

Insight

BRANDING IN A TIME OF TURMOIL; WHY? HOW?

Brand Adaptability While Preserving Identity

By M. Aref | Tajrobeh Design Studio

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--- Brand Adaptability While Preserving Identity —

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In a situation where rapid technological changes and social, political, and economic crises make high-speed management and decision-making inevitable, can we (and should we) think about "identity and brand design"? Is it "optimal"? Isn't it just a luxury or philosophized theory?

Aren't the economic pressures that are currently squeezing businesses enough reason to consider "Brand Design" unnecessary?

Isn't it better to spend on quick and guerrilla advertising campaigns and quickly adapt to social and consumer trends, instead of having a medium- and long-term approach to Branding and Business Development?

Several business managers in various fields, in response to the "necessity and importance of brand design," said that "branding is not for now," "we are under pressure now," and "branding is for the future and for long-term businesses."

Now the question is, if great companies work on their branding, is it because they are not under pressure? Is their competitive environment easier and less stressful? Are they not challenged with any social and economic crisis?

Management decisions (by the CEO) are usually made based on achieving "results", but strategic decisions (by the business leader) should be planned based on creating the desired "impact".

"Identity and brand design" is a strategic and fundamental concept and should be designed with a leadership mindset. Its approach is to create "impact", not just to achieve a series of quantifiable results (though it will eventually lead to tangible results).

In this regard, some of the most important "impacts" of identity design (why) and methods of creating this impact (how) in times of crisis are introduced in the following.

Part One: "Why?"

-- The impact of "identity design" on business resilience and stability --

The core of Identity Design is connecting to the common internal characteristics of a part of the society. Characteristics that almost do not change over thousands of years, such as:

- The need to have a "sense of belonging"; the need to have a "tribe";
- Contact with the Inner Child;
- The need to express personal inner feelings.

The important point here is that

if you invest in the most inner human commonalities, your brand identity will be meaningful to your audience in the long-term and will not become outdated when it faces fleeting consumer trends or economic and social crises.

In this regard, to increase the resilience and stability of the brand, you can consider the following approaches:

1- Responding to the need for a “sense of belonging” and having a “tribe”

In the current era, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of people feeling lonely has increased more than ever before. Consequently, there is a need to reconnect with social groups more than ever.

Any platform that can create the experience of connecting to a group (tribe) for your audience is still desirable and valid. This platform can be your brand experience in the form of its identity and style.

An identity and style that connects a group of people (your audience) to each other and forms a small community.

2- Creating loyalty by delivering peace of mind and a dense experience

Brands summarize and condense a large amount of decision-making information for customers. It takes little attention from them to understand and choose you and your (new) products, because they already know what level of quality they can expect. Therefore they get a lot of information by spending a small amount of energy and time.

Identity of your brand gives them mental breathing, so when they are in high-stress and even critical situations, they make more complex decisions with less effort.

3. Creating organizational loyalty

Today, the frequency of switching among employers is much higher than in the past. In the past, many employees of a company would retire in it. But nowadays, employees who have worked in a company for 3 years are considered senior!

A good brand creates a sense of family within the organization. As a result, employees will be more interested in keeping their jobs and staying with the organization and they will collaborate and cooperate better in difficult economic conditions.

4- Creating Differentiation Amidst the Mass Content

With the massive amount of content being produced, especially in the age of Artificial Intelligence, businesses need to have a unique “style” to be seen. With AI tools, content production has become easier than ever, but consequently, creating differentiation is becoming increasingly difficult. Part of this differentiation is achieved through brand identity and style.

Identity creates fundamental differentiation. “Identity” and “Identical” have a common root. When you create an identity and style for your business, you set it apart from others.

Your story, combined with your brand style, creates an emotional complex that will be difficult to copy (if not completely copy-proof).

It has been said that "people forget what you say, but they will never forget how you make them feel".

Part Two: "How?"

-- Brand Strategy in the time of crisis --

Having a timely and appropriate response to social, economic, and technological changes, indicates that your brand is lively and up-to-date. It can also help increase brand awareness in the minds of your audience. These responses can be applied in various aspects such as "advertising", "content creation", "financial approaches", and "change management".

Communication and Advertising Approach

When people (for various reasons, especially due to social, political, and economic crises) have negative and unpleasant feelings about advertising, what can companies and brands do?

1- First, your most important advertising and communication medium is your product/service itself.

Your product is your biggest billboard.

In times when spending on advertising can have a negative impact (for example, in the midst of political protests or in a war-like atmosphere), a better and more strategic choice is to improve the quality of your product/service.

Instead of allocating budgets to advertising when the general atmosphere of the society is negative and stressful, allocate that budget to Design and Development teams, so that they can create a better ratio between quality and price of the product.

2- If for any reason you decide to advertise in a crisis period, do not advertise with a mass-audience approach.

Use TTL methods instead of ATL and BTL. Send messages precisely and specifically to your former and current customers. Messages that, in addition to advertising your product, should also have two other functions:

First, your customers should know that your one-on-one communications are important to you;

Second, it should be a sign of your understanding of the general mood of the society. Therefore, advertise offers that are appropriate to the conditions.

Once, during the Football World Cup, I asked a friend: "Do the football-themed ads that various businesses broadcast have a positive effect or not?"

"Yes, because it shows that they pay attention to current events and trends." He replied.

The same amount of attention by brands to the general mood of people should also be maintained in times of crisis.

Content Production

What content should we produce when society is in crisis and despair?

1- Express your social position and views.

Everything that brands say should not be just about themselves and their products (a very common mistake), but

taking a stand on social crises and producing content about the concerns of the audience is one of the most important signs of your brand being humane.

Publishing a content like “Look how wonderful everything is” during turbulent days and crisis can be quite irritating and disappointing. It also puts you in the category of fake and state-dependent media. Don't think that your brand has to be happy and cheerful all the time. Acknowledging hardships and crises shows that your brand is humane. It shows that you are connected to the community and have a clear and realistic view of people's lives. Artificial euphoria makes your brand appear unbelievable and hopeless.

Real tears are more impactful and lovable than fake smiles.

2- Introduce solutions to make people's lives better through your products and services.

For example, if you sell home appliances, explain to people how to take care of their appliances during power outages.

If you are a clothing manufacturer, explain to them the best way to fold clothes to fit in a travel suitcase (when people leave the city due to critical conditions). In addition to being a timely and punctual help, it is also a sign of being considerate for your brand.

Brand, Facing Economic Crises

Even in a widespread economic crisis, you can continue to strengthen your brand image with appropriate decisions. In this regard:

1- Trust your audience.

They will understand the increase of your prices to the extent that it is fair.

2- Use creative methods of managing costs.

For example, ask employees to take turns for unpaid leave (for example, monthly) to diffuse the financial pressure. This method is also a sign of cooperation and proper interaction between employees and the organization.

3- Layoff human-friendly

If you have to make layoffs, at least do it sympathetically and fairly. Prioritize their salaries. Give them a recommendation letter so they can find work easier. Introduce them to other business owners you might know.

Remember that your employees are still your brand ambassadors even after they leave your company.

4- Maintaining Brand Position versus maintaining Financial Position.

Would you rather maintain your brand or your profit? With a little patience and working with less (or any) profit, you increase the likelihood of getting through an economic crisis.

5- Learn from the great ones.

There are businesses all over the world that over several decades have gone through all kinds of economic, social and political crises such as revolutions, wars and sanctions. However, they still continue to operate. You can learn from them. These businesses are mostly well-known brands and are good case studies for crisis management.

Dealing with nonstop Social, Economic and Technological Changes

How should one respond to all these changes in tastes and trends? Fast paced changes that can be a crisis for the market stability.

You can keep up with the changes, but this keeping up does not necessarily mean accepting all social trends moment by moment and becoming one with them. Rather, it means finding a timely response and the right degree of flexibility and adaptation.

1- First of all, realize that the change in the psychological mood of society is faster and more than economic changes. For example, there has been no news of shortage of gasoline yet, but long queues form at gas stations. New sanctions or tariffs have not yet been imposed and only vague news has been published, but economic despair is spreading among business owners.

So instead of quickly joining the queue of those panicked about the economy (and, for example, laying off staff), first try to convey the message to your brand audience that "we are here for you" and "we're still committed to our brand promise and quality".

2- Take advantage of the current trends, but don't get completely overwhelmed by them. Remember that most of them are Pop styles and short-term trends that fade quickly. If you try to constantly adapt and change your style, it will cost you a lot.

Of course, changing your style does not contradict maintaining your identity as long as it is done appropriately. The identity of a soldier or lawyer has been the same for centuries, but their appearances and style have changed.

Your copywriting and graphics can be updated from time to time, but "products and services" should be designed with a medium-term perspective and "identity" with a long-term perspective.

Design in its contemporary form was born from economic and social challenges. Designers are experts at facing challenges and providing solutions that fit the situation.

Designing your brand identity, style, and communications based on an understanding of "internal human needs" and "external societal conditions" can create a sustainable and resilient business for you.

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