excite customers and prospects about what you offer, and create new levels of loyalty to your brand.

A brand audit is a vital tool to understanding the cross over between brand strategy (what you think you're saying, the ways that you're saying it and the things you promise), and brand experience (what customers are actually hearing and experiencing).

An audit helps to align strategy with experience, and enables you to build a stronger brand reputation, both internally and externally.

Six key benefits of a brand audit

1. Your branding is more effective and recognisable when everyone, and every communication device, tells the same story.
2. It provides an essential SWOT analysis of a brand, helping to recognise any short comings and seize opportunities.
3. It identifies key differentiations as a potential source of competitive advantage.
4. It is an excellent tool for determining the consistency of the brand across the board, from employees to past, existing and future customers.
5. It enables measurement of brand awareness and association across all responses, from all stakeholders that must to be considered.
6. In a nutshell, it will help companies strengthen their brand position from the inside out, by reviewing it from the outside in.

Who should i audit?

- Customers – past, current and prospective
- Partners – including shareholders and investors
- Media – local, trade, business and consumer press
- Staff – management, employees and sales force
- Competitors

The four main types of audit

There are several different types of audits but at the very least these four should be considered as a strong starting point.

Internal

This can happen in various guises, with workshops, interviews, questionnaires, etc. The aim is to gather quantitative and qualitative ideas on how the staff members of the organisation view the brand. Mystery shopping is also an important way to establish how staff members portray the brand message to customers on a daily basis.

External

This includes partners, such as distribution channels, strategic supplier partners and, of course, customers. The first two can help greatly in determining, honestly, how well your brand is understood. It is also vital to get feedback from customers – face to face, over the phone and through online questionnaires.

Communications

This focuses on establishing both the positives and the shortfalls in your brand communication across the board. It will be a complete review of your written and visual brand consistency, as well as establishing the clarity of what your brand currently promises. If you filter out a variety of messages it may surprise you that they don't necessarily say the same thing.

Think about your brand as a journey with multiple prospect and customer touch points, then review all current and possible interaction at each location.

(see diagram page 2)

Competitors

See what your competitors are promising and what they stand for in order to further differentiate between what they do and what you believe is the crux of your offering.

Is it best to use a quantitative or a qualitative approach?

Both are important to use across the various types of audits. Qualitative research can prove valuable in terms of understanding emotions linked to the brand, which can be especially helpful when a brand enhancement needs to take place. This will mostly be achieved through conducting interviews and workshops.

The quantitative approach can take the form of surveys – online and offline, to get a snapshot of how your brand is perceived by the various groups previously listed.

How do i turn the results into actions?

- Analyse the findings and generate an action plan for incorporating the changes that can be made, capitalising on the opportunities that are identified from the audit.

- Start spreading the news – the most important thing that can be done with the results of an audit is to tell people what you found out about yourself, and more importantly, what you're going to do about it. It can be incorporated into any internal communications, as well as any advertising and PR generated by the company.

Key tips

- A brand audit is definitely for your business if you feel there is a noticeable gap between what you believe your brand promises, and what your customers are actually experiencing.
- Through qualitative and quantitative methods, use your audit as an opportunity to get honest opinions from a range of key stakeholders.
- Use this information to shape your brand, and make it understood and meaningful.
- Make sure you consider which type of audit best fits your aims. You can choose from internal or external audiences, communication devices and channels, competitors and more.
- Shout about the audit findings. A brand audit done well can deliver greater business focus and meaningful communication with greater audience resonance.

Mapping The Brand Experience (Audit)



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