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# Why Marketing Works Using Branding and Communications as Exit Strategy

*Whether you're a small to medium-sized business owner looking for an independent buyer, or an expanding business wanting to take your company public, some fundamental branding and public relations strategies can be implemented to position your company in a positive light and develop a higher profile. If done right, these strategies will enhance your company's appeal and result in a more favorable deal.*

## Lessons from Nature

Spring brings about some peculiar behavior among our feathered friends. Male birds will entice their female companions by building strong, sturdy nests and by flailing around ruffling their feathers and flapping their wings. The ritual is quite amusing, but if you look closer, there is a business lesson in their vibrant display and tireless preparation.

When planning an exit strategy, the idea is to develop and display your business as a sound, attractive offer for would-be suitors. Gone are the days of small, virtually unknown companies being bought up by larger corporations or taken public. In that wake, the market is more complex and competitive. Investors are taking more time in their evaluation and assessment phase to help ensure they are making a good decision.

By using a three-prong approach of branding, communications and public outreach, you can successfully attract the right investors or buyers:

1. Building the nest – Identifying your business strengths and differentiators
2. Attracting attention – Communicating your brand (strengths and differentiators) to target audiences
3. Courting a suitor – Building a solid reputation through public affairs and community relations



## Building the Nest

Market research is key in identifying the public perception of your company, product or services, and in identifying areas to exploit. First identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of your business. This includes research on your company's image, sales and marketing goals, quality, pricing, service, promotion and advertising, market opportunities, competitive pressures and general market perceptions.

After you've gathered and analyzed this information, design a brand that focuses on your company's strengths and differentiators. What makes your company unique? Remember, brands are not about you, they are about the audiences you are trying to reach. In simple terms, a brand is something you want others to hang onto – an emotional bond between buyer and seller. Your company's brand should convey the essence of your business, its products and services.

When the brand has been established, implement the

brand into every part of your business. This includes marketing and sales collateral, advertising, communications campaigns, Web site, etc. Develop a unified brand throughout your company, and continually evaluate the effectiveness of your brand positioning.

## Attracting Attention

Even the strongest, most appealing nests are only as good as the squawking and feather fluffing you do to promote them. While advertising can be an effective medium for promoting your brand, a strong media relations campaign can bring third-party credibility to your business. Leveraging media coverage to promote your brand and build awareness can prove very effective if done in a consistent manner.

In addition to direct marketing and sales tactics to promote your business and attract a potential investor, there are other avenues of communication to help build your brand and promote your company, including:

- **News coverage**

Distribute announcements to garner media coverage, including new products or services, partnerships, significant customer wins, awards, speaking engagements, leadership changes, etc.

- **Bylined articles**

Develop and place articles on a topic of interest, positioning your company as a thought leader on a particular subject.

- **Proactive and reactive media outreach**

Develop story ideas and pitch them to target media to garner media coverage for your company. Search editorial calendars for topics in upcoming issues and build relationships with the editorial staff of publications covering your industry or community.

- **Customer testimonials**

Develop case studies about customers who have achieved success using your products and/or services. Pitch these stories to target media to garner media coverage and help tout the return on investment that your company offers its customers.

Media coverage secured from

any of these outreach activities should be leveraged in marketing and sales collateral, posted on the company Web site and referenced whenever possible.

## Courting a Suitor

Preparing your company for investment or acquisition opportunities also means raising the value of the company through community relations and good will efforts. Investors or potential buyers want to know they are acquiring a company with a positive public image.

The best approach is to think of ways your company can contribute to the industry and communities in which it operates. Perhaps your company is involved with a charity, or provides pro bono work to a non-profit organization. Obtaining a positive public image also means networking, participating in speaking engagements and sponsoring events or programs. Connecting with the communities and industry in which your company operates can help generate brand awareness, create publicity opportunities and make

your business more appealing to a would-be buyer or investor.

These communication activities will also work to attract more clients and help grow the business, which of course is one of the most appealing aspects to a potential buyer or investor.

In developing an exit strategy, there is much to consider. The branding and promotion process takes time, so plan and budget accordingly and work with reputable communications professionals who have the expertise you need. If done correctly, the rewards are well worth the investment in time, money and effort.

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