

Branding Lecture Outline

Branding. I am not talking about burning hair on a cow with a hot iron. Branding as far as it relates to business is defined on dictionary.com as a noun as kind, grade, or make, as indicated by a stamp, trademark, or the like: *the best brand of coffee*.

Or as a verb

to give a brand name to: *branded merchandise*.

to promote as a brand name.

When I first came up with Neale Bacon and his Crazy Critters, I wasn't really even aware of the topic of branding as it related to show business, but the more I have read and studied marketing, I realize it has been part of the success I have had.

I love quotes and one of my favourites is from Walt Disney. "You have to be unique in this business. You have to be unique enough, that if people want what you have, they have to come to you to get it."

In other words, your branding should not make a potential client want a ventriloquist; it should make them want YOU. People can hire other ventriloquists, but if they want Horton and my other Crazy Critters, they have to hire ME.

So here are a few things to consider when you are branding.

1. Branding is a message. It identifies you and your product. It should make people think of you as soon as they hear it or see it. Therefore the first question you have to ask is – Who is my ideal customer or market? A good brand will filter out people that are NOT your market. People hear Neale Bacon and his Crazy Critters and they hear a few things like fun and silliness which indicates I am a family and/or children's entertainer. I am probably not who they want for a corporate event like a sales meeting etc. I am however, a good fit for someone looking for a fun show for kids or for the whole family. Another part of my branding is my slogan "Canada's Favourite Family Ventriloquist" which further defines who I perform for – families. I am not specifically a kid's performer but I focus on family events. So who are you focused on – are you a nightclub performer? Do you like the corporate world? What does your branding say to that market customer? Does it make them want to choose you?

2. So you have a focus on who your market is and the message you want to send them. How do you refine that message? It should be short and to the point. It should contain your name (otherwise what's the point) and maybe the name of your show or cast, and it should speak to the needs of the market you have decided to focus on. I attended a magic lecture once where I heard some great advice – name your shows. It goes back to having something that people have to come to you for. Some people bill themselves just by their name, and that's good especially depending on the market you want to reach. I have found it just takes a lot longer to establish your name alone as a brand. People probably think right away of Jeff Dunham. He markets on the basis of his name, but it took years for his name to become marketable on its own. Also – Jeff still names his tours so again that adds to that uniqueness, as well as his characters being memorable. You would be amazed at how many people I speak to who don't know who Jeff is until I mention Walter or Achmed. I wanted something that could have quick recognition. People hear Neale Bacon and his Crazy Critters and they think "Oh that's the guy with the funny pig or the Mind Reading Chicken."
3. Once you have a brand, it needs to be consistent across your marketing. All my business cards, postcards and other promotional material have it. The Crazy Critters now even have their own fan club called The Crazy Critter Crew that kids can join. I believe you need to have a consistent in your style of shows. I don't think it is right (and all of this IS ONLY MY OPINION) to be doing a foul mouthed night club show one night and a kid's show the next day. I have seen performers do it and during a kid or family show have an inappropriate word pop out because the performer is used to that punchline or whatever from their "other" market shows.
4. What form should your branding take? It can take many forms – from a slogan or title, to your logo or trademark. Ideally it should work across all forms. In other words, the name of my show is Neale Bacon and his Crazy Critters. My logo also has the exact same wording, as does my banner that is on stage. People coming in before a show see that banner and know what kind of show is coming, and hopefully people again think "Oh that's the guy with the pig" or whatever.
5. To get your brand "out there", I strongly believe you should engage in 2 things – networking and social media. **NETWORKING** I have joined a couple of networking groups and have gone to a lot of meetings. I have met a lot of people and have exchanged a lot of business cards. When they read my card, the number one thing I get comments on is "Crazy Critters, that's cute I like that."

They comment on it even more than on my being a ventriloquist. I must admit that occasionally people do ask if I am an animal act, but that's ok. It engages me in conversation with them and lets me tell them about what I do and who I do it for. **SOCIAL MEDIA** This could be a whole lecture in itself. In my opinion many performers do not use social media because they do not know HOW to use it. Social Media and Online Interaction are key these days because that's where a lot of your customers are. In my case – I deal with a lot of young families or folks organizing thing like fairs and festivals. They are on social media therefore I should be too. How does this relate to branding? Let me give you one example – I use Twitter a lot, but it is HOW I use it that makes it effective. I have a business coach (a good investment by the way) who showed me a few key things. You can't just go on there and brag about yourself. That gets tired very quickly. You want to engage with people. Find out what people in your market are talking about and join those conversations. It takes some time and some digging but in a period of about 4-6 months, I went from have 200 followers to having close to 2000 followers. I did use some other tools and ideas, but as I said that could be another lecture. The important thing is that in all my interactions, my brand remains consistent.

6. This will not happen overnight. You have to be prepared to put some time and thought into this and into how to implement it. When you do, it will put you miles ahead of other performers of almost any stripe because so many performers forget this is show BUSINESS. Read books on branding. Understand what your brand means. Understand who your market is and ask yourself if your brand speaks to that market.

I hope this has given you some ideas on finding your brand and getting it out there. As the great motivational speaker Zig Ziglar once said "Don't become a wandering generality. Be a meaningful specific!"

Happy Venting,

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Here are a few resources that should help you with branding and social media:

Books:

Gravitational Marketing by Jimmy Vee

Blue Ocean Strategy by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne

Book Yourself Solid by Michael Port

The Power of Brand YOU by Peter Urs Bender (I believe out of print but worth searching for)

Websites:

www.justunfollow.com helps you manage Twitter

www.hootsuite.com help you manage all your social media in one spot, including the ability to schedule posts

Social media sites you need to be on:

Facebook, ***Twitter***, and ***LinkedIn*** as a minimum

Some also use ***Pinterest*** but I am not a big user of it myself.

Before signing on to these, check out to see how they are different. Please don't do the "I had a ham sandwich for lunch" kind of posts, especially on LinkedIn as it is very business focus.

LinkedIn offers some great groups (like forums) to join.