

## A.S.A.P. Branding

Learn these smart shortcuts to branding your business quickly and effectively.

By John Williams | July 04, 2008

To successfully brand your small company, you must *know* who you are and *show* who you are in every aspect of your business--but especially in your promotional materials. Are you the innovative maverick in your industry? Or the experienced, reliable one? Do people choose your product because of its quality--or because of its price point? You can't be all things to all people, so you have to decide just who you are. Strategically pinpointing your niche in the market will simplify all your branding efforts. Every visual aspect of your brand should consistently point in the same direction. But when you're first starting out, how can you do this quickly and cost effectively?

As a fledgling entrepreneur, there's one rule of thumb to keep in mind when it comes to branding your business: Keep it simple! Besides conserving your time and your budget, simplicity will cement your brand in the mind of your prospects in the most expedient manner possible.

When it comes to the basic building blocks you need to develop your brand in the most efficient manner possible, I use what I call the "A.S.A.P." formula of branding. Here's how it works:

**A = Advantage.** You've got to decide what prevailing message--what content--you want to communicate to your customers.

**S = Style.** What's the style of your message? In other words, how are you going to "dress" your message for your audience?

**A = Adjective.** What verbal cue will your message carry to your customers?

**P = PMS color.** What visual cue will your message have that helps reinforce your brand?

Let's take this formula one step at a time. First, let's discuss your advantage.

### What Makes You Better?

Your company is special--it has to be in order to succeed. If it's not special in some way, if you can't set it apart from your competition, it won't survive in business today.

So what makes your company unique? You've got to determine what differentiates your company in your market in order to craft a brand that makes that advantage obvious. Ask yourself this: How is your brand better than the others? In what areas does your brand create value for consumers?

If you're stumped, let me help you out. Here are some common competitive advantages I've found in working with small businesses:

- high-quality
- low-cost
- high-tech or innovative
- customized
- stylish or trendy
- wide range of choices
- full line of products
- experience
- reliability
- conveniently located
- eco-friendly
- first-to-market (the "classic")
- unique (the only one)

Of course, advantages can be much more specific and unique to a certain industry. Advantages can also be both your current and your potential offerings--as long as you really plan to follow through with what you say you'll offer. After all, branding is for the long haul.

When you're trying to decide just what makes you stand out, remember this: Contrary to popular opinion, a brand can't successfully occupy both the high-quality and low-cost niches in

the mind of consumers. Simply put, it's impossible to be "the high-quality, low-cost" option. You can be the high-quality choice, or you can be the low-cost choice. But you can't be both. If you really think you could be both, your best bet might be to focus on value, because value is a different story. Value implies satisfactory quality at a satisfactory price, and that's something all consumers love.

If you're having difficulty identifying your key advantage, start by answering this: What makes you personally different? Most new businesses take on the personality of their owners, so your unique traits really do matter. Another option is to list all the advantages up for consideration, and then choose the strongest, or the most interesting, or the most profitable.

Whatever route you take, choose only one advantage for your brand. When it comes to marketing and advertising, the ability to prioritize is golden--and the ability to select just one advantage is genius. Today's consumers have no time or inclination to juggle the three, four or five different advantages you may actually offer. They need to file your brand in their minds quickly and easily, into just one slot, so they can retrieve it quickly and easily. Choose one advantage, and stick with it.

Once you've determined that one advantage, sum up your brand's value in a sentence or two, and try to include your product's principle features or benefits. Here's a sample, fill-in-the-blank formula: "[name of brand] provides [name of target market] with [advantage to target audience]." For instance, "Prodo Products provides Fortune 500 corporations with the highest-quality printers." Then go further by stating the benefit your clients derive from your advantage: "... by providing fast document printing to increase business efficiencies." This statement can serve as a compass for virtually all your branding efforts.

Only after you've determined your brand's advantage and you've nailed the content of your message can you address its style, which I'll happily address in next month's column. Stay tuned.

## A.S.A.P. Branding--Style

**In Part II of this series, branding expert John Williams shows how to design your brand to reflect your company's image and draw in customers.**

By John Williams | August 18, 2008

In last month's article I began an explanation of an "A.S.A.P." formula for cost-effective small business branding. A.S.A.P. is both an acronym and an adjective: Not only does each letter stand for a key component in your branding platform (e.g., "A" = "Advantage"), but also it refers to the speed and efficiency with which you can successfully gain brand traction using these simple guidelines.

The A.S.A.P. branding model:

**A = Advantage** (Content of your Message)

**S = Style** (Style of your Message)

**A = Adjective** (Verbal Cue to your Message)

**P = PMS Color** (Visual Cue to your Message)

I discussed "advantage" in last month's article, so now I'll expand on "style."

### What's Your Style?

This second step involves determining the right image for your company. A professional image is critical to your success. After all, your image--as reflected in the design and copywriting style of your business cards, marketing materials and website--is the first and sometimes only chance you have to introduce your company to potential customers.

So how do you select the right image for your company? Are you progressive? Innovative? Reliable? Your image should reflect your brand's personality and account for industry norms, your customers' expectations and the defining attributes of your products and services. As with your "advantage" (see last month's article), it's best to keep it simple.

For years I've maintained that there are basically three broad image categories: flair, bold, and high-tech.

#### Flair

This is for brands that want to project creativity, flexibility and friendliness. Many retail establishments and companies in the service industry fall into this category. Promotional

materials should be creative and unique, featuring such design elements as curving lines and warm photography or illustrations.

### **Bold**

A bold image projects experience, strength and stability. For obvious reasons, virtually all banks fall into this image category. To reflect a bold image, marketing materials should be conservative in tone and design, never trendy or surprising. Straightforward, easy-to-read fonts such as Helvetica and Times, and lots of white space work well for this style.

### **High-Tech**

Not surprisingly, this image projects innovation and technological expertise. Promotional materials should be exciting and dynamic. Designs might incorporate italicized fonts, bold graphics and energetic photography.

Most likely your brand personality includes some attributes of one image category and some of another. However, you should have more of one category's qualities than the others. (If you don't, ask yourself if you are trying to be all things to all people.) It's important that you choose only one style for your brand. Your customers need to file your brand in their minds into just one style so they can retrieve it quickly and easily.

Choosing a style is critical to your branding efforts whether you plan to outsource the design of your materials or do it yourself. Professional designers rely on the adjectives you use to describe your brand when selecting design elements for your piece. Additionally, copywriters take your image into account when they choose a tone for your piece. If you are acting as your own copywriter, it's important that the style of your writing (tone) complements the design style of your piece. In other words, the copy and the design of your materials should match, and both are based off the brand image you choose to project.

Once you've got the content and style of your message down, it's time to address the second "A" in the A.S.A.P. model, "Adjective," which we'll look at next month.

## A.S.A.P. Branding--Adjective

**Sum up your brand advantage into one word, and stay in customers' minds.**

By John Williams | September 24, 2008

Every brand platform needs an adjective. By this I mean every brand needs to own a word in the minds of consumers. Jif peanut butter, for example for decades had TV ads that ended with the tagline, "Choosy Mothers Choose Jif." Obviously, the branding strategists behind Jif hoped to associate the word "choosy" with their peanut butter. (Notice how superior product quality is implied, not stated, through use of the folksy term, "choosy.") Today, Jif's tagline remains virtually unchanged. Talk about a successful branding strategy: Jif has been the leading peanut butter brand in the United States for more than 27 years.

This leads to the third installment of my four-part series on A.S.A.P. Branding. Both an acronym and an adjective, each letter in A.S.A.P. stands for a key component to your branding platform. For example. A = "Advantage; but as a whole, A.S.A.P. refers to the speed and efficiency with which you can successfully gain brand traction using the following simple guideline:

- A = Advantage.** Content of your message.
- S = Style.** Style of your message.
- A = Adjective.** Verbal cue to your message.
- P = PMS Color.** Visual cue to your message.

See my previous A.S.A.P. columns for discussions on [Advantage](#) and [Style](#). Read on for more information on Adjective.

### What's Your Adjective?

Like Jif, your goal is to select one word to associate with your product, and then cement that association in the minds of consumers. The adjective you select should be based on the competitive advantage your brand offers. It's your advantage boiled down to one word--something unique, compelling and easy to understand.

In my first article on A.S.A.P. Branding, I suggested a hypothetical advantage statement: "Prodo Products provides Fortune 500 corporations with the highest-quality printers providing fast document printing to increase business efficiencies."

In this example, "quality" might be the first adjective that comes to mind. But "quality" is neither unique nor interesting and compelling. Instead, consider a synonym of "quality" that describes your products, evokes emotion or incites action. The more specific you are, the more unique your adjective will be and the more your brand will stand out against the competition's. Choose only one adjective for your brand platform, but also create a list of synonyms for that adjective.

Remember, the adjective component is directly related to what you're promising your customers. It's a bite-sized way to communicate what they can expect from your brand vs. the competition. It would be wonderful if customers spent the time to memorize your brand's comprehensive advantage statements--features, benefits, and all--but that's not going to happen. So use the advantage statement to guide your selection of that one key word: your adjective.

*John Williams is the president and founder of [LogoYes.com](http://LogoYes.com), the world's first and largest DIY logo website. In his 25 years in advertising, he has created brand standards for Fortune 100 companies like Mitsubishi and won numerous international awards for his design work.*