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## Inside Edge

### Build Your Brand Online - *Ways to Rise Above the Noise*

In this month's edition of Inside Edge, we look at simple methods, tips and techniques to build your online brand identity. After you read this month's edition, contact WSI to find out how to put this valuable information to work for your business.

Thanks for reading!

The primary purpose of branding is to create consumer recall for your company/product/service. In Web branding, the ultimate aim is to get people to trust you more than your competition and think of your website before your competitors'. Given the clutter in cyberspace, it isn't surprising for many small and medium sized business owners like yourself to think that branding is for big companies, the ones with deep pockets. Absolutely not true, yet, an easily understandable myth. Yes, it is important for every business that wants to hold its ground to rise above the noise. No, you don't need a big budget to do so.

Most traditional brick and mortar companies that are using online branding techniques are doing so to leverage their offline strategies. However, the leaders in online brand building are Internet-based companies.

Research shows the brand names of seven Internet companies are already recognized by more than 50 million U.S. adults, giving them 'mega-brand' status. According to a survey from Intelliquest, 10,000 Internet users associated the following Net names with the following products:

- **Books: Amazon.com - 56 percent**
- **Music: CDNOW - 24 percent**
- **Computer Software: Microsoft - 30 percent**
- **Computer Hardware: Dell - 20 percent**
- **Clothing: The Gap - 12 percent**
- **Travel: AOL, Yahoo!, Travelocity - 8 percent each**
- **Autos: Yahoo! – 6 percent**

### Branding Online Means Being Functional

According to a global Web-based survey by Interbrand, the Google brand had the most impact on people's lives in 2002. Google beat established brands such as Coke and Apple and is still a leader to the extent that "Googling" is now a verb! Unlike TV or print methods where great visuals, catchy audio-video and of course, big ad spends are critical, branding on the Web is different. It's less about how a brand looks than how it works.

Your Web brand, therefore, must be concerned with helping people do things. It must be, first and foremost, functional. On your website, you brand with your words, with accurate, well-written, up-to-date content, with your classification, your navigation, your search process and purchase process. In short, you brand with helping your visitors to find what they are looking for in a quick, easy and efficient manner. WSI can help offer your site visitors a positive brand experience.

## Online Brand Building Tactics

Here are some simple, cost-effective and sustainable tactics you can apply to improve your brand presence online:

**Be Consistent:** Your overall brand message is the promise to your customer. However, going beyond the promise - to deliver - is the crucial factor in winning and maintaining brand loyalty online.

**Hurl the URL!** Use every opportunity you have to send out your brand message. Identify all the marketing vehicles you can use for this purpose - business cards, letters, brochures, banner ads, email signatures, invoices and statements. Put your website address on everything!

**Offer Tangible Brand Value:** Always bear in mind that once your target audience is on your website, they are also, only a click away from your competitor's website. Unless you offer a value exchange – and quickly! There are various ways of doing this, depending on your target audience; most such offerings are best received when they are free. Examples of these tangible brand value offerings are: a free e-book on your product or service, an e-newsletter, a functional tool like a mortgage calculator or an MLS listing search, a downloadable research study or white paper, cartoons, online games, recipes, tips for users, and so on.

**Media Relations and Interactive Marketing:** Studies show that 70% of consumers are multi-tasking with multiple media. Evidence of this is seen in statistics showing that attention is eroding. 74% consumers read the newspaper and 66% go online while watching TV. 59% watch TV while reading a magazine. 52% watch TV and 50% listen to the radio while reading newspapers.

**The challenge of brand marketing is thus, on integrated branding and moving beyond audience size or impressions to 'engagement'.**

Online press releases, blogs, RSS feeds, podcasts, community portals, user reviews, forums, online groups, directories and other social media or conversational marketing tools are being used very effectively by companies engaged in building strong brand loyalty online. Interactive media like streaming video, video email, click-to-call technologies and more, are other advanced tools that your WSI Consultant brings to the table.

**Keep Your Content Current:** There is nothing worse than stale content online. How often have you searched for a schedule of events on a website and found last year's listing with the words "NEW" written in bold, red letters at the top? It happens all the time and online users knock off another notch in the brand's reputation based on this experience. Going beyond basic information like a schedule, it is important to update your site with fresh content that will keep visitors coming back. Remember, search engines are also indexing your site and its ranking based on critical parameters such as new and relevant content.

**Translate:** If your brand needs to speak to the widest audience with the minimum of cost, provide critical product information, instill the same feelings about a product, regardless of the language in which the message is delivered, you need to translate. Subtle changes to communications, content, and messaging can help multiply your brand's reach. You can truly benefit from the "write once - customize - sell many" continuum.

**Internet Marketing:** Your online business must have a comprehensive Internet Marketing strategy to attract and convert more customers. WSI offers Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Pay-per-Click (PPC) advertising, Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Email Marketing, Link Exchange and Affiliate Marketing, Viral Marketing to help you put in place a good mix of Internet Marketing tools.

**Monitor the Health of Your Website and Thereby, Your Brand:** Using Web Analytics, you can plug the leaks in your customer conversion funnel. A clear diagnostic can determine the "health" of your website and provide useful suggestions on remedial actions for overall improvement. Using a number of different analytical tools and techniques, such as our **WebScan** report, we can help you unravel knots of data into clear threads that run further through the buying cycle than you may have thought possible.