
Keep the Makeup On: Branding



“What’s your name?”

Lynyrd Skynyrd

What’s the name of your band? What kind of music do you play? What’s your image? Where are you going to play? How will you promote the band? Which record company should you sign with? Which radio stations play your brand of music? Have you contacted the local newspaper? Are you proud of your music?

Those questions should give you an idea that it takes some work to develop a lasting and memorable brand. We can’t all be so lucky as to have The Rolling Stones’ tongue. KISS is already wearing the makeup. However, both those bands, as well as many others, worked long and hard to create those brands, promote them, and protect them.

I asked questions about “your band” at the beginning of this section. Now let’s translate that into regular business speak. What is the name of your service or product?

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Can you explain what you do in one sentence? What is the image you want to convey? Who are your customers? How do you reach them? And last, but not least, can you proudly protect and stand behind that brand? This is an ongoing process for any business and a surefire way to create something people will remember.

This is probably the hardest chapter for me to write because it is my favorite part of doing business. It's like putting together a puzzle with thousands of pieces and the satisfaction you get when you pop in that last piece. This is also the part that makes a lot of people give up and quit. It's hard work and can seem fruitless at times, but then the press calls or sales double, and you are on top of your game again, ready to keep going.

★ Call Me

ZZ Top. Lynyrd Skynyrd. Aerosmith. The Rolling Stones. Led Zeppelin. All are great names backed up with great product and phenomenal branding. For every great band, there are hundreds of other bands with great names but no product or branding to back it up. In other words, they sucked. Or they sucked at marketing.

Let's assume you have a fabulous product or service, and you are going to market it like no one has ever marketed it before. First, you still have to have a name and be able to tell people what it is you do without a dissertation.

Sometimes the hardest part is starting at the beginning.

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We get so excited about our new business that sometimes we jump ahead and forget to start with, well, the beginning. I was recently consulting with a client who wanted to jump ahead to marketing ideas. I had to slow him down and back him up. What is the name of your company, and what do you do? You need to be able to discuss who you are and what you do in one sentence—a sentence that is so compelling, people will want to know more. Then, and only then, can you elaborate more.

Frank Beard, the drummer for ZZ Top, and the only one without a beard, is responsible for the most lasting name in my family, my mother's nickname. She so reminded her friends of the waitress character on Alice, a hit television show at the time, that a few took to calling her by the waitress' name. Frank and Debbie, his wife, were neighbors of my parents, and once Frank picked up on the nickname, he never called her another thing. I'm not even sure he remembered her real name. Soon other neighbors started to call her by her nickname, as well as friends, family members, and my KLOL co-workers. With her signature poofy hair and Texas accent, the "brand" was set. Fran Nicholson was forever branded as Flo.

Once you have a name, it will make it easier to come up with that short description of what it is you do. From there, you can start to build on that foundation. You really will be tempted to jump ahead, but slow down and make

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it a strong foundation. With the name and a compelling description, the rest will fall into place a lot easier. It's still going to take work on your part, but it's easier to build the second floor when you have the first floor in place.

★ You've Got the Look

Ask anyone what the logo is for The Rolling Stones and, chances are, 99.9 percent of them will know the correct answer. They probably can't tell you who the Secretary of State is, but they can tell you that Mick and the boys use a red tongue on t-shirts, album covers, and more. Maybe if Condoleezza Rice joined a band or got a cool logo, it would help identify her as Secretary of State.

KLOL, Houston's Rock and Roll Authority. The name and the description were all in one neat little package, and then we added the Runaway Radio, a memorable logo. We proceeded to put it on everything: letterhead, stickers, t-shirts. You name it, and KLOL branded it. There were a few years where you just weren't cool in Houston if you didn't have a KLOL Runaway Radio sticker on the back of your car. I have a picture of Stevie Ray Vaughan, sitting on the back of his pickup truck and posing for a picture for a local music photographer. If you look very closely, there is a KLOL bumper sticker on the back of Stevie Ray's truck. Even at one point, local law enforcement targeted cars specifically with KLOL bumper stickers to be pulled over. Talk about stereotyping.

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The point is, when you saw the Runaway Radio, you knew it must be rock and roll. A picture is worth a thousand customers, and the first time someone sees your logo, letterhead, packaging, or anything, that is when they form a lasting impression of you or your product. So, make sure it's a good one.

Also make sure you are consistent with all you do, from your business cards to your Web site to all your materials. This includes the way you dress, the way you speak, the words you choose, the people you are with, and the places you go. It all defines who you are and how people think about you and your product

If you are a woman wearing low-cut, revealing outfits to work, chances are you are not going to be promoted much higher in the company. At KLOL, I found myself branded as "Houston's First Lady of Radio," and I had to find a line somewhere between class and vamp. I also came with my own theme song. Starting with the first KLOL Rock and Roll Auction, someone decided to always play Jimi Hendrix's "Foxy Lady" when I walked on stage or into an event. It perpetuated the brand, but it embarrassed the heck out of me. I still cringe when I hear that song, even in the privacy of my own car.

Whatever image, look, or logo you decide on, stick with it and be consistent so that it is branded into the memory of your customers forever. KISS came into our lives with makeup

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on, and they used the same makeup design each and every night. When they took the makeup off, consistency was lost, and fans were disappointed. The makeup went back on and the brand survived. It survived to the point that there are now thousands of KISS-branded products including: KISS wine, a KISS coffin (for those lifelong fans), and even a KISS coffeehouse in Myrtle Beach, Florida.

★ You Really Got Me

If you play classical flute and book a gig at an after hours rock bar, chances are the crowd will not be happy. Not happy at all. If you play rock music, find your rock fans. If you play classical music, find the classical music fans. You get the point. Know who your audience is and where they are.

For most of my rock radio career, I was doing the mid-day shift at KLOL. I wanted to create an identity for my listeners like the morning show's "Groove Dawgs." I saw what the branding did for the guys in the morning, and I didn't see any reason I couldn't do it in middays. We thought long and hard, and we tried to come up with the most common characteristics of my listeners. It all came down to one common denominator. The majority were listening to me at work. I must give credit where credit is due. Christina Ayo, my best friend since we were twelve, came up with the name for my listeners: Steeleworkers. I am still surprised after a speech when a successful, well

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dressed business person walks up to me, holds out a hand, and proudly proclaims, "I'm a Steeleworker." Christina's name and the branding continue to this day.

Think about your product. Write down a list of who will buy it. Make a list of where you think these people go, what they watch and listen to, what they read, and the groups they tend to associate with. After this research, you'll have a better idea of where to advertise, what events to attend, and much more. Once you identify your customer, then it's simply a matter of getting their attention.

★ Magical Mystery Tour

Woodstock. Lollapalooza. Willie Nelson's Fourth of July Picnic. All these are great concert events and branding that is forever in our memories. Concerts are an excellent way for bands to promote their product. A lot of bands actually lose money initially in production and travel costs on the road, but they have to get out there and do the shows to reach their audience. Imagine being asked to open for Def Leppard. It is a branding opportunity a rock band can't pass up.

Radio stations probably take advantage of event branding more than any other business. Their station vehicles, plastered with the station logo, call letters, and frequency are parked outside like-formatted concerts with handouts for fans as they go into the show. KLOL always took event branding

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to the next level. Sure, we did the concerts and venues, but we also created the first Rock and Roll Auction for charity with one-of-a-kind rock items and rock star auctioneers.

Pregnancy seems to be cool and hip now, but when I became pregnant with my first child, there was some concern about my rocker chick image. How was I going to maintain my “brand”? It was suggested on several occasions that I not mention the pregnancy on air and possibly even hide it as long as I could. Demure and quiet however are not two of my strong points so, at seven months pregnant, I posed nude ala Demi Moore for the cover of Houston Health & Fitness magazine. Now keep in mind, I had thrown up for six months and only gained fourteen pounds, starting at 105, so posing nude was not a problem. I was happy to show off my body and brand my pregnancy as a cool, hip publicity stunt. It remained that way until the first labor pain.

Keep up with events in your area that would give you an opportunity to brand your product or service even more, or create your own event. At the Space Store, we would occasionally invite retired astronauts to come in on a Saturday afternoon and sign autographs. Our customers loved getting to meet an astronaut and it branded us as space experts. You could actually *meet an astronaut* at the Space Store.

Again, identify who your customers are, what they like, and where they go. If you have a cool new toy for kids

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and the Children's Festival is coming to town, you need to be there. If you can't afford a booth, you can still be there. Take some toys and give them away. If the kids like them and play with them, believe me, other kids will notice and parents will start asking where more are available.

I do believe one of my favorite KLOL branding events was the giant bra the promotions department had hung from a billboard touting, "A couple of boobs in the morning." As the sun came up over I-10 in Houston, it became quite apparent that a billboard-size bra was swaying in the morning breeze. It brought out fans, protesters, police, city authorities, and every television station in town.

★ Givin' the Dog a Bone

Rock stars and bands never arrive at a radio station without CDs, t-shirts, and other "swag" to give away. It's all in an effort to brand themselves into the memory of the radio station personnel and eventually onto the play-list of the radio station. At events, they happily sign autographs and occasionally still have photographs to sign.

KLOL had stickers and t-shirts to give away at events and appearances. The morning team had their "Wrap That Rascal" condom key chains, and I had "From the Desk of a Steeleworker" notepads. I never went anywhere without business cards and pictures to autograph.

Spinal Tap, the fictional band, did everything as if they were a real band to promote the movie, This Is

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Spinal Tap, a hysterical parody documentary of the trials and tribulations of a famous rock band. My hands-down favorite rock star giveaway was the colander I received from Spinal Tap. Playing off the parody of the movie, it came with a disclaimer that explained there had been a problem with communication within their organization and that it was actually supposed to be a calendar. I still use it in the kitchen, and it still makes me laugh each time.

When it came time to promote the Space Store, I knew we had to come up with something just as worthy of branding history. Plus, if I was going to spend my hard earned money on something free for my customers, it had to be something that would make them think of us anytime they needed anything space related. It also had to be something that would catch the attention of others. So we imprinted our name on the infamous Fisher Space Pens, sometime referred to as “the Seinfeld pen.” It was much more memorable, and useful, than a business card.

Customers love free stuff. Everybody loves free stuff. Just make sure it works for you and serves its purpose to strengthen your brand and continue to bring in new customers. Put some thought into those items you leave behind. I’m still surprised when someone hands me one of those small, paper yearly calendars. Who uses these? They go in the trash. Give them something they want. I’ve noticed more conferences putting memory sticks in the take-away bags. Great idea. I can always use one of those. And it’s a

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fantastic way to share information at the conference.

Remember. It's most important to never leave the house or office without checking to make sure you have business cards. If you have a card, you look legitimate, and it gives you something to leave behind, or you have something to write notes on if needed. Just don't be a business-card psycho, which is kind of like a flasher, but who instead pulls out a business card. Scares me every time.

★ More Than a Feeling

Rock stars like Mick Jagger and Sting have a bevy of high priced attorneys, managers, accountants, and advisors to protect their interests and their brand. You may not have quite that many people on the payroll, but you can still protect your own brand.

Okay. I'm guilty. But I learned from my mistakes. KLOL did a billboard when I returned from Los Angeles. The concept was "the music is back." It was to herald my return and be a subtle jab at the disc jockey who was leaving and had been notorious for talking instead of playing music. They dressed me up in a sequin dress, poofed my hair, and put a thick layer of makeup on my face. I hated it. I loved the slogan, but the rest of it was awful. I was so uncomfortable doing that photo shoot and was just as uncomfortable each time I drove past any of the billboards. They were everywhere. It wasn't rock and roll. And you know what? The way the show was put together wasn't

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that great either. But I didn't speak up and I didn't find a solution. I just went along with it all and hated every minute of it. I know the billboard wasn't the reason the show didn't last, but it certainly didn't help.

If your gut tells you something is not right, it probably isn't. Protect your brand. Don't let anyone talk you into anything that doesn't seem right for your product or service. And no matter how well they package something or present it, ultimately you know if it is right for you and your product.

Never be afraid to protect your brand.

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Branding

- ★ A name says it all
 - ★ A one sentence description
 - ★ Identify your audience
 - ★ Locate and reach out to your customers
 - ★ Give'em something
 - ★ Protect that brand
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