

AFTERWORD: WHAT TO DO NOW

Home Depot says, “You can do it. We can help.” What’s true of home improvement is true of brand improvement. In fact, to live your brand, you *have* to do it yourself. But almost every company benefits from some expert help.

Are you ready to take your business to a new level? Are you ready to use this discipline of the Big Boys to beat them at their own game—or at least to hammer all the Little Boys that keep nipping at your heels?

You can do it. As Jim Karrh, formerly the Chief Marketing Officer for Mountain Valley Spring Company, says, “the principles in *Branding Like the Big Boys* work very well; I used them successfully in an industry where the Big Boys were nearly 200 times our size. In fact, because they can be smarter and faster, I believe that smaller businesses can beat the Big Boys regularly—by using the Big Boys’ own tools!”

In this section, I’ll outline the process. But be warned, what I’m about to do is no different than your dentist telling you how to fill your own cavities. If you’d like some additional tools, more case studies, online resources, and more goodies, be sure to visit BrandingLikeTheBigBoys.com, where we keep the conversation going.

Here’s the recipe to the secret sauce:

1. Discern and define what makes you unique. This is what we call “brand definition.” Start by writing down every single attribute and “selling point” for your organization, product or service. Now, go back through that list and strike *every point* that can credibly be claimed by *any competitor*. Depressing, isn’t it? That’s why branding works. Dig deeper if you must to come up with at least a few candidates for this point of uniqueness.

2. Identify which of these unique attributes are those in which you can hold leadership, even against a larger, richer, hungrier competitor. If you can't stay in the lead with it, scratch it from your list; that particular attribute will make a poor brand foundation. Don't stop working until you have something you know you can sustain.

3. Evaluate which of these unique and sustainable brand foundations are relevant to the market—they have to matter to your customers. Do this with external market research. Depending on your appetite for both risk and spending money, mount a small-scale qualitative study, a large quantitative study, or some blend of both. Whatever path you choose, you want to acquire enough data to mitigate risk and build confidence in your brand proposition. After all, you're getting ready to invest a lot of human, cultural, and financial resources in the outcome.

4. With data in hand, codify your brand stance. Once you have your unique and sustainable competitive advantages validated by customer research, you need to turn them into narratives that explain, rationalize, and elaborate. The narratives should bring your unique brand proposition to life. We call these the "Brand Leadership

Frames." Others call them by all kinds of names. I suggest you also work with a design or creative team to "visualize" your brand. We



often create a collage of images, sometimes a video or Flash animation. (Bank of Little Rock Mortgage's brand visualization is shown in the accompanying illustration.) Words, sounds, pictures, and music can all add depth and dimension to your brand understanding at this point. These frameworks are useful tools for earning internal buy-in and clarifying what you're doing. They will inform everything else you do, so spend the time and money to get them right.

5. Enroll your senior team. If you're the owner, entrepreneur, or CEO, perhaps you *are* the senior team. In almost every organization, however, there is a top tier of leadership that must be engaged in your brand development program. Branding is a *leadership* discipline and not just a marketing discipline; you cannot *live a brand* unless every single senior executive is on the very same page. If you're the marketing leader and you're just now bringing your senior team into the loop, it's a little late. But better late than never. We address this issue by working with our client's senior team from the get-go. The biggest disasters we've seen happened because the marketing guys didn't want to get the executive team in the room until most of the work had been done and the decisions made. It's easier to invest in an idea and initiative of your own creation; bring the senior team along.
6. Design the activation plan. Truth be told, no great brand is built in a day. A brand is a continuing dialog with your customers. But you have to start somewhere. As with my examples, start inside. Enroll your own employees and other internal stakeholders as brand ambassadors. Educate and engage them in the brand story. You'll love the psychic and creative energy unleashed when you do this, and they will too.

7. Identify, sponsor, and support brand behaviors. Are you becoming “The Air Doctors”? Your brand is going to express itself through service behaviors. Your techs may show up on repair calls wearing lab coats. Maybe there’s a stethoscope or other medical metaphor. We have a “Dash Heating & Cooling” in town that hangs its hat on speedy service: “*We’re there when we say or you don’t pay.*” I’ve never called them, but it would be cool if their techs arrived in tracksuits and running shoes. Perhaps you’re not going to be that kitschy. Just decide, and do it.

8. Communicate your brand platform, promise, and value proposition. In earlier chapters, we explored how that gets executed through logos, taglines, advertising, and more. Establish a plan, calendar the activities, budget the resources, and stick to it. You’re kicking a flywheel, like Jim Collins described in *Good to Great*. Don’t get discouraged because it’s resisted by inertia at first. A few more kicks and the inertia will be working *for you* instead of *against you*.

9. Iterate repeatedly. Like a glorious garden, a brand is never finished growing. You’ll monitor, refine, nourish, and prune as you grow. Good branding.