

# Branding: A Small-business Perspective

## The Right Approach

by Steve Williams, THE RIGHT APPROACH CONSULTING

Starting a small business is hard. I woke up one morning in 2013 and realized, with great trepidation, that after 40+ years in manufacturing, I now found myself in sales. What follows is an account of my personal journey transitioning from a career of making stuff to having to sell myself and my services.

### What Now?

When I woke up that day, I thought, “I have a company, I have services, but I have no customers. What now?” Coming from a family of entrepreneurs and sales professionals, I had direct access to a vast amount of experience to draw from. I was also fortunate to have a good colleague and friend in the business I had just hung my shingle in that provided—and continues to provide—invaluable advice, counsel, and guidance.

### Company Name

The first decision to make was the company name, which may seem like a no-brainer, but

was a struggle for me. Do I leverage my name recognition in the industry or create an autonomous name? After much discussion with family, friends, and colleagues—plus market research—I ignored all the feedback and advice and named the company after myself. After a year, I rebranded the company with a name that reflected what the company actually does. Best decision ever. The takeaway here is don’t take this task lightly, and focus on what you do—not who you are.

### Logo

This decision is just as important as the company name because it is the first thing people see and one of the sticky things people remember. Just like the name, it should be a visual representation of what the company does. I would advise that you don’t try to develop a logo by yourself. The last thing you want to convey is a logo that was clearly self-developed. Hire a professional graphics or branding company to develop it for you.



## Branding

A very painful lesson I learned is that the key to success is to laser focus on what you do. When I first launched the business, my list of services was extremely large and disconnected. When I rebranded the business, the company name, logo, and services were totally in sync and focused. The adage “you can’t be all things to all people” is especially true in this case. Another painful lesson learned is that my personal likes and dislikes do not necessarily reflect what my customers like. Again, as with the logo, I would strongly suggest getting professional help from people whose job is to understand your market and how your product or services fit in.

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Once your brand is created, it takes daily diligence to build your brand continuously. The biggest lesson to be learned here is that every single contact you have with a customer or potential customer is an opportunity to reinforce your brand. Your business card is a powerful tool that can make or break that first purchase order after an introduction. The mistake I first made was to cram my first business card with things that don’t belong on a card and fill up both sides. That is the fastest way to get a potential customer to toss your card in the circular file instead of adding it to their contacts. I took a minimalist approach with the rebranded card that resulted in a simple, clean look with a blank back. Especially during large meetings and trade shows, people like to make notes on the back of business cards, and since

the goal is to get someone to keep your card, this works.

## Website and Social Media

In today’s business environment, your website is often the first introduction to potential customers. It needs to be simple, visually pleasing, and highly functional. In my case, functional means having all the pertinent contact information, a lot of content (articles, white papers, videos), e-commerce, and a call to action. My first website had some of these attributes, but the rebranded version has them all along with a fresh, clean look. Once again, my personal likes and dislikes in the original website proved to not to match my customers. You will be much happier if you step back and let the professionals do what they do.

Social media is also a powerful lead-generation and prospecting tool, and if used strategically, can be much more effective than cold calling and knocking on individual doors. There still is a great value to knocking on doors, but that is one lead at a time. I personally don’t have much use for Twitter and Facebook, but a tool like LinkedIn can put an article about your business in the hands of millions of professionals with a single click. Some of the advanced features can target specific audiences by industry, company, title, etc., to focus your message even further. Constantly build your social media pages and provide meaningful content specific to your business. Believe me, this takes a concentrated and ongoing effort, but the payback is fast and lasting.

## Conclusion

Overall, what I can offer is my most valuable lesson learned in this transition. It doesn’t matter how great your service or product is, if you can’t reach your targeted audience with your message, it really doesn’t matter. **PCB007**



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