



DIY **BRAND AUDITS**

Brand Audits are recommended to all the businesses who want to establish the brand values and believe in timely brand updates to face the ever fierce competitive markets.

It is also suggested for the start-up brands who are trying to create their own space in the business area.

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Grow your Business through DIY BRAND AUDITS



Branding a business is forever considered important. It is important for two reasons – to differentiate and for easy recall in the customer’s mindset.

Earlier it was easy for the Brand owners and the marketers to create a space in the customer’s mindset as the media channels were limited and so were the time slots. But with the growth of trade economy & technology – gaining the mind space has become a challenge.

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Let us begin the series by understanding the 'Current Need of Branding'. What the year 2014 looks like to the marketer and what you need to know about Customer preferences.

Branding your Business in 2014

For those of you who are already working on their brand, and those who have finalized the idea they are going to launch, have got an idea and planning to launch sometime this year or early 2015. Here are few quick tips which are trending and will evolve in the years to come.



Assess your Idea, twice

The consumers are informed, the market is expanding, and the reach is growing multi-folds. Brands are reaching customers door steps from the world over. Be it a British apparel brand, a handmade Bangladeshi craftwork or even the *Prasad* from an auspicious Indian temple everything is being offered where a consumer needs it.

From services to the brands, ideas are spreading fast in the world over. It is never recommended to launch a 'me too' brand but even if you are working on an existing idea, you need to make sure that you stand out and make a difference – in offering, in pricing, in positioning, in service delivery or anything but you need to stand out. Explore how!

Brand Early

Yes, branding early is beneficial. It gives the right edge over other starters, provides the ample of opportunity to lead and overlap the competition.

At 30TH FEB, we always recommend our clients to Brand Early. It is fine to launch a little late but it is essential that you launch a brand and do not become another business. You may argue that there are many businesses which excel without branding themselves but the coming times are going to be difficult if you do not brand.

It is also important if you want your business to stand out and make its own space in the existing market.

Speak their Language

When you create a brand, customers should be the most important aspect on your mind. And while creating a brand, working on their communication, devising brand story – you should work on their needs & wants. The brand should speak their language and not what you ideate or envision for your brand. It is significant to reach out to the customers by talking about – the benefits that your brand offers to the customers, what your brand communicates is the 'key influence' on customer in making a purchase decision.

It also helps the consumers in making a choice over competition, to assess why your brand is better than the existing one or what makes your brand a better choice.

Sometimes an exciting brand name, a relevant design and attractive communication leverages the chances of your brand get noticed and it also triggers consumer interest and results in impulse purchases.



Keep the Brand Promise

You need to know it all before you promise something. The marketer needs to understand the competition, the existing gaps and only then make promises. A promise not kept will not just create an identity crisis but it will dissolve the entire brand image.

For new brands, starting small is ok but starting with truth is more important. A Brand Image is assessed based on the name, design, image and quality. Like it is important to launch with a clear identity – launching a quality brand will only lead to a sustainable business.

Watch Out the Social Space

The 3C's that matter most in current times is Customer, Connections and Content. How sure you are about the customers for your brand, are you connecting them at the right place, are you spreading the right message – is your content right?



A marketer must be careful with all the 3C's of the Digital worlds. You need to watch out the space for 3C's. If your customer is the one you can connect on the road side through an outdoor hoarding, make sure you are not writing blogs and spending on facebook likes.

If a product is youth & urban centric, connect with them on the social networks, reach out through the right content which is relevant and interesting to the TG. While you work on any promotions, managing customers, connections and content – you need to make sure of the reach, offering and service availability. Connecting with more consumers and reaching out to lesser audience works against the brand. So the brands need to be constantly managing their social space.

Above are few tips which we observed and are trending as our Brands perform in the market. With the year on, we will be sharing newer & better observations. []

Having understood the current brand trends, we now need to understand why a brand or business needs Brand Audits. What is the significance of brand audits and what difference it can bring to the brand, performance and revenue? So here is the Need, Significance of Brand Audits.

Brand Audits – for the timely Brand Boost

Brand Audits are defined as the evaluation of the brand value in current times as compared to the competitors. A brand audit includes examination of brand attributes – tangible and non-tangible.

Regular brand audits are recommended like the regular health check-ups. It is required to assess the elements which are affecting the brand image – it could be in the positioning, perception, social media, content, brand design or even the marketing communication. A brand audit checks it all and provides a feedback with the recommended set of actions to better the brand equity in the industry.

WHY Audit your Brand?

Many wonder about the need of a Brand audit. People believe that it is enough to have an identity created and rest of the time & effort shall go in Sales. They fail to understand that the first impact of their product or service is through the brand only. Also with the increasing social media the brand reach has increased, methods to connect with customers have multiplied and with the mobile apps the reach has gone manifold.

The suggestive motto behind a Brand Audit is to ascertain the following:

- To check the present day positioning and how relevant it is to the industry and the competitors.



- SWOT Analysis – One can check the strength and weaknesses of the brand. It is also good to keep an eye on the upcoming opportunities – which could be like the change in technology, launch of alternative products, changing customer needs due to any social/environmental revolutions etc.
- To examine current market expectations and re-alignment of brand attributes to make them suitable and preferred brand.
- For accelerating the business goals in purview of the customer needs.
- Figure out the PODs (Points of Difference) with the competitors. And whose promotions are making an impact.
- If there is any Identity Crisis in the brand image inference.
- Checking the collaterals and communication material to assess if there is any difference in what we want to present to the client and how they infer our brand messages.

HOW Audit is done?

At 30TH FEB we created an Audit Framework and formulated the following steps:

Brand Definition

To start with we need to check the Brand Definition. Is the focus still there from where you begin it? Is the Brand intent same or the actions and communications differ from what were established at the launch.

This becomes important when there is seen a difference in what we position the brand as and what we offer. The brand communication need to be same at all levels, be it the company profile, the social media content, the e-mailers or even a

simple brand message. This binds the consumer mindset and offers a great recall. All the things if differ, there is an identity crisis and that develops gaps in the brand defined and shared and hence lead to a weaker brand recall.

So it is important that the 'Brand Profile' is updated and similar across all channels.

Brand Evaluation – Marketing Efforts

Whatever is created, formed and developed need an assessment? One need to check if the investment made in creating the Brand is bringing any business. If it is reaching the right consumers and the target segment find relevance.

Sometimes start-ups opt for high end branding with heavy weight content which might read well but actually miss out the consumer base. The TG doesn't find relevance, they fail to perceive the brand as a solution provider and that is not satisfactory – that needs to be changed. May be the top management will give you great reviews but if the target is middle/junior level, you need to reconsider.

There are also times when people pick the fad over logic. Brands which won't be searched on the social media keep social media budgets, if the intent is awareness it is ok but you need not invest beyond a limit. Save that money for more relevant media.

The above things can only be ascertained through Brand Evaluation. An annual Brand Evaluation is a good strategy for businesses which are relatively new and offer new services.



Customer Profile

Interview your customers. Ask them questions about your company, the services offered and why they think an association with you is a good deal. Avoid questionnaires and prefer to talk in details because here you are doing the Perception Analysis and you need to check if they have changed over the time.

Here is a checklist for what the customers should be asked about in a brand audit:

- About your company
- How do they infer the collateral?
- What do they like most about the brand?
- Is there any change they would like to bring?
- If they are having any difficulty in using the service/product offered or suggested by you.
- Ask them what they feel their competitors are getting and they want too.

Assess Internal Branding

Often non-existent but Internal Branding is significant. You need to ask your team what they perceive the brand as, what is the work philosophy in the company. How the company and its staff should communicate with the customers? And also if they think there is a scope for improvement. This not only helps improvise the brand but also increases the employee loyalty.

Speak to the Stakeholders

Stakeholders can be your vendors, the team you worked with, the people you associate with or those whom you outsource work. You need to check with them about the brand perception, the values, its functioning and how it can get better if at all they think.

Also since they are associated and not part of everyday work life, they can provide a reality check of your brand and also its competitors. From image to routine functionality – they sometimes have a lot to offer and talk about which implicates the Brand Image. They are the people who help one create a Business/Corporate citizen.

Evaluate the Audit Results. ACT

Now once the steps explained above are taken care of, it is time to evaluate the results. If your findings are relevant to marketing & promotional strategy – you need to get it correct. Change the Marketing Plan and see the difference. If it is about the Brand message, for say, your brand is not offering what was promised, you can probably need to update the Brand Communication.

Many a times, Brands do take up corrective measures and change the offering/design itself. But mostly, an Audit is recommended to get more value out of the brand. []

INTERNAL BRAND AUDITS

In the last post, we talked about the Significance and Need for Brand Audits. Going further in the series, we will detail out the steps in Brand Audits. The Brands & Business Establishments can observe the functioning and consumer perceptions of a brand, also the brand performance shall be measured in such a way that subsequent improvements can be done to keep the brand and branding efforts up-to date pertaining to the market conditions, competitor brands and changing consumer preferences.

What all is covered in Internal Brand Audits? Why those points matter and what do they emphasize. We will explore through the components of **INTERNAL BRAND AUDIT**

Positioning

It is very important that a Brand positioning is correct and to the mark. The positioning of a brand should be such that each & every employee of the organization can speak about the brand as an advocate. There should be no identity crisis in the team, brand communication.

Profile and Brand Values

We need to make sure that the profiling of the brand is done in an accurate way. It should talk about the values, the goals and the bigger purpose behind the very existence of the brand. The profile of a Brand is all about – Mission Statement, Statement of Purpose and Brand Values or Brand Philosophy.

A Mission Statement should be clear, focused and talk the very intent of brand. A good mission statement can be Target oriented, a role model specific, it can be goal specific or it can be about all these. There is no specified length of a mission statement, it should be understandable concise and talk straight to the consumer.

A **Good Mission Statement** should be:

1. Simple in writing.
2. Treated as a goal and not as a statement while framing one.
3. Specific and not a sentence made up of heavy words.
4. Should define the intent & purpose of brand and not the emotions behind it.
5. Comprehensible and Inspiring.

Similarly, the Brand values & philosophy should be formulated with the key elements and intentions behind the brand; they should talk about the goals, the values a team plans to follow and the voice of brand. Values can be defined in the simplest words like – Young, Dynamic, and Collaboration etc.

Unique Selling Proposition (USP), brand promise, or brand essence

The world is full of 'me too' brands. And that is the reason enough to have a defined Unique Selling Proposition. You need to create a space in the consumer mindset, make it impeccable so that there is a brand recall and appropriate action in favor of your brand.

A USP is created to stand out and to power-up the sales. While working on a USP one must keep the customer in mind and analyze the need-gaps and detail as how the brand is better than the competitor brand. The USP should be a promise, a compelling statement to motivate the consumers for favorable buying decisions.



Voice

The brand voice holds great importance in Internal Branding too. It details the Brand attributes and reaches out the consumers in the right sense. You can explore more on [Brand Voice Guidelines](#) at our [blog](#).

Culture

Internal Audits need to include the assessment of culture. The culture of the brand includes – the culture inside the firm. How important you make your people feel defines the Brand Culture. A healthy brand culture provokes belongingness and henceforth better brand image. It is important for positive growth and image of the brand and therefore the performance.

The audit of culture enables assessment of happiness quotient, clarity amidst the staff on core values, USP, mission and vision of the brand and as a result performance & advocacy.

Product / Service Positioning

What it should be known as and known for, is the positioning strategy of the brand? A Brand positioning needs an audit because many a times it is observed that the offerings and the consumer preferences change at times. The product/service needs an audit for a timely check on the characteristics of the offering and the key benefits. It is also important to assess that the product/service is perceived as intended by the marketer. This also helps in ascertaining changes/improvements in the positioning if required for the immediate future. []

Internal Strength of a Brand matters having said that we cannot ignore the external elements of the brand. We will be talking about the EXTERNAL Brand Audits and how they bring a magical difference to the consumer perceptions and overall Brand Image.

EXTERNAL BRAND AUDIT

'Charity begins at home'. Going by the quote we recommended the Internal Audits as the first step toward a Brand assessment program. That is also to make sure that the team and the stakeholders perceive and understand the brand in one tone for they are undoubtedly the first & foremost ambassadors of the brand.

you have to **LISTEN** to what

RESONATES within your own gut.

you find your **DIRECTION** there.

your **VOICE** comes out.

– Kathy Mattea –

Once we make sure that internally we are strong and firm as an entity, the next step is to observe the brand as an outsider, as a customer, as a prospect. It is significant to check the visibility of the brand as a separate entity with no strings attached.

This could be done internally through Dipstick, Perception Analysis and other qualitative methods. At the same time if there are huge communication and branding gaps observed at the niche level, the external audits can also be extended to the target segment for which the very idea of brand is conceived at the management level.

The basic idea behind an external audit is to assess the marketing effectiveness. It can be done by assessing the strength, weakness, opportunities and threats of each & every marketing effort. You can also identify the return on branding investments- the areas of improvement which can lead up to brand repositioning, brand extension etc.

Largely, an external audit shall include a thorough check of the following Brand Elements:

Corporate Identity – logos and other brand elements

Logo is the first impression of your brand. Make sure it is remarkable and it stands out. It is not necessary to have a story behind the logo but it should have some relevance to your brand. Many a times people go by their creative preferences and leave the logic behind, sometimes the choice of color, fonts go wrong with the logo design, such cases get great help through external audits. An audit on identity should help you understand -

What do the consumers perceive about your brand?

What changes do they think you should incorporate?

Is there anything which suggests a change in brand elements?

Is there something which leads to an identity crisis?

Collateral-brochures, print materials, trade show displays, etc.

There are 2 ways to check the brand communication materials. It is recommended that a brand voice shall be in sync. The identity and values cannot be different; the brand goals shall remain same and must reflect the brand values and strength in all the brand communication elements.

But Caution, often it is been observed that the brands talk exactly the similar language, the same content and this is seen as a weakness for it becomes repetitive and hence redundant. Posting the exactly same content about the brand in all the elements shows stagnation and it is also observed as a signal of no growth and evolvement in the brand story. Go slow if you do not have much to talk about the brand but make sense and engage the readers if you do so.

Advertise

Advertisements shall be done with the core message at the center. Conduct some focus group interviews with the key audience of each Target Group. Suppose it is a youth oriented product/service – you can meet college goers, the fresher at corporate ladder, the studios and the part-timers.

Be Creative. Be Consistent

Connect informally to find out what connects with your audience. Change the message or creative if it is working against the brand.

Website and SEO

- Keep it simple.
- Avoid too many jargons in the content.
- Do not complicate the design.
- Focus on what you want your audience to reflect on when they visit your website.
- Avoid creating a 'replica' website like your competition.
- Remember, original is always appreciated then a copy.
- Do quick surveys as what keywords do the consumers associate your brand most with?
- Is there any service which is most recalled?

Social Media

Social Media is picking up fast as your alternate brand address. Initially predicted as a youth driven media space, social media is now catching up with all the age groups. The statistics are fast changing and growing in the positive direction only with a lot of scope for the marketer. The challenge now is – to engage the consumer, to earn the brand space and now also to get business out of your social efforts.

In social media, Language is a powerful tool. One needs to be careful about the images used in the social space of the brand, the words, the actions; the thoughts and opinions a brand shares on various brand specific, customer centric and even social issues.

A social media audit is required to assess the results on social efforts. Which medium is resulting in better traction, where majority of the consumers are coming from the target segment etc? It is also significant to ascertain the factors like – differentiation, awareness, reach, connections, relevance and personality of the brand.

Sponsorships/civic-involvement/memberships

It is important to assess the brand tie-ups for the reason that the events positioning lead to brand image formation. You will find most of the brands associating themselves with the cause driven events, social and environmental causes. Some take up economic issues and launch exclusive programs to empower the youth.

An audit helps to ascertain,

- The benefits your brand gains through such business tie-ups.
- Result of these tie-ups, memberships on Brand Equity.
- Gain in the image, credibility, customer trust or mileage or local/global level.
- News/PR Coverage of any such event and its effect on the stakeholders.

Content Marketing and other assets – blogs, white papers, case studies, articles, books, etc.

Content matters most in the current times. Content helps in building credibility of the brand. It is important as analyze who is following your brand content. What are elements it is most sought after for, what are the differentiating factors from that of competition? Are the consumers reacting to your content, what are blog posts which are fetching comments and how are they connecting. Are you getting any queries through the content or you need to rework the content strategy.

Content Audit also helps in improvising the social media strategy, SEO results.

Read more about [Content Strategy](#) for a brand.

External Review

External review includes assessment of competitors advertising campaigns, their official press release documents, the industry review on that etc. It is also advised to interview the business partners, the associates and vendors to understand the market image of the brand and if the competitors are swaying away the points on service, vendor relations or governance for that matter.

Like the internal audits involve interviewing the employee and preparing them as the real ambassadors and brand advocates, the external audits help assessing the brand image externally.

You should try doing these audits by yourself and write to us if you need help. In the next post, we will talk about the choosing the right people to audit your brand. []

Many a times it is seen that the findings of brand audits result into Re-branding. The reasons could be several but Rebranding is an exercise in itself, it needs background work, should be done keeping certain rules in the mind and that is why it becomes important to talk about Re-branding in context with audits.

Does the Brand Audit suggest Re-branding? Why & Why not?

Re-branding is a difficult decision. It involves lot of time, effort and money. That is why it need not be an instant decision, one need to spend good time, assess, and revisit the decision before bidding adieu to the existing brand.

Choosing to re-brand should also come with the confidence of sticking to your offering and making its image, its communication and its message more relevant, consumer friendly and appealing. All this is not possible without a proper research and analysis of the existing brand, the message it conveys and how differently are these perceived. Competitive brands, alternate brands can also be a reason to re-brand.

A correct positioning of the brand is a promise of long term sustenance and growth. An established brand can further lead to premium pricing with the right positioning.

Here are some of the most obvious & popular reasons for Re-Branding:

Expansion / Outgrowth

Growth from a smaller venture to a bigger organization, growth in terms of capacity, employees, franchising, expansion etc is good enough reasons for a re-branding. At the beginning the brands start small in capacity, confidence and hence budgets. Some even start with the logo only and rest of the brand is managed at the printer end only. When they grow- they want to re-establish the brand with an image which reflects its values and its experience.

Currently, we are working on the re-branding of an organization with annual turnover of 1 Billion. They reached here and wanted to diversify their business in an organized way. We suggested them Umbrella Branding as now we are creating the entire group's identity. With growth, it becomes inevitable.

Relevance meets Truth



Sometimes, the brand becomes old fashioned, the new players overlap the identity, the technological advancements, the lifestyle changes lead to obsolete brand images and therefore the brands feel irrelevant in the market situations and in the insight of consumers. That is where the brands come to know about the truth of their old age branding and choose to Re-brand.

One of the example is, revival of age old brands like 'Rajnigandha' – the positioning has changed and that is why the endorsers. All this because they want to stay relevant to the target market and that is why they evolve as the market evolves. A decision of re-brand usually comes as result of segmentation and by developing customer insights.

M & A and Demergers

When two different entities join each other for creating a more beneficial & stronger business entity, they need a reinforced and stronger Brand identity too, hence leading to a re-brand. It is also significant for communicating the new image and the new brand message, the very purpose of merger & acquisition and to win the trust of consumers. Sometimes, it is also done to

emerge as a single stronger identity when the marketer wants to kill the previous 2 existing brand and establish the third one as the brand both the merging companies would like to associate with. One example of re-branding as a result of a demerger is 'Hero Motocorp.' when Honda decided to move out of the then ruling brand Hero Honda.

Changing Brand Services/ Brand Evolvement

Most of the businesses begin with one or may be two things in mind, a simple or may be varied set of services and they run to survive. With time, when they survive, they run further to evolve and that is when the management reaches to a conclusion, as to what they would actually like to do under the Brand name or they are confident enough that they want to do concentrate or may be add up to the portfolio and that is exactly why they need to Re-Brand themselves.

The closest example that comes to my mind is my own brand. We took three years to decide on what we should be all about and we re-launched certainly as a better, clear and more confident entity. Many start-ups come through this phase and even the biggest brand evolve and innovate and keep presenting to you – the new revived brands. Remember, last year when Microsoft launched the new logo.



Technology & Innovation

Technology is one reason that keeps all the brands on toes. The consumer is everyday looking for new & better products, services and eventually brands. You need to not just reach out but you need to connect to the consumers in the right way.

Be it your identity, your web presence or your social media accounts – consumer is demanding. They want to see you up to date and that is the reason why innovation leads to many re-brands.

Globalization

Many brands felt the need of re-branding when they decided to adopt global strategy. What may be working great in your local market doesn't necessarily have to be appealing in the global markets. Creating new brand for new markets often leads to identity crisis and even affects the credibility and that is why it is considered a prudent decision – to rebrand into a single global entity.

Also with the social media gaining a lot of brand space, everybody wants to capture maximum consumer mind space which is only possible if the identity remains same and thereby allows firm brand recall.

Internal Branding

Many a times, it is observed that an all round Internal Branding exercise leads to a decision of re-branding. The reasons here could be multiple – business strategy change, new team and hence new preferences, some disagreement in the mindsets and brand perceptions of the stakeholders etc are the reasons which induce the very thoughts of re-branding/ a re-launch or even a positioning change.

These are reasons, why most of the Brands choose to Re-brand. But like we said it is a decision of precision and shall not be taken in haste. There are reasons why a Brand should choose against Re-branding or re-launch.

When you are a young brand, you should not choose to re-brand.

There may be feedbacks, reviews against your ideology and logic. Some may find a flaw in your design or the brand colors. Some will just say it out of their personal choice. These are not reasons enough to rebrand. You are still in establishing phase, we can say we are testing the idea and checking the response. So the idea is to check the business sustainability before moving on to brand/re-brand.

Go live the brand, like you live a dream. []

What not to do when you Re-Brand?

Re-Branding

Do's and Don'ts

Re-branding is quite an uphill task. Generally the emotions of re-branding include Anxiety, Excitement, Curiosity, Creative flow of thoughts etc. Well, it is a creative journey, the competitions and the friends come as a great influence and you tend to listen to all of them and hence making the entire task difficult.

Since we have worked on few re-branding assignments, we thought to share 'things which one should not do when they re-brand'. These are significant and also save time & effort.

Do Not Over Think

You have one or may be few reasons which made you choose to Re-brand. And you should work on those reasons and stop over thinking. It ruins the very idea and leaves not only you but the identity confused too.

DO Not Limit it to the Design

Many times people presume that changing the logo and the collaterals is enough to symbolize re-branding. Change the notion; remember a Branding includes all the spaces your brand touches. Changing the mere designs doesn't signify re-branding. You need to change the brand environment – offline and online. If you are touching the brand colors – let that reflect in the office premise, the social networks, the employee uniforms and what not. Remember, Branding is not about logo & stationary design.

DO Not Go for it without Planning

Re-branding requires proper planning & research. You need to be sure about the reason for rebrand, you need to check the market, the competition, the name – if it pre-exists and in which category, is it a commonly searched brand name in what category and in which context. It has to be a well researched and assessed decision, before we launch a re-branding campaign.

Do Not Create a Shallow Brand

I have met people who want to go for a re-brand because their most important client suggested it, their spouse doesn't appreciate the colors used, sometimes even because the astrologer indicated that it has got a wrong sign. That much of reasoning shall not result in re-brand and neither should a re-brand be decided on just the above stated logics. The groundwork needs to be done; the story has to be planned and there has to have interesting facts behind the brand. Neither just a design, nor your favorite color and not even just a random story individually are enough for re-branding.

Do Not Leave the Basics

Sometimes, people go a lot after the premium brand. They want everything on the top of sky where as the Brand doesn't needs it! As a result, the customers fail to relate, sometimes the design is so over done that the average performance or behavior of the brand is seemed as a failure or underperformance. If you leave the basics aside and go on to create extravagant brand identity – remember that is not a promise of success.

Do Not Ignore the Customers

Though a Brand is your dream, your idea, your property but the sole purpose of its existence is not you. It is the customer for whom you create the brand and that is why you cannot ignore the customer. They should be kept in the centre of branding process – because they are ones who should be able to relate to the brand instantly.

Do Not Ignore the Stakeholders

We have always maintained, stakeholders – internal or external know the brand, talk about it, listen about it, deal with it and that is the reason they should not be ignored during the process of re-branding. They know where the brand lacked, what were the areas of improvement and where the competition overlapped your brand and that is why they should be heard & made to participate in the re-branding process.

Remember, Re-branding cannot happen over a cup of coffee – you need to drink a lot of them. []



Who should Audit the Brand?

While working on this series, suddenly it struck me that we are talking about the DIY Brand Audits but then it doesn't mean that we all will be able to assess all the spheres of Branding.

Like most of my technology clients only talk about their color preferences when we ask them about the identity. Some even come up with answers like 'no idea' when we ask them about what is their idea behind the brand? I am sure people like those, cannot do a Brand Audit and we hope to help them through this post.

Like we have discussed & detailed already, doing a Brand Audit needs assessment on the business intent, the brand vision, mission and philosophy. The external brand features like the logo, collaterals, the communication and the social media. We did mention that the stakeholders should be a part of Audit but we need to streamline – who audits what?

The stakeholders shall include – the leaders, the top management, and the middle level employees to meet the clients and look over the day to day operations. We shall also include the sales people who move out and meet the clients, watch out the competition pretty closely, the business partners, associates, vendors and employees. Everybody will have something to contribute & share.

An Auditor shall,

Have complete knowledge about the brand.

Shall not be complacent about certain areas of the brand and over enthusiastic about others.

S/he should be keen to have an overall view of the brand.

Know the organization design, hierarchy and functional ability. Else the audit would largely be a result of external brand audit.

Who should include the Audit team?

Should include people with the following traits:

Someone who knows the operations

A leader, who understand the brand values

Someone who interacts closely with the employee

One who is updated with the market conditions and competitive brands.

Someone with a flair for design and understand branding

They need to assess it all. The brand competency as per the market, the staff who is acting as the brand ambassadors, the brand messages and what kind of connection they are making with the customers – are they blunt or they are triggering emotions. Is it working on the Brand Values which the leaders incepted or they need to re-work on it.

Remember, a brand audit is like a SWOT analysis of the Brand Identity Prism, which captures the personal identity, the culture, class, relationship, physical attributes, Customer Insight and Individual Reflection of a brand. []

Considering the Brand Audit process is exhaustive and detailed, we also recommend the suggestive measures for the Start-up Brands. Since, there is investments and time involved in Brand audits; the start-ups can follow these steps in the planning phase only to avoid failures.

Start-up Brands – Watch your Decisions, avoid failures!



Failures are good as they leave us with lot of experience. Thomas Edison says, “I haven’t failed but I have found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” Saying so, feels good that yes failure is not an end it is only an event which no one would like to repeat. Start-up Brands mostly look for constant encouragement and sometimes even go hunt for a dose of positivity to overcome the failures. But what could be the steps, decisions which one can be careful of, to save themselves from such negative outcomes which can be termed as failure. Have a look.

The following points are recommended for the Start-up Brands. Product/Service brands which are launching everyday should be watchful of their decisions.

Planning is better than Rushing.

Many start-ups rush into decisions without proper planning. Plan before you jump into, doing your own thing.

Chances are you will soon be rushed into a closing dilemma if you are left without things to execute and without any plan B, there are chances that you will suffer from a initial low-down. And even if you are able to excel it for a while, you need to plan for the latter stages as well. Entrepreneurship is ever evolving and a start-up brand needs constant fodder of thought & ideas. When we are small, we need to offer more to become big.

Here are **stories of 2 brands** I worked with, one with huge investments and no planning, one with just an idea and no planning.

Some brand owners risk it too much at the beginning without tasting the initial bites of success. One of my clients invested into an idea with huge competition already into the market. She had worked into the same field in past in a different market and launched it with a grand office where even the brand elements were incorporated, they could not sustain the brand for 2 years and now they are not even keen on keeping the domain. I wonder, many *wannapreneurs* can do magic given such investments.

I briefly worked with clients who were keen to venture into social media. We did the initial brand design and by then the client had realized they were missing out big time on the planning. The postponed the idea and are happy with their jobs.

In a way, it helped them and saved the amount they would have spent on an idea which was yet to be explored for execution. Plan before you proceed working on your brand.



Myopic Idea is Harmful

Many a times, the ideas are myopic and they result in myopic brands. Some of the brands we worked with end up into a re-launch, a closure and some postponements.

Reasons are numerous and different for various entrepreneurs. An idea which is not well explored, studied and checked on feasibility and for which the markets are not tested is bound to bring failure to your brand.

In some cases, the stakeholders stopped the work on brand in the design phase itself. The brainstorming sessions with client, end up in so many points to ponder, that the client decides to take a break and re-work on the idea.

That is why, it is necessary to make sure that your idea & markets both are tested. You are aware of the target segment and its availability as well as the competition.

One of my clients Mr.X got swayed with an idea and he wanted to launch it now and did not want to invest his time, effort and money in it. We did our bit but he could not take the brand forward, reason the idea is still good but it is not well executed.

Hire Smart, Value your team.

One of the most important reasons why start-up brands fail is the team behind it. You need to hire smart and value them. Tea behind the brand is its prime ambassador, you need to make your team believe in your brand and advocate about it. Even if you hire freelancers, they should appreciate working for your brand and not merely take it as a project they are put on.

You cannot end up hiring someone based on the past. You can hire someone who is passionate about the work s/he does, the kind of projects he executes, someone who could be nurtured as a strategic partner, who sees growth as well as profits instead of the latter.

At the same time, one basic ingredient of a healthy team is 'internal branding'. Your team needs to believe in it and only then they can become the advocates of your brand. It is also important that you understand the capabilities, strengths and weaknesses of your team members and delegate accordingly. Favoritism is a big no in start-up brands. Equality brings synergy and is good for overall brand health.

Mind your Investments but DO NOT Choose Discounted

Almost all the start-up brands of the world follow a skewed pricing which is a good decision in terms of investments made. When you are yet to test your brand, you must tread slowly.

For the same, follow a prioritized approach instead of asking for too many discounts or going cheap. Many-a-times, start-ups opt for cheaper options available, be it design, print or websites.

One of our clients actually ends up designing their own logo in MS-word and then went on for redesign in 2 months. Such situations end up terribly and are a major brand loss. Like I mentioned in 'myopic idea', Mr.X also suffered because of the discounts on a myopic idea so the execution suffers right from the ground work. One shall not over-spend but to explain the basic idea and to make it appealing to the customers, you need a basic investment, brands which hop too much on the cheaper/discounted options end up changing the idea or launch it with too many compromises.



Partners/ Associates can Make or Break the Brand

When we are starting-up, naturally we tend to seek partners, associates to make the journey smooth and successful. Those who choose to run along alone need right mentors.

This is important for Brands and their success. Like a business, a brand needs right mentors with right energy and spirit. Many will be interested in your idea and would offer to join in as a parallel path for them. This is alright if they are really investing their time for your brand and adding value to it. Before you welcome a partner, it is crucial to check their potential and the interest level in your brand.

Start-ups are a fancy. Everyone welcomes an idea and wants to be a part of it. But for a start-up brand, interest is not enough, passion is what we need. []



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Jigyasa is the founder strategist at 30TH FEB, a Brand Consulting firm that helps businesses in the areas of Brand, Content and Social Media. She has worked on brands ranging from fashion, technology, education, e-commerce etc in the areas of Brand Naming, Story and Strategy development, Website Development to Social Media connect strategies.

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