

Continuous

Branding

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

Craig Thatcher

CHAPTER 7
**Five Principles
of Continuous
Branding**

Continuous Branding is a strategic tool made up of five principles for those who want to grow their service-based organisations on a consistent and sustainable basis.

Put it at the heart of everything you do when you're tired of sailing into that head wind we've talked about. It's simple, it's practical and it's results-driven.



Copyright © 2019 Craig Thatcher.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Printed in the United Kingdom and published simultaneously in electronic format.

First edition, 2015

ISBN: 978-0-9932168-1-7

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

It's based on nearly thirty years of my experience acting as a branding consultant to a diverse range of service brands from start-ups to multinationals and working with all sorts of service-based organisations. It's also born directly from my drive to help everyone get the very best from their investment in branding.

The five principles are key to your brand's future success because you'll be able to interpret them in your own way to drive your brand forward. There are two very good reasons why I'm not going to tell you precisely how to implement them. The first is that you'll use them in a totally unique way within your organisation and this will depend on whether you are in a business-to-consumer market, business-to-business market or both at the same time. And secondly, the adoption of these principles isn't something you can delegate entirely to anyone else or to a third party to undertake on your behalf. You'll only be able to achieve the results you need if you take complete control yourself. The five principles of Continuous Branding are:

1 THINK LIKE A BRAND OWNER

2 LEAD FROM A POWERFUL MARKET POSITION

3 HAVE A POINT OF VIEW

4 PERSONALISE YOUR BRAND EXPERIENCE

5 INVEST CONTINUOUSLY TO GROW CONSISTENTLY

Continuous Branding is not a discrete, standalone activity that takes place solely in the marketing department or sprinkled superficially all over your organisation on a 'stop start' basis when growth slows.

It should be an integral part of your day-to-day management. Put all the principles of Continuous Branding at the heart of everything you do because it's the only place where you'll fully reap the rewards from your investment in time, energy and money. It will provide you with a framework to manage innovation and service excellence as well as providing a way of driving your brand forward continuously, even in the most challenging conditions.



Principle 1: Think like a Brand Owner

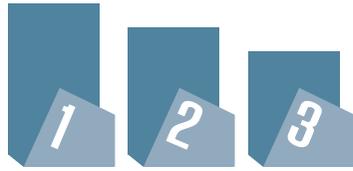
The responsibility for the long term performance and success of your organisation rests with you. So you need to think like a brand owner regardless of your job title, or whether you are the custodian of your brand for only a short time. Everyone else who works with, or for you, should feel motivated to help you achieve your goals.

So what do I mean by thinking like a brand owner? First, it means focusing on what is the right experience for clients and making decisions that are true to your brand. And not being tempted to compromise for a short term gain over your long term good reputation.

Secondly, it means being entrepreneurial, always wanting to improve, spotting opportunities and adapting to meet them.

Thirdly, it means growing your brand consistently, sustainably and responsibly as this is best for everyone involved. And finally but equally importantly, it means inspiring others to help you build your brand and that includes your clients, your suppliers and not least your people. Also, if you make your people feel appreciated and important they'll personify your brand by looking after your clients just as you would yourself.

In order to provide the ideal conditions to grow, sometimes you'll also need to be prepared to protect your brand from anyone else who wants to damage its reputation through their inappropriate behaviour or mischievous comments.



Principle 2: Lead from a Powerful Market Position

Clearly setting out your ambition for your brand for a long term sustainable future is the only place to start. Simply wanting to be ten times your current size is very ambitious, but not clear enough. It doesn't explain why, or how you're going to achieve it. You can't do it on your own without help from your clients and your people, so you need to give them all a big reason why they should support you.

Decide how you're positioning your brand in the most highly desirable place in the minds of your clients so you can achieve what you want. Ideally, it should be in a place where none of your competitors are already positioned. Once your brand has claimed this spot, think how you're going to defend it from others.

Positioning your brand in this way is one of the most powerful things you can do. You'll need professional advisers to help you achieve this and a process which is explained in more detail in chapter 9.



Principle 3: Have a Point of View

People buy from brands that share the same values and have the same point of view as they do. It makes them feel comfortable, understood and respected. They go on to develop deep, enduring and emotional connections with those brands. How can you achieve this between your clients and your brand? The answer is to segment them by their attitude. Seek out clients who share your brand's values and point of view and they will feel a natural synergy with you compared to other brands. A point of view is how a brand views the world, what it thinks is important, what it believes in, what obligations it has and how it behaves. It increases or creates demand for a service. In the business-to-business world it's described as 'thought leadership' which isn't quite such a friendly or engaging term.

Media publishers intelligently segment their markets according to attitude by targeting and then reaching out to certain types of readers by the way they think, their values and their aspirations. Cleverly targeted editorial content promotes them to these readers as independent experts in the chosen subject. This develops strong, yet invisible relationships that build circulation.

In a highly competitive world where there are few real differences between business-to-business brands, one of the best ways to differentiate yours is to develop a point of view of the future that reinforces your brand's position in the minds of your ideal clients. Clearly outline what it is with hard facts and figures to support your thinking. If you can persuade them to look at their problems or issues from this new perspective, you can move forward together and grow consistently. If they're only interested in the cheapest option in the market then you're never going to win.

In consumer markets, brands create and then lead with campaigns that confront a big issue or some form of injustice as a way of expressing their point of view.

EXAMPLE: Celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver (www.jamieoliver.com) combines a successful UK based business empire with a turnover of £200 million (US\$ 300 million) on his cheeky, accessible mass market appeal with a flair for expressing his particular point of view which he describes as taking his public on a journey. You know what's important to Jamie because he not only talks about it, he actually puts his money where his mouth is. He does this by providing opportunities for young unemployed people to become chefs through the apprentice programme at his restaurant, Fifteen. And by starting a campaign to improve school meals and championing much maligned British food. Through The Jamie Oliver Food Foundation, he shares his love of cooking and keeps cooking skills alive. This is a smart move because it provides the Jamie Oliver brand with some space to remind everyone about his true passion.

EXAMPLE: Hubspot (www.hubspot.com) is a business-to-business brand founded in 2006 by Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah who created their vision for inbound marketing and a platform to support it. They developed powerful, easy to use, integrated applications so that businesses could attract, engage and delight customers by delivering inbound experiences that were relevant, helpful and personalised.

Their point of view is based on persuading all of us that traditional marketing is no longer relevant, and that inbound marketing or content marketing as some refer to it, is the way forward. They educate us with papers from their marketing library of best practice. Their academy advocates learning by watching training videos, reading user guides and becoming qualified. They even have a free marketing grader that assesses how good our websites are. As they say – 'So you can make it better. Outpace your peers'. Compelling stuff.

They've managed to create a whole community of converts. On digging a bit deeper, you find they don't really think traditional marketing is dead, as they've kept the core principles, adding new ideas to help promote their services. It's clever. After all, content has always been important, it's just brands see it as a more effective engagement tool. The integration of their software and all their services is the key to their success. In doing so, they've helped create a whole new sector called inbound marketing for organisations that want to help their clients find them.

Sharing your point of view provides a continuous way of engaging your clients wherever they are on their journey with your brand. It means that tactical sales campaigns are consigned to the past as you move towards consistent sales growth with only the right type of clients. You'll also find it easier because you'll have the same things in common with them, popping up in the right places at the right time. And creating opportunities to start irresistible conversations that are highly relevant and topical.

Business-to-business brands will find that their negotiations will be less confrontational, less one-sided and more about making the relationship work for both parties – rather than just being hammered down to the lowest price.

According to motivational speaker and author Simon Sinek, people don't buy what you do – they buy why you do it. So you need to uncover why you do what you do and to convey this clearly. Unfortunately, clients tend not to like being overtly sold to – there's a certain in-built resistance to sales people where the barriers automatically rise when being pressurised in any way. Explaining why you do what you do can be achieved through engaging brand storytelling – everyone loves a good story especially ones about ordinary people. The greater the adversity overcome, the harder the stories work – by resonating deep within our souls. They're also

far more interesting and engaging than sanitised press releases crafted by spin doctors writing for many different stakeholders all at the same time.

People are inspired more by an ordinary person creating an extraordinary experience than listening to a 'commitment to service excellence' statement proclaimed by the Chief Executive Officer of a faceless corporate entity. They'll also find it easier to remember and to tell others.

We relate to stories in ways that no bland advertising campaign or super slick sales person can replicate. Perhaps it goes back to our childhood when we learnt this way? We find them easy to understand, interpret and buy in to. They cut right through all the clutter in a complicated world – and they star your people helping your clients in extraordinary ways, and explaining in an engaging way, why you do what you do. Dig deep and you'll probably find plenty of such stories – so use them in different situations. They work well when told at the right time and in the right place. A spin off of this is that by searching out and recognising your people in this way as an integral part of your brand ethos, you will inspire others to raise their own performances too. In turn, this creates more to talk about and more people to congratulate. I find that most brand owners overlook the fact that their own people are creating brilliant new stories every day – and not recognising that these are far more believable than all the marketing hype.

The people featured in them need to be recognised and celebrated and the very best examples of them published – because there are not enough good service stories out there. They're far outnumbered by the thousands of bad experiences that seem to pop out of the woodwork all too easily. Every one of us has experience of those!

On top of this, there are a myriad of different ways to communicate with people compared to when I first started work. This means there are a lot more opportunities to get your message across. Although, I do find it a little ironic that it seems harder now, or sometimes virtually impossible, to get a response from anyone!

When I first started my career, I either wrote a letter or picked up the 'phone to a prospective client. If they were at their desk when I rang, they answered it because they didn't know whether it was their boss, colleague or a loved one calling them. Or me, for that matter! If they weren't actually there, it rang and rang. If they were in a meeting, in their car or travelling, I had to wait until they got back to their desk. No caller ID or voicemail to protect them either. Now all calls are screened they don't pick up, and voicemail kicks in to take my messages.

They also receive hundreds of emails a day that are not opened because they're just far too busy dealing with more urgent things. Add Skype, iChat and social media into the mix and it's all mind-blowing to a fifty-something like me! People don't respond unless you have something very relevant and topical to talk about. If you can't reach them when you want to, help them reach you when they want to.

To achieve this, you'll need that appealing or thought provoking point of view and an interesting and engaging way to trigger that first conversation. You'll also need ways to continue the dialogue through an exchange of ideas and experiences that you've been on together.



Principle 4: Personalise your Brand Experience

We all know what ‘building rapport’ means. It’s an essential step in developing a relationship with somebody. But have you ever thought how to make it an absolutely fundamental and integral part of what your service brand does in building all those valuable relationships? You can’t afford to leave anything to chance so you need to decide where and when the moments for building rapport will take place by inserting them into every stage of the brand experience. From the first moment that your brand is discovered, all the way through to enjoying a shared experience.

Make sure you don’t have any guidelines or procedures in place that will hinder your people from doing what you now want them to do – or you’ll be telling them to achieve one thing and measuring and rewarding their behaviour to do another. This will be confusing for them, irritating for your clients and counter productive for your brand. This next example is far more common than many would like to admit.

EXAMPLE: I once commented on the poor display of in-store communications materials to a client of mine who worked in the retailer’s marketing department. I was told it was difficult to get right because the people in the stores were measured in all sorts of ways including how tidy the stock room was. This is obviously very important if you run a shop, but they weren’t measured on whether they displayed the posters, leaflets and tickets correctly on the shop floor. The general running of the store was being prioritised and addressed, but not the customer experience and ensuing sales.

So, make sure that you’re not making it harder than it needs to be for your people to provide your clients with the brand experience you’ve defined. How do you start to build the brand experience then? You need to sit down with a multi-disciplined team of internal people and specialists, as well as external partners, who can share their objective and expert views with you. You’ll have to pick people who can put aside preconceptions and place themselves in your clients’ shoes. This is a journey that you’ll all go on together with your brand.

Define all the touch points, or as I prefer to call them – ‘rapport building opportunities’. I’m not keen on the phrase, touch point, because these moments in time are highly important. Sometimes they’re fleeting and yet each must be recognised and incorporated into helping your people and your brand to build rapport with your clients.

These moments must also be a high quality experience or they just won't make an impression. They definitely won't be memorable either, and you'll fail to build any rapport whatsoever.

EXAMPLE: The receptionists in restaurants owned and operated by Jason Atherton's The Social Company (www.thesocialcompany.co.uk) never walk in front of guests when guiding them to their tables, but at their side. In doing this, they create the opportunity to chat and pick up little bits of knowledge about the reason for the visit. These snippets are passed on to the maitre d' who is then enabled to make their experience a little extra special. They do this because they're really passionate about what they do – the food, the service and value for money – however, they recognise the guest experience is the over riding and most crucial factor when building loyalty.

As you can see from this example there are all sorts of (small, inexpensive) ways to personalise your brand experience if you set your mind to it. However, if your service is for other organisations or businesses as opposed to consumers, there will be different issues to consider. For instance, there is usually more than one person on the decision making team and contract negotiations can take weeks or months to complete. If you need to submit tenders to win new business, then establish what information, help or support the decision making team needs to select your bid to move forward.

Collect this information or intelligence and then develop different ways they can access or experience it. To do this, you need to work out what they're thinking at each stage in their buying journey, the questions they have, how they feel and where they're located. Are they in one of your offices, restaurants or somewhere else that's totally neutral? You'll need to learn what's making them anxious and to understand the issues they're trying to resolve. This way you'll provide them with the information they need and not the information you think they need. Ask yourself, how do you want them to feel at the end of each rapport building opportunity? At this point, don't forget to also provide them with a clear step for moving forward together with you.

As you know, every little detail builds or breaks the brand experience. For example, environments like your store, office or exhibition stand and communications materials like brochures all play their part. Once you've decided what you're going to do you need to document everything, and then plan how you're going to communicate this all to the people who need to know. They need to be clear about what to do to support you. Don't forget to build in ways that will encourage them to continuously improve the way they do this. Never stand still – because to stand still is to go backwards.

If you're always searching for deeper ways to engage your clients then sooner or later you will move towards personalisation of their experience of your brand. Around your organisation you already have all the experts and the answers that your existing and prospective clients will ever need to help them achieve their goals. Given the right guidance and support, your people have the ability to make your clients' lives easier, make them feel good about themselves, look good in their own organisations and in turn to help their brand be more successful. In return, they'll reward you with larger and longer contracts which all has to be good for your continuous growth.

Finding an accessible way to bring all these things together will be a huge asset. It might be a web-based tool or an app that's useful, helpful and relevant. If you can share information, data or opinions that provide valuable and timely insights then this could potentially disrupt whole markets by excluding competitors from the conversation altogether.

Having inserted all the rapport building opportunities into your brand experience you can review it on an annual or six monthly basis depending on your own circumstances. And also whenever you need to create a new or different brand experience. How do you then make sure this experience is consistent day in day out? You'll need to record it in such a way that all your people understand what is expected of them. You can do this in the way that your people find the most

engaging and memorable. An employee engagement programme like this could be based on using illustrations, infographics, cartoons, animations or film. The possibilities are endless for communicating how to personify your brand. To perform consistently, they'll want to know how to appear, behave and communicate and how they'll be measured, recognised and rewarded for doing a fantastic job. The format and content will depend entirely on the type, complexity and location of service and the number of people involved. Ensure that it's easy to access whenever and wherever it's needed otherwise it will fail to be effective.

As part of all of this take moments to celebrate successes together. I don't mean throwing wild parties every week. What I mean is taking a few moments to highlight something that has gone particularly well, to congratulate all those involved and to provide positive feedback. It's an easy step to forget when you're so busy or because you're firefighting.

You need to share all your research findings and performance data at regular review meetings to evaluate whether you're on course to achieve what you want. I'm not suggesting loads of different metrics. Just a few key ones that will enable you to accurately measure how much progress you're making. Share the good news and the bad. The purpose of this is not to blame anyone in particular, but to share things when they don't go to plan so everyone can work together on making improvements and be continuously moving

forward. They all need to know what is going on because engaged employees are more productive, providing your clients and each other with excellent service. They'll understand how their actions have an impact on the performance of your brand, even if they work behind the scenes with no direct client interaction. One of the ways you can achieve this is by using a social networking website exclusively for your people, but accessed from whatever device they prefer to use. They'll quickly learn that this is the fastest and most reliable way of finding out everything that will help them be the best they can. This type of system is ideal if you have multiple locations, people working from home or on the move as it's a great way of keeping everyone together culturally.

Performance should be measured on a regular basis to highlight any issues and enable you to make improvements quickly – and ensure your brand gets better continuously. Meeting regularly to make improvements is great, but you can't beat all working closely together on a continuous basis if you can re-arrange your work space to do so (not so easy in a big multinational, I know). This makes it easier to communicate with each other and to make things happen. Fast. How you measure your own progress will depend on what your ambition is for your service brand and how you define success. So measure where you are now regularly so you know when you've reached your goals.



Principle 5: Invest Continuously to Grow Consistently

I'm often asked what sort of investment in time and money should be committed in order to grow. There's no simple answer and it all depends on the unique circumstances of your brand and what precise stage of development it's at. Consider investing anywhere up to 3% of your revenue per annum on Continuous Branding. However, it isn't so much the actual amount you spend that's important, but rather it's about applying it consistently over a continuous period of time that will make the difference. The percentage will depend on the unique circumstances of your brand.

Brands that challenge market leaders tend to spend more on branding than their peers because they're trying to become a dominant player and command higher prices. Having achieved it, this allows them to invest in research, training and IT infrastructure which in turn all help to keep them ahead.

Just like every home owner, every brand owner wants to increase the value of their asset over the long term. A home owner continuously invests money in building maintenance, decoration and gardening to keep their property looking good and the weather out. If they had to sell quickly, they wouldn't need to spend a fortune putting everything right or accept a lower offer.

The same goes for your service brand. If you continuously invest in it then you'll maximise its value over the long term. The more valuable your brand, the easier it is to attract the best talent and suppliers and you'll also be in a stronger position with your clients.

Continuous Branding enables you to decide whether to design new services, diversify, divest, spin-off, merge or sell up or start again. Whatever challenges you face it's good to continually invest in your brand so that you're in the best shape to take on whatever is thrown at you. It's so much easier to do this continuously than have to take a deep breath and make a big investment in re-branding every few years with all of the uncertainty and disruption it causes.

No matter how good the quality of your service is right now, you need to improve it on a continuous basis. So how can this be done? This is a subject for a whole book in its own right and I'm not proposing to cover it here. It depends on your particular situation – it could be you only need to improve certain aspects of it, or

re-design your existing ones or perhaps add completely new services. Ask yourself what is happening in your market? Measure where you are now and assess any change in perception as you move forward.

Maintaining a high quality of service is only achievable with high quality people, but it's unrealistic to be able to keep a great team together for years. The critical DNA will be lost unless successive generations inherit the genes by learning about your brand and how to personify it. In the dance world, principal dancers of the previous generation will often run master classes to coach the next generation on the finer points of the major roles. In the world of branding, passing on the essential DNA can be achieved through story telling and sharing team building experiences with all of your people, branding experts and designers.

So if you're still not convinced by all of this, what happens if you decide not to adopt the principles of Continuous Branding? You may not notice anything in the short term but quite soon it'll feel like that head wind is blowing stronger and stronger. Everything just takes more effort. You may also find that small, cheeky competitors start to steal your market share. At first, only tiny bits at a time. You'll easily dismiss this to begin with, but it will gather pace. You may even find that some of your best people leave, disillusioned with how slowly you're developing and either join another organisation or start up on their own. Some of your

clients will go elsewhere, your brand won't grow as strongly as you'd like and your shareholders will be disappointed.

However, if you put the principles of Continuous Branding at the centre of everything you do then your brand will begin to feel more agile, nimble and responsive. It'll become more dynamic, quicker and adaptable. You'll be communicating with your people better and as a result they'll be motivated and fully engaged. This in turn enables them to serve your clients by working together and performing at their very best. They'll fully appreciate how their efforts affect your brand and their own personal development. One thing is for certain, by achieving all this you'll be building the long term value of your brand – just in case you ever want to prepare it for a sale or merger.

In the next chapter I'll share with you how I've helped Greg Mace, Managing Director of Rapport Guest Services to build his brand and how he uses Continuous Branding to consistently grow his company by motivating his people to personify his brand based on excellent, award winning service.

Key points in this chapter

- Continuous Branding is made up of five principles and is for anyone running or marketing a service-based organisation and building their brand through their people.
- Use Continuous Branding strategically, by putting the principles at the heart of everything you do for greater brand performance and success with more consistent and sustainable growth.
- Motivating your people to personify your brand is both challenging and rewarding and Continuous Branding can help you with it.



Greenfisher

Branding, Design & Digital Agency

Strategically led, creatively driven. We mean business.

Helping ambitious companies like yours to build your B2B brand, engage your people and grow your business internationally.

Inspiring you and your audiences with engaging marketing communications and memorable experiences on-line, in-print and face-to-face.

Learn how to build a strong brand at our Learning Hub



David Clough, Sales Director and Neil Timmins, Director of Caice, a leading acoustician, designer and manufacturer of building products, are securing their brand's future with Greenfisher as their creative partner.

Craig Thatcher
branding specialist_author_managing director
M +44(0)7497 462520
craig@greenfisher.co.uk

www.greenfisher.co.uk
T +44 (0)118 933 8558

dba design
business
association