



A GUIDE TO IMAGE BUILDING

Dartways Guide to Creating a Positive Company Image

This guide has been developed for the SMEs of Pakistan. Majority of the Pakistani SMEs are unmindful of the need for crafting and effectively marketing their image in order to stay alive in this intensely competing world.

What communication tools are available to a company for establishing or building a positive image in the eyes of its customers and more importantly, the consumers?

DARTWAYS Guide to Image Building has been developed for the SMEs. It articulates the various communication tools available to a company for creating and effectively marketing its corporate image. These are powerful tools to attract more customers and expand business to new frontiers, nevertheless getting it done successfully hinges largely on effective utilization of these tools.

1. From Identity to Image

First thing first

Organizational Identity – Perceiving yourself!

Identity Vs Image?

- Identity is how a company wants to be perceived
- Image is how the company is perceived

There is a marked distinction between an organizational identity and organizational image. In order to have a good image, you need to start first from defining and ascertaining your own identity as to how you want to be perceived by others. In other words, an organization creates its own identity and has control over how it wants to project its identity. An organizational identity is thus about what members perceive, feel and think about their organizations. It is assumed to be a collective, commonly-shared understanding of the organization's distinctive values and characteristics. If the outward appearance of a business doesn't clearly communicate a company's unique strengths, customers may not understand everything the company has to offer.

A desired image

- Dynamic and innovative
- Reliable and well-established
- Committed to long-term relationships
- A creative and pro-active partner
- Result oriented
- Committed and reliable
- Accountable
- Good listeners
- Analytical problem-solvers

There are many ways through which you can communicate or exhibit your company's identity. These can be via direct interaction or through printed material like company's brochure, profile and leaflets etc or by using printed and electronic media.

Organizational Image – What others think about you?

An organizational image, on the other hand, is not what the company believes it to be, but the feelings and beliefs about the company that exist in the minds of its audiences. The first step in building your company's image is to clearly understand your key competitive advantage in the marketplace, and then to craft your image around that advantage.

Having a positive image is of utmost importance for any successful company or enterprise. A company image has very much to do with marketing, public relations, and branding. Focusing on creating a positive company image will enable you to attract more customers, have a great reputation, enjoy consumer loyalty, and basically do a lot better in sales than any of your competitors. In reality, your company image is really what sets your company apart from the hundreds of other companies which might be offering the same product or service that you are offering.

Equation to remember!

Customer expectations minus the reality they experience = customer disappointment

Creating an image for your company is only the first step, however; you must also support and maintain your image through your actions. Make sure that the image you present to your customers is accurate. Once you have determined what your image should be, you must strive to deliver that image to your customers.

Building up your Corporate Identity

a company's identity is represented by its core values, behavior, symbols and the way it communicates. The external world assesses you from these key elements and forms its perception about you. A good image, therefore, begins 'at home'.

Symbols: Are they significant?

The first thing that your customers might come across be your logo or letterhead: Harbingers of your company's identity

Basic elements of a corporate identity

- Symbols
- Core values
- Behavior
- Communication

Symbols: Logos and other graphical things

An organizational logo can be the first thing that your potential customer or a consumer may come across i.e. on a billboard, newspaper or a visiting card. Even the typography and design of your letterhead, brochure, business cards, the website and placement of logo play an important role in creating and enhancing your identity. Develop them professionally. Do not apply different logos, but use the same fonts and colors for all your communication, including letterheads and business cards. Treat your company's logo with respect, just as big corporations do. Be strict and do not allow deviations from color and size because you are aiming at a company's identity which, being a long-term process, requires consistency. This is also the case when your company name is your logo.

Core values

The 'core values' form the foundation of your company's identity. They are based on fundamental managerial decisions taken by the company, ranging from daily activities to long-term objectives. Core values can consist of organizational policies, its mission, strategy, products and services, office facilities, people and their behavior, communication and the company's code of conduct. The values are expressed in behavior, communication and symbols.

Organizational Culture and Behavior

An organizational culture is perceived as a symbolic context within which interpretations of organizational identity are formed and intentions to influence organizational image are formulated. A corporate identity involves how we define and experience ourselves and this is influenced by our activities and beliefs which are grounded in and justified by cultural assumptions and values. The organization's behavioral pattern emanates from its very essence. Culture, traditions, procedures, standards and values and its style of management together form a number of trend-setting aspects of organizational behavior. The company's objectives also play a leading role.

Communication

The style in which the organization communicates with its surroundings forms yet another pillar on which its identity rests. As regards contents, this is a case of 'tone of voice'. Is the communication open, honest and correct? Are enquiries, requests, complaints and suchlike swiftly answered, and by which

means of communication? Is there a univocal manner of communication? And is it possible to make personal contact?

Creating an Image – Why is it important?

As we said earlier, having a positive image is of utmost importance for any successful company or enterprise. A positive image brings along business success not only in your own country but also abroad. It compels your partners to trust and build partnership with you.

An organizational image can only be built and sustained if it has the cooperation of not only its customers, suppliers and bankers but most importantly its employees which drive this image. All of them are more likely to cooperate if they have a positive impression of the company.

It is important to note that a company's real face is exhibited from its behavior and the way it communicates with outside world. In order to function well, it is vital that an organization has a positive image directed towards its clients and that the image is one which tallies with reality. The image which the organization perceives of itself and the image perceived by the company's clients (the relation between the Company's Identity and the Image) have to be in agreement. It is not only made visible by printed material, electronic (virtual) expressions and the set-up of the company's office. Non-written communication, such as the way employees behave, how complaints are handled, and reactions to correspondence: all of these also have an influence on the image which the outside world forms of a company. Every effort needs to be put in to bring the company's image at par with its position on ground.

An image is often determined on the 'front line'. A prime example is how incoming phone calls from customers/clients are handled (accessibility?), behavior at a trade fair (active, attentive?), the processing of complaints (customer-friendly, service-minded?), and other situations in which direct personal contact occurs. It is therefore important that the company's personnel should be given clear instructions regarding external communication. Instruction manuals and courses on this subject can contribute greatly to avoiding that a carefully built up image becomes shattered with one blow. This is, of course, only a part of an overall communication strategy. Attention should be given to which communication media should be used, when to activate them, the ultimate objective, the available budget and equally important, how to measure the results while designing a strategy of this kind.

Corporate Image: Should be more discernible from the organization's positive behavior and its cooperation with partners

- It takes years to build a positive image; it only takes seconds to ruin one.
- Make sure that your image accurately reflects your company's unique strengths

Image building campaigns

Image: Should be more discernible from the organization's positive behavior and its cooperation with partners

It takes years to build a positive image; it only takes seconds to ruin one.

It must be clear by now that the formation and use of a company's identity cannot be left to chance, but has to be carefully considered and applied on a long term basis. Also worth taking into consideration is whether, within a communication strategy, a sound 'image-building campaign' should be developed and whether or not to bring in a specialized agency to handle it. Image-building campaigns have to convey the desired image in the best possible way to the target group and must create a clear company image as opposed to that of the competition. An effective campaign is a strong instrument for exerting influence on the desired image. Thought must be paid in advance as to what the 'focus', the core aspect of the image has to be. Under the sub-heading 'Building up the Corporate Identity', we already identified a number of core values on which a company can focus. In this respect, one should realize that corporate image campaigns are at least equally important as product promotional activities, especially if your company is still unknown. Since competition between products is increasing by the day, the corporate image could make the difference. Therefore, determine your image first. Do not engage in product promotion before having invested for a longer period of time in image promotion. Remember that in business-to-business the image of a company is equally or more important than the image of your product. Campaigns are generally built around a so-called 'promotional mix': a combination of different instruments, deployed at different stages. When applying a combination of those instruments, consistency and repetition are aspects of the utmost importance. Below, we give examples by highlighting a few aspects in the campaign.

The Company Logo – the fore-runner of your identity

A logo is a strong element for supporting your company's identity in the outside world. It consists of a symbol of which the typography and the color(s) are the deciding factors. Simply the use of the company name in a particular and consistently applied typography can also function as a logo. Bearing in mind the importance of the professional appearance of a logo, it is strongly recommended that a specialist should be engaged for designing your company's logo. Needless to say, the specialist should be given a well prepared and thorough briefing on the desired image.

Highlighting Your Unique Selling Offer

The company's Unique Selling Offer (i.e. how your company or product distinguishes itself from that of the competition) has to be communicated and used as a strong argument for achieving the desired image.

An Effective Catch Phrase (Slogan)

A good catch phrase or slogan plays an effective role in drawing attention and making clear, at a glance, what is unique or most characteristic about your company. But how should the slogan run? A slogan which one person finds marvelous can strike another person as stupid. Creativity is a must, but a couple of rules of thumb can do wonders. Here they are:

1. Do you really want a slogan? A bad one can do more harm than good to the image which you want to achieve.
2. Make the slogan short and simple.
3. Beware of exaggeration, it works counterproductively.
4. Do not 'shout': a subtle, original text is far more highly appreciated.
5. A slogan which has a double or even triple meaning can easily be confusing.
6. Search for original words and avoid clichés like quality, service, the best, etc.
7. Test your slogan on other people. Ask them what they think about the sentence you have just composed.
8. At their best, slogans activate an emotion or stimulate people's imagination.