

DESIGN EXPRESS

The graphic services newsletter for promotional products pros



June 2017

BRAND TO THE CUSTOMER'S EXPERIENCE



Many experts today say that brands aren't just logos or catchy monikers that become household names and that **brand identity is all about the right messaging**. But in an increasingly competitive — and digital — world, there is one thing smart businesses can count on to build their brands' longevity: the customer experience.

That said **the idea of the brand as a living, breathing thing** has taken hold. The best way to build your customers' brands and support their relationship with their clients is to make their brands into experiences.

What is a "Brand Experience"?

A year and a half ago Stephan Vincent, a branding expert and contributor to LinkedIn's business news network Pulse, asked a lofty question.

In the article titled, "**What does it take to define your brand experience**", Vincent talked about the various ways companies both big and small strive to separate themselves from direct competitors.

Some of Vincent's argument involved high-level concepts like commitment by company leadership and courting "buy in" from employees throughout companies. But some of his more important ideas involved customers.

"The brand's purpose is not defined by what you do for your customers," Vincent writes. "It is defined by why what you do matters to your customers."

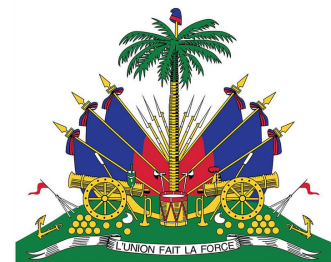
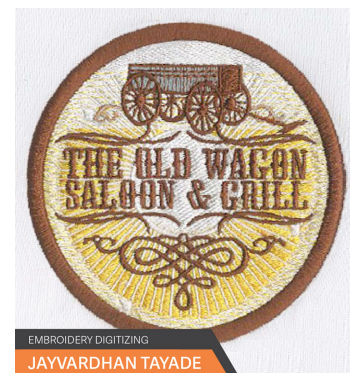
QUICK NEWSLETTER SURVEY

Would you recommend this newsletter?

Nope ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 For sure

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR TEAM

Every month, we celebrate the designers whose work scores the highest impressions on Instagram. This time, **Jayvardhan Tayade** won for embroidery digitizing and **Jagan Kesarkar** won for vector artwork. Keep up the great work, team!



NOTABLE QUOTES

Taking a different angle, Bruce Henderson, a contributor to *Chief Marketer* business network, writes that brand experience is more about delivering ideas, knowhow and even useful information about how to use products or services in terms of how they benefit users. This is especially important with businesses engaged in B2B markets. In particular, Henderson says that brands that can physically engage customers via trade shows or experiential marketing and events do best.

"Most events offer prolonged interaction with a brand, its people, products and/or services. As such, they are a valuable tool to build brand affinity by deepening people's exposure to — and relationship with — the brand."

As a partner to thousands of promotional products distributors and decorators that serve small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), Idea Custom Solutions can vouch for the fact that trade show and event marketing works for many companies. But the means by which your customers make contact with their audiences — and ultimately the customers who choose to do business with them — might be less important than the contacts themselves.

Getting Personal

Without going into certain industry-specific marketing tactics such as loyalty and rewards programs or more futuristic ideas about virtual reality technology, it appears that building useful brands for customers involves more personal approaches versus a one-size-fits-all mindset.

Recently, a craft brewer in the Pacific Northwest decided it was time to rebrand and spiff up its packaging. But it didn't stop there.

Pyramid Brewing introduced a summery Outburst Citrus IPA not just for the warm season but to complement its year-round line-up. It coupled the new product launch with a colorful set of cans and box packing as an integrated "invigorated brand aesthetic and experience", while also revamping digital channels including its website and social media.

More importantly, Pyramid started a campaign called "Find Your Pyramid" to engage beer lovers. The campaign, plugged on social media, called on their loyal customers and curious beer drinkers unfamiliar with the brand's great brews "to share their adventures from across the Northwest" by posting photos of them drinking Pyramid beers with a #FindYourPyramid hashtag. While getting customers to enjoy their beers, Pyramid also in turn is turning the volume way up on their rebrand efforts.

Customers' Voices and Listening

Forbes just revisited the topic of branding and the customer experience in an April post. Contributor and best-selling business author Step Hyken writes that building a meaningful (and profitable) connection with customers begins and ends with listening.

"Brands that listen well respond by doing something with the information. Their response isn't in words; it's in taking action on what they 'hear.'"

Similar to what Pyramid Brewing demonstrated through its #FindYourPyramid marketing campaign, Hyken reinforces the value of calling on customers to share their stories. He also writes that, by listening



"Look several months ahead, see where the obstacles lie, and figure out ways to overcome them."

— Jillian Michaels



"You always have two choices: your commitment versus your fear."

— Sammy Davis, Jr.



"Life is one grand, sweet song, so start the music."

— Ronald Reagan



"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest."

— Benjamin Franklin



"I enjoy hard work; I love setting goals and achieving them."

— Jewel

to their clients, your customers will increase their clients' spending while also reinforcing long-term retention. Companies can also build brand ambassadors.

"When you make customers happy, they talk to their friends, family members and colleagues. This is amplified through social media," Hyken adds. "Positive feedback should be shared on websites, brochures, and more. It can be some of your best marketing!"

Certainly companies come in all different kinds, each with different approaches to engaging clients. But don't forget to **leverage the expertise of an experienced partner** throughout the process of helping your customers to engage their audiences.

SUNNY WEATHER: THE RACE IS ON!

Promotional products are more than just after-the-sale reminder advertising. Likewise, they are more than another version of business cards with names and phone numbers imprinted on pens or magnets.

For many of our thousands of distributor and decorator customers who serve other businesses, promotional products and wearables are a very tangible part of the comprehensive marketing campaigns they develop. No matter whether they are supporting **restaurants**, auto body shops, **law firms** or **colleges**, studies by the Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) and others show that promotional products fit right in with brand building.

In certain sectors of business, trade shows and industry conferences are the best way to connect with existing and new customers. B2B organizations like parts manufacturers, petrochemicals firms and even hospitality and commercial real estate firms rely on forums that bring businesses together.

But for many more types of companies, such as those that can serve other businesses and consumers, public events that take place outdoors can be one way to drive new revenue and market through products and giveaways.

Fitness, Fests, Fun

Last week, ASI dispatched a web exclusive from the front lines in Philadelphia, where 40,000 diehard runners and jogging hobbyists channeled their inner Rocky Balboa on a Sunday morning for the **38th annual Broad Street Run**, a race sponsored by health insurance provider Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Runners trekked ten miles from North Philly down to the old Navy Yard, and around residential neighborhoods, "cheered by sign-holding, bell-jingling friends and family along the way."

Put another way, ASI pointed out that this ten-mile race wasn't just an event for runners and banner companies to grab headlines with their naming sponsorships. The Broad Street Run was also **ten miles of branded promotional products for small and medium-sized businesses** (SMBs) targeting current and future customers.

Spring and Summer Specialties



"Never confuse a **single defeat with a final defeat.**"
— F. Scott Fitzgerald



"I think it all comes down to motivation. **If you really want to do something, you will work hard for it.**"
— Sir Edmund Hillary



"Ideas are easy. It's the **execution of ideas that really separates the sheep from the goats.**"
— Sue Grafton



"**I hire people brighter than me** and then I get out of their way."
— Lee Lacocca



"There are really **three parts to the creative process.** First there is inspiration, then there is the execution, and finally there is the release."
— Eddie Van Halen

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

There are definitely some categories of promotional products that are a better fit in warmer months and also whet peoples' appetites for the outdoors. Some are obvious, like **sunglasses, Frisbees, beach towels** and **outdoor wearables**, all of which are **easily imprinted or embroidered with companies' logos**.

Spring and summer toys, hats and accessories are great for trade shows and outdoor events. They not only bring people to booths or pop-up displays, they let businesses put their brand in consumers' hands.

Likewise, spring and summer get people thinking about food. We've written about the trend of SMBs warming up to summer with barbecue and outdoor grill products, including everything from branded aprons, mitts and spatulas to spice and rub sets.

Another great way for SMBs to tap into sun and fun is with shirts and light outerwear. In December, ASI wrote a story about how promo products distributors could advise their customers to prepare for seasons ahead and summer sun with **"9 Perfect Polos"**.

Whether your customers target the cutting-edge or the more conservative and preppy, in 2017 the short-sleeved, collared wearable can appeal to anyone pining for golf courses or tennis courts, as well as the non-sporty people looking for comfortable summer wear.

Active clothing is another great means for SMBs to get their brands out in the open when worn by employees who are part of company "beer league" softball teams or simply out for walks in the park.

Whatever gets your customers excited about sun and warm weather, remember that having a **great graphics partner** can help you decorate products from wearables to hard goods. Our **embroidery digitizing** and **vector artwork** (as well as **custom creative logo design**), are top quality, fast and reliable. That's why Idea Custom Solutions can help you ease into summer — and summer sales!

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: STILL IMPORTANT IN THE DIGITAL AGE

We all know that, in the digital age, communication has become much easier and more immediate. In just a few minutes, you can fire off an email to check in with a customer. Sometimes, if you have a personal relationship with folks who do business with you, just a text will suffice.

But what is also true is that easy internet access and smartphones can result in communications becoming detached and impersonal.

Not Just Numbers

Accounting professionals are perhaps known more for crunching numbers and financial expertise than anything else. Taking a deeper look beyond the tax questions and IRS forms, it turns out that CPA and small independent accounting firms tend to be very intimate with their clients' personal finances. A contributor to AccountingWeb, Nastassja Tejada, says that a **building a close relationship with clients** is ultimately what makes things work between clients and firms.

She says, "If you show your clients that you are dependable, available,



Arun Bhanuse

Unit Production Specialist, Order Entry Team

Back in the summer of 2012, Arun started his career with Idea Custom Solutions as a junior data analyst. With hard work and the guidance of his managers, he was promoted to his current role. On a typical day, he says, "I like to learn something new. And whatever I do I try to give my 100%."

When he first started, Arun was very shy and afraid to face new challenges. But he gradually got more comfortable and started performing well. He tells us, "Now I accept the challenges and am giving my best efforts in all assigned tasks." Ultimately, he would like to be known as a good mentor who enhances the skills of team members.

About Idea Custom Solutions, he thinks employees should know: "Dedication and hard-work is the key to success and give us the chance to grow. Also, I believe whatever level of perfection one achieves there is always room for improvement."

He got married in 2016 and spends most of his free time with family members. Arun's favorite activity is cooking and he often experiments with recipes. Otherwise, he enjoys watching movies and inspiring videos. For sports, his passion is cricket.

and personally invested in their business, they will feel more comfortable approaching you for business advice."

Certainly Tejada puts her recommendations on relationships within the context of the accounting business. But her emphasis underscores the importance of good working relationships, especially when it comes to gathering detailed and often personal information from clients in order to properly serve them.

Another unlikely crowd that cherishes relationships as a means to growing business is in the insurance business. The summer before last, we talked in our blog about insurance agents. Despite some stereotypes seen in films like "Groundhog Day" and a few Woody Allen films, **insurance folks are as entrepreneurial as any other pros.**

This is probably why one publication called *Insurance Journal* speaks so highly of the idea that insurance agents, similar to big businesses and entrepreneurs, build relationships first. Most importantly, **building consistency and a friendly familiarity with the customer is paramount.** *Insurance Journal* contributor Tom Wetzel writes that doing so eliminates the impersonal transactional feel that can torpedo business. Quoting business author Brian Appleton, Wetzel illustrates that the size of the company or brand doesn't matter much when it's all done right.

"Everything you do . . . needs to look and feel the same — it's your brand. Why do people buy from McDonald's? Consistency. Everything from their cups and napkins to their golden fries and Big Mac with special sauce brings about an emotion that says you can trust them. You know what you are getting, whether you go to one in Chicago or Los Angeles."

So if professionals who talk to their customers about things such as cost accounting, tax returns and insurance coverage consider mastering relationships with small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), to be essential, so should you.

Story Time

Yes, relationships will accomplish much more than helping you collect information and understand your customers' needs. Another school of thought is that building relationships builds your brand and your reputation, especially with SMBs, who tend to make referrals by word-of-mouth.

Others think that being closer with your customers allows you to do two very important things. The first is being a connector.

"**Not every person you meet will be a prospective client** or business opportunity," writes Claudia Mollerup-Madsen for the *Houston Business Journal*.

She goes on to say that the fact every prospect may not be an ideal customer initially, "doesn't make their relationship with you any less valuable. Uncover people's undisclosed needs and concerns; then teach them how you can help."

The second thing that a closer relationship lets you do is tell your story, both as a person and as a business.

"If you want to be remembered," Mollerup-Madsen adds, "you need to find

Someday, Arun would like to learn to speak French. If he gets the chance, he would also complete his master's degree.

TWEET THAT!

Ranking 20 coolest pieces of 2018
[#PromoProducts](#) for [#MLB](#) fans: socks, flip-flops, boat shoes.
<https://goo.gl/KGfvYw>

Tweet
That!

Tips on making your [#golf](#) [#marketing](#) ideas a hole-in-one.
[#PromoProducts](#) a must.
<https://goo.gl/vbAZKN>

Tweet
That!

Why it is cool to work at Tesla? Great benefits, coffee, free food and [#PromoProducts](#).
<https://goo.gl/pTQ8Ci>

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LinkedIn's Top 50 Companies for talent. Perks, branded [#PromoProducts](#) are all part of welcomes.
<https://goo.gl/QqFIJC>

Tweet
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The [#vintage](#) look is popular and [@ASICentral](#) has 5 easy tips for screen printing [#wearables](#).
<https://goo.gl/IRUQz6>

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Spokane, Washington [#rebrands](#) to rework its reputation as "creative, natural and enterprising".
<https://goo.gl/fBcnFz>

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Hawaiian Airlines launches a [#re-brand](#) to court travelers looking for beautiful destinations.
<https://goo.gl/th5p7i>

Tweet
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Upcoming film Jurassic World 2 takes a page of out the stone age for its new [#logo](#). Maybe!
<https://goo.gl/RyDcfx>

Tweet
That!

New Zealand Rugby, the Allblacks, have a new [#logo](#). Fans of the world's biggest team are fickle.
<https://goo.gl/rhx1HR>

Tweet
That!

Affiliation with the NY [@Yankees](#) is a start but

Tweet
That!

common ground with the people you meet — and the most effective way to do that is to tell a relatable or unique story."

Just Do It

Thinking about the value that relationships provide for both customers and service providers, [the possibilities for growing your business with people who consider you their friend are great](#). Moreover, the means by which you increase contact and familiarity are less black-and-white and more a facet of you, your business and your sector.

For some, a simple approach might be dropping by in-person more frequently, or perhaps calling ahead first! For other SMB clients that want more attention, a quarterly lunch might be effective. [Others might love to know about your next event](#), or have you [visit their booth at their upcoming trade show](#).

And, if you know your customer likes to get out of the office, [an occasional trip to the golf course might be just the thing!](#)

If you need graphic design and production in serving your customers, we stand by ready to help [with the best in embroidery digitizing, vector artwork, custom logo design, image editing](#) and more. If not, we just happy to be an informative resource that you tap in trying to build your successful business.



Embroidery Digitizing



Vector Artwork

its broadcast channel rolls out baseball imagery.
<https://goo.gl/VsjuL4>

Innovative [#SMBs](#) in the UK find "print is still king", offering places to show creative [#logos](#).
<https://goo.gl/sqafLe>

[Tweet That!](#)

Delaware's beaches lure tourists. Print [#brochures](#) and [#MarketingCollateral](#) also drive visits.
<https://goo.gl/U7m8IE>

[Tweet That!](#)

CLIENTS ARE RAVING

"I just wanted to let you know that our customer is extremely happy with this design. She did not expect it to turn out this well. Thank you for doing such a great job on this difficult design and for making our customer very happy."

Major supplier client of Idea Custom Solutions

"Keep sending all of the excellent newsletters and info. All of it has been tremendously useful and helpful!"

Idea Custom Solutions customer

"This is great info!"

Idea Custom Solutions customer

"I tried Idea Custom Solutions for the first time and the file was not correct, but it was fixed very quickly. I'm happy!"

Idea Custom Solutions customer



If you have any designs created by our team that you would like to share in this newsletter, send them to us at marketing@ideacustom.com



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