

# Use Your Brand, Weather the Storm

By Kelly Walker, M.S.

Rudyard Kipling's classic poem, *If*, advises us to "Meet with triumph and disaster, and treat those two impostors just the same." Most of us look to economic slowdowns with trepidation, and scramble to weather the doldrums until the winds of change bring the economy roaring back. The challenges we encounter, however, often begin when the winds are fair.

When the world is beating a path to your door, and your biggest challenge is keeping up with demand, it's easy to put branding and marketing on the back burner. Herein lies the danger. By the time the curve moves to its natural downward cycle (and it always does), we suddenly find ourselves competing for a limited client base. We're courting disaster if we grow complacent in the good times; we will be stretched to get the market's attention when budgets are tight and we are trying to ride out the storm.

This is the first in a series of educational articles designed to provide you with sound branding and marketing tools to help your business develop steady, managed growth to even out the highs and lows. Now is the time to begin changing our thinking, starting with how we communicate our brand: using outward appearances to communicate inner substance.

Consider for a moment Romeo and Juliet. Romeo, being a rather poetic kind of guy said of Juliet, "One fairer than my love? I the all-seeing sun Ne'er saw her match, since first the world begun." We all know it was love at first sight, but have you considered how much that first contact mattered, and how appearance mattered? Juliet made a powerful first impression, decked out in the latest fashion, all lace and silk, shining like a star. Juliet's image and how she conveyed it got her just the attention she wanted from a guy to die for.

Your image, and the impressions you make are important because they reflect your substance and communicate at a glance whether or not your business is worth a second look. Grabbing the attention and interest of potential clients is paramount; it is the first step to a deeper relationship.

An effective brand is skillfully expressed by your business name, a modern logo and a memorable tagline. These are the essential elements of your first impression; they simply have to grab the emotions and imagination of your audience within a few seconds.

Getting noticed in a media-saturated market requires a strong identity communicated through the execution of an effective marketing plan. In an economic down-cycle, positioning your business with a compelling, contemporary brand is more important than ever, if you are to gain top-of-mind awareness over all the other businesses courting your

potential clients! Businesses with outdated, ineffective brands, marketing based upon guesswork, or advertising that fades into the background will not compete well.

Start now with a good plan and a thorough analysis of your brand's effectiveness. The key is balance and a visionary plan that is proactive rather than reactive and a steady marketing presence—in good times and bad. Between creative brand marketing strategies and whatever budget you can muster, your business will shine, whatever the weather! ●

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