

Continuous

Branding

**For Service-Based Organisations
Ambitious to Grow**

Craig Thatcher

CHAPTER 1
**Why branding
is Vital**

The most successful owners and managers of service-based organisations realise that branding adds tangible value on a daily basis when it's linked clearly and continuously to what they want their brand to achieve strategically.

It isn't something they employ tactically, superficially or as a last resort every few years when growth slows down.

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On the other hand, many other owners and managers still spend their marketing budgets inconsistently, instead of steadily investing them as they do with their research and development or training programmes. A strange strategy because when growth slows, as it invariably does, they're taken by surprise and have to dig deep to push on. It would be easier to maintain forward momentum if they invested their time, energy and budgets continuously rather than in sudden spurts, every now and then.

The most forward thinking have learnt to harness the value of branding by first understanding it, and then by managing it continuously – otherwise they find they stall. Branding is very powerful and yet it can't be just sprinkled on an organisation like fairy dust, creating instant and magical results. Some people unfortunately don't understand the depth, breadth and nuances of it or know how to manage it. As a result, they fail to appreciate its power and what it can achieve for them. Many incorrectly assume that a brand is just a logo – rather like the original form of branding simply used to differentiate one person's cattle from another. Accountants tend to think of a brand as an intangible asset on a balance sheet, albeit a very important and valuable one. Others firmly believe that branding should only be confined to the fluffy parts of their organisations and don't see how it can add real and significant value. These people are driven by spreadsheets, not emotion, which is a shame because branding actually embraces both.

Since this book is primarily for service-based organisations, it would be useful to define the meaning of a few key words before moving on.

For simplicity, I've decided to predominantly, but not exclusively use client to mean customer, consumer or user and I refer to you as a brand owner, regardless of your job title, or if you're self-employed, an entrepreneur or a business manager. I refer to the company, partnership, collective or charity that you work for as an organisation.

The Design Council (www.designcouncil.org.uk) defines a brand as a set of associations that people make with an organisation. Therefore branding is an attempt to harness, generate, influence and control these associations to help it perform better.

Service, according to the free encyclopaedia, Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service_\(economics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service_(economics))), is an intangible commodity created for the benefit of the consumers of it. With no stock or raw materials to carry, the service is produced, personalised and consumed in the same instant.

A simple way to think of a service brand is as a promise of an experience yet to be enjoyed. Therefore branding a service is about setting the expectation for that experience in advance.

I've been fascinated by service-based organisations for many years because they have to address three specific issues that manufacturers and sellers of products simply don't have to face.

The first issue is the intangibility of their services which makes it difficult for consumers to evaluate or compare prior to experiencing them – without a guarantee.

The second issue is that a large component cost of the service is the people providing it – and as the quality of service depends on the quality of the people, labour costs go up year after year. The 'added value' segment has to be conjured up from somewhere or created in another meaningful way to justify these increases. In contrast, a manufacturer has more options to lower the cost of products sold.

The third issue is that differentiation is difficult. Traditionally, only the most established service providers were able to charge a premium for services because of their brand recognition. The advent of the web means consumers can now search the globe for a service provider that meets their specific needs. This presents both a challenge for market leaders and an opportunity for all those young pretenders.

This is why all service-based organisations need to manage their branding on an ongoing basis to help overcome these issues, grow consistently and be more successful. In doing so, they'll also transform their intangible services into tangible, highly differentiated ones that add value to their offers and help them to engage people in new ways. Design is the enabler here. It provides the discipline, the creative thinking and the structured process. This is because there is a deep and fundamental relationship between design and branding. The creative design component is what translates branding ideas into communication and sets the expectation of the service experience.

This all sounds good but how can you put branding to use? By being smarter about the way you use and measure the impact of it. Use it strategically and measure it against your organisation's key objectives – link it directly to your brand's performance. This encourages continuous innovation and renewal with more consistent growth. If you build a strong brand, you don't have to sell so hard.

One word of caution though. It isn't possible to achieve excellence in branding by hiring somebody who says they've done it before and letting them get on with it. You can't beat experiencing it yourself. You actually need to live it, breathe it, truly understand it and then learn to manage it. Like most things, the more you do the better you get and it will show through in your results.

However, your biggest challenge is not with the branding itself. It lies with motivating your people to provide excellent service by personifying your brand in precisely the way you want. The great news is that branding can be of real and significant help here too, by clearly and visually linking your strategy to you and your people and helping them to understand precisely what you mean. That's why it's vital to you and your future success.

Over the years, I've seen many service-based organisations fail to use branding properly because they don't know how to apply it. And yet they see it and recognise it working well for others. I'll be revealing the key insights that led me to develop 'Continuous Branding' as a strategic tool for everyone who is building their brand through their people and who want continuous and sustainable growth.

Continuous Branding encourages you to think differently about the experience you want people to feel every time they come into contact with your brand. This is important. I don't just mean when you want to sell to them, I'm talking about the entirety of your relationship with them. Far too many service-based organisations concentrate on the selling process and forget what it feels like to be neglected the rest of the time.

You'll also learn about the five simple principles that make up Continuous Branding in chapter 7. You'll be able to easily adapt them and place them at the heart of everything you do, regardless of whether you're in a business-to-consumer market, a business-to-business sector or operating in both at the same time. They'll help you change the way you do things by communicating clearly with your people and improving your clients' experience, whilst explaining how your brand is progressing.

Continuous Branding provides a more consistent return on investment in time, energy and money than re-branding every few years – which is what happens in most organisations. This is because there is a failure to firmly and clearly link Continuous Branding with an organisation's strategy which results in having to re-brand after a crisis which is not as effective as branding on a continuous basis.

Above all, Continuous Branding will help you improve your brand's performance because it removes confusion and complexity. It focuses on your clients, on the future, on the simple and on the tangible. It will make consistent and sustainable growth easier to achieve – and help smooth out the peaks and troughs. If you have the ambition and determination it can also help you be a leader in your market.

You've probably already identified the major issues facing your organisation that slow you up – and tried all the traditional ways of growing. You may even have already used design in different forms, but what if you haven't used branding strategically before? Don't worry, you're not alone. Inhale long and deep whilst I take you on your own branding journey! A journey that's totally unique to you and your brand. It has no straight lines to the end – because there should be no end. Only twists and turns along the way to greater success and continued growth.

For inspiration, chapter 8 details how Greg Mace, Managing Director of Rapport Guest Services, a front of house services company, uses Continuous Branding to help build and maintain his brand as a market leader that's winning awards for excellent service.

Finally in chapter 9, I'll de-mystify the branding process itself, so that you can understand it and see how it actually works. You'll also be able to identify where you need specific help to achieve the results you want.

First though, in the next chapter I'll be revealing what some organisations use as a motor for growth and innovation.

Key points in this chapter

- Service-based organisations have to overcome issues that manufacturers of products do not – the intangibility of their services, market differentiation, adding value to their offers rather than cutting costs and engaging people in new ways.
- There is a fundamental relationship between branding and design to be exploited by those that recognise the existence and relevance of it.
- Continuous Branding is a strategic tool to be used by service-based organisations to grow consistently, sustainably and to communicate clearly.
- Measure the impact of branding against your organisation's key objectives and link it strategically to your brand's performance. This encourages continuous innovation and renewal with more consistent growth.



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