

CAREER BOOSTER

Consistency is King

[By John Schaub]

In today's marketplace, where a person comes across hundreds of brands in a day, it is important to keep consistency when developing and maintaining a brand. John Schaub, a senior vice president and creative director at Laughlin/Constable, an integrated marketing agency with offices in Chicago and Milwaukee, provides some advice for creating and maintaining a consistent brand image.

The set-up

Let's say you have a friend you've known for 20 years. She's always well dressed, always thoughtful, neat, organized, and always on time. One day, you meet her after work, and she's wearing a sweatshirt and jeans with holes in the knees. Something isn't right. Then, the next time you plan to meet her for coffee, she's 20 minutes late. That's just not like her. And a month later, she forgets your birthday. You feel a little unsettled. The place you held for her in your mind has shifted. You can no longer count on her. You can't stop asking yourself, "What's going on?"

Okay, what does this have to do with a brand? Well, consumers have the same kinds of feelings when a brand they know and love acts inconsistently. A brand's look, feel, voice, even where a consumer encounters a brand, must be consistent in order to be effective over the long term.

You are what you wear

The same is true for a brand. It all begins with the brand identity system, and its most prominent element, the logo. A brand's logo is often the first thing consumers see. It sets the tone for the brand. In essence, it's a big feature of the brand's personality. Does it look high tech? Conservative? Fun? Strong? Warm and inviting? Whatever its prominent

trait, it must be consistent at each consumer encounter. What else goes into a brand-identity system? Font or typeface, color palette, and supporting graphic elements all interplay to solidify the brand's presence. Think of them as the accessories. They come together on letterhead, business cards, brochures, annual reports, the web, trade show booths, packaging, and ads. At every consumer touch point, a brand's identity, or dressing, must be consistent.

What did you just say?

The same goes for a brand's voice. The printed word and spoken word, and the tone that comes across, must be consistent from consumer encounter to consumer encounter. Is the brand voice casual? Formal? Lighthearted? Serious? Professional? Whatever the trait, it must always be the same voice. This is true right down to the way a receptionist at the brand's headquarters answers the telephone.

They say a brand is a promise and an expectation. Let's say your friend is the brand. The way she looks and acts over the years is her "promise" to you that her personality is just that — thoughtful, neat, organized, and always on time. You, the consumer, have an expectation that she will continue be thoughtful, neat, organized, and always on time. When your friend's (the

brand's) promise meets your expectation, the brand is solidified. It is complete and working. However, when her promise and your expectation do not meet in the middle, the brand begins to fall apart.

Consistency in branding is at the heart of a strong brand. Consistency helps maintain and build the brand's value. It helps create brand loyalty. Consistency also creates budget efficiencies, since the brand does not constantly need to define itself. And consistency helps a brand break through the clutter. In other words, brand consistency, simply put, is king.

About the Author

John has been in the advertising industry for more than 20 years, with experience on both the agency and corporate side. Through the years, John has worked with everyone from the Kohler Company to Master Lock and McDonald's Restaurants, winning many awards along the way, including an Art Directors Club Distinctive Merit Award. He holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin in advertising and mass communication.

About Laughlin/Constable

Laughlin/Constable celebrated 30 years of continuing success in 2006. With offices



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in Chicago and Milwaukee, the agency provides full-circle branding, including brand development, digital marketing, design, advertising, public relations, media research,

and buying. Its annual billings are in excess of \$160 million. The agency's clients include Associated Bank, Bon-Ton Stores, Buell (Harley-Davidson) Motorcycles, Bridgestone/

Firestone, Master Lock, Aero Products, Butler GUM Dental Products, and Navistar International. For more information, please visit www.laughlin.com.

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