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# Branding and being heard in the noise

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## **Background**

CommTogether is a communications and marketing agency who specialise in finding the voice of businesses and not-for-profit's, then developing content, materials and other solutions to grow and maintain audiences. CommTogether was founded by Anthony Perl who has worked for 25 years in communications and marketing building large audiences for local brands through to large organisations. Visit the CommTogether website [www.commtogether.com.au](http://www.commtogether.com.au) to find out more.

This report represents a series of articles designed to get business leaders thinking about their brand, how they communicate and market themselves.

## **Introduction**

A brand is more than a name and a logo. A brand is how you and your staff represent your business in any form of communication, from the way you dress to the way you answer an email or call. The key is clear consistent directed messages combined with listening to your market.

Critical to a brand is what makes it stand out. Does the brand have its own unique voice? Why choose this brand over another? Why will it be noticed?

The market place is becoming more crowded with every day. The competition to be heard is greater than ever before, because there are more communication channels open to us. Gone are the days when you could just post a newsletter out to a list of people when you felt it was the right time to send it. The power has shifted and you must now compete with a 24 hour news cycle and the need to push your brand out continuously on multi-platforms.

It's critical to be able to analyse who your audiences are and how you should engage with them or you will be overwhelmed and left behind.

Communications and marketing can not continue to be under-estimated by business, because without professional assistance you will not survive long.

## **Branding must make a point**

How many businesses do you know where the brand was created on a whim? They use the name of the person or some random term they like the sound of and combine it with some kind of design done on the cheap. The problem is a brand is the foundation for the business. If you don't have the basics right then you are starting from a long way back.

So many businesses just get it wrong. Unless you are a big corporate where you can spend a fortune on advertising, your name does matter. It has to do more work for you especially if you don't have a big advertising budget to play with.

Your branding needs to stand out and make it easy for your target audience to understand who you are what you offer.

CommTogether has come to the rescue of a few brands lately – for some it is a total change and relaunch, but for others we tweak it and give it a professional edge that has also included creating some sub brands to make their offering clearer to the public. Branding has to talk to your audience.

Then if you do have some money for advertising – you need to be smart about it. If your branding is doing some of the work for you the ad can be about reinforcing your message and making it memorable.

Spend some time looking at your branding. Don't think you have to hang on to your branding because you have had it for a while. Sometimes a simple tweak can help, whether it is to the branding itself or the way it works with your definition and strategy. Other times your branding may need an overhaul, but it's not something to be afraid of, rather you should embrace it as a potential life saver for your business.

Take the time to get some professional branding advice – your business may depend on it. Before you balk at spending money, remember every businesses needs to be spending money on communication with its audience. Branding is a central part of this communication process. The design is one part, the message is another and ultimately this drives the marketing.

## **Branding basics**

It's surprising how often the most obvious question is ignored. What's in a name?

A name will make a big difference to your success. If you don't have a massive advertising budget, it matters even more.

If you opt for a name that says nothing about who you are what you do, then you start from a fair way behind. Only celebrities can afford the luxury of using their own names as the one for their business. Let me preface that statement by saying celebrity does not have to be someone who is a famous sportsperson or actor. You could be a celebrity in your community – so well known that you are the lure that brings people to your doors. That works where your long term aim is to remain working only in that community. If you are aiming bigger then I would be angling for a different tact.

You often only get one shot at telling people where you are from before they lose interest. If your name has no meaning then you stand even less chance of them remembering who you are.

I have worked with a number of businesses and not-for-profit organisations in recent years where the name has become a major issue and yet some of them don't realise it. They wonder why they struggle to get any cut-through and be noticed, yet their name is doing no work for them. Given the chance for their logo to appear somewhere or their name to be mentioned in passing, nobody is any the wiser about what they do.

You must make your name have meaning.

Don't be misled by perceived goodwill in a brand name. Just because the community who already engages with you knows your name is not a reason to stay with it. You need to make sure your potential audience can grasp who you are quickly. That is an even bigger issue if your potential audience includes funders.

It is not easy to take a step back and see what someone who might encounter your name for the first time is going to think / how they will react. But you must consider the outsider and not pretend that because you have had your name for years it must stay as is.

I am not necessarily advocating immediately changing lots of names of businesses overnight. There are options to consider. You could introduce a strap-line which helps explain what you do.

Alternatively you could introduce a new name but include a reference to the old name, For example, formerly known as OR part of xyz.

There is much pain in finding the right name and even more so if you are changing a name that may have a long history. The rewards in the long run are that you have a business or not-for-profit which is much easier to market because the name itself is doing some of the work.

Communication is the key to the success of any business and if the name is your first and sometimes only real chance to be heard, then it needs to make its point clearly.

## Top marketing tips

Over the past 25 years I have learned a thing or two about marketing a business, building, maintaining and growing large audiences for sole traders through to corporates.

Top 3 tips for marketing a business:

1. **Professional edge.** When it comes to how you want to portray your business to your market, be professional. Seems simple, but all too often the basics are forgotten here. Being professional is everything from the way you answer the phone, respond to emails, dress, talk, present materials, your website etc. You are only as good as the way you look. It's an old line, but it is so true, you only get one chance to make a first impression. Make sure you present professionally in keeping with your brand and your market.

For example, look at any of the big retail brands. The staff are trained to respond to customers in a certain way. They all present themselves consistently and in keeping with the style of brand. You are not greeted at the checkout by someone in a singlet, board shorts and thongs. You don't see their advertising brochure with one design and something different in the store or on the website. The messages are clear and simple and connected to their business plan. What they produce is consistent and the style is in keeping with the brand.

2. **Listen.** Before you do any marketing you need to know you have a market. Listen to what your target audience is saying they want and need. You need to keep listening for as long as you have a business. When you stop listening, you will find your business starts to fail. How you listen depends on your business. It could be formally in a survey or simply by talking to your audience. You might also use social media to engage with people or just hear what they are saying about you and your competition.

For example, TV stations are in a business who as much as any business must listen to their audience. I can think of two recent occurrences where this has been significant. A couple of weeks ago one station began airing a program, then after a couple of episodes they realised people were not watching. If they kept the program on their main station they would feel the impact in other programs and additionally they would lose revenue from sponsors. By putting on a show like Big Bang Theory instead they are giving people what they want – they listened. In this case it was ratings surveys primarily which gave them the information. On the flip side, the same station had also decided not to air a sporting event live. A backlash from supporters through social media in particular led the network to airing it live and then still offering a full replay later in the day.

**3. Invest.** Marketing is a business. You can do it yourself, but you don't know what you are missing by not investing in professionals. If you want to do tips 1 and 2 well, then you need someone who can give you a professional edge. As a guide I would say you should be spending 5-7% of your earnings on marketing. Of course you always need to monitor the investment and it will depend on your business and if there is any particular campaign you might need to undertake. But 5% would be a minimum. Some businesses invest much more, because they can justify it through growth, but even then it has to be measured. The difference between spending 15% and 20% for example may make no difference at all.

For example, some small business operators tell me they don't need to advertise, all their business is word of mouth. My response to that is they are still spending on marketing. If you are a plumber and you have not invested in a uniform, a business card and a web page then people will not know how to find you and recommend you. If you are following up on your clients, then you are investing in marketing. The list goes on, but marketing is so much more than just an ad.

Why does a plumber need a marketing professional? It may just be for a health check, to look at what you are doing and see if there are areas for improvement.

Seeing a marketing professional is not about spending thousands and employing a big agency. While that is relevant for some, there are simple relevant solutions for any size business. Once a year you should spend at least a couple of hours with a marketing professional and some time on your own looking at what marketing you do. An annual check can make all the difference to the health of your business.

## **The noise**

The communication revolution that has occurred over the last few years with social media infiltrating our work as well as our personal lives, means the challenge is to edit.

I hear all the time from both businesses and not-for-profit organisations that we must be on Facebook, we have to be on Twitter, we need a newsletter, more forms on our website, our brochures need updating, we need to do some PR, we are thinking of doing some advertising, this year we are doing videos to post on YouTube, we should blog, we should send messages to our database about this and that, we should do more with LinkedIn... The list seems endless when you start to add in things like Instagram and all the other latest and greatest tools.

Stop for a minute and gather some real clarity. Who are your stakeholders and what is the best way to communicate with them? Do you need everything? What are the priorities? More importantly what is the strategy for the business for 2013 and the next 3 to 5 years?

I would encourage you to think about what is really critical to help move the organisation forward?

Do you realise what I have not mentioned above? Good old-fashioned conversation, both on the phone and face to face. Don't forget these are still the most valuable communication tools.

While you consider which paths to go down, consider also the messages themselves. They need to be on strategy, clear and consistent.

There is no business or not-for-profit of any size operating where communication is not critical to the success and long-term survival. It is time to stop what you are doing and start exploring communication options.

## **The art of being personal**

Remember your brand is more than your symbol or name, it is in every communication, written, spoken and visual. If you want your brand to stand out then don't ignore the need to communicate regularly with all your stakeholders.

Personalised communication seems to be waning. Interestingly when you do a search there is not much around to even define it. We are in an age of 'social media' where it seems to many it is ok to send group based messages. Sure they can sometimes give the illusion of being personal ("Dear Anthony"), but we all know what we are getting when another Mailchimp newsletter arrives.

Personalised communication is not posting a status update on Facebook to your friends. Personalised communication is most certainly not letting the world know what you had for dinner on Twitter. Personalised communication is also not posting information on LinkedIn or a picture on Instagram. Personalised communication is old fashioned. Personalised communication is about making an effort to reach out to an individual and relate to them on some level. It requires building relationships and spending a moment to think about what you are saying.

When we are in the holiday season we have all spent time catching up with friends and family where personalised communication is what it is all about, yet somehow when we drift back into the office it all goes astray.

I am of the theory that there are two types of CEO's – those with an open door and those with a closed door. I have worked with both. Those with the open door in my experience tend to be more successful. One of the keys to the success of the open door policy is personalised communication. On the one hand there is the CEO who heads straight into their corner office in the morning and you don't get as much as 'hello' from them. I recall one CEO I worked with, who made an effort to wonder around the office at least once a week. He took an active interest in things outside of work remembering the names of your partner and children. Personalised communication. His easy quick conversation not only served to make him approachable, but it motivated the staff because we felt he understood our personal circumstances and cared.

You can use a personalised communication approach in emails. Just offer something a little extra to show relationships are important and that you are listening to them. Ultimately though, personalised communication is at its best when you go and see someone face to face. As good as jumping on Skype can be, it is not the same. There is so much more you can get out of an actual physical meeting. Seems logical but in a world of social media and fast paced living the simple things can sometimes be lost.

By the same token let's not pretend you can adopt this kind of approach with everyone, particularly if your organisation is large. That is why you also need to surround yourself with people who can continue this process down the line. You also need to recognise where it is important for others to

manage relationships for your organisation. For example the Chief Financial Officer is better placed to be talking to the Bank. It is the same with different groupings of suppliers. It can be easier to manage a relationship with one supplier who has their own list of suppliers that will help complete a task. For example, when you work with CommTogether we can produce a brochure, newsletter or annual report because we have a graphic design agency, photographer and printer who we can rely on. We manage those relationships and pass on the benefits.

The value of quality personalised communication can not be over-estimated.

## **The message**

This collection of articles is designed to make you stop and think about your business. Understand the importance of brand, audience and sorting through the noise - at times getting back to basics. However the most important point I have left to last.

Clear directed information has the ability to change lives.

Develop a definition of your business that matches in with your business plan but makes you stand out. The logo is one thing, the name is another to get you noticed, but then if you have the chance to say what you do, never say "I am just a xxxxx."

One word can make a real difference, like 'cheap' or 'leader' or 'local'...they position you. You need the whole sentence and sometimes a paragraph to be spot on and reproduced easily and accurately by staff and in all your communications.

If the message is right it will change the life of your business. If the message reaches the right audience it could change someones life because accessing your business has helped them on some scale.

## **Contact information**

CommTogether has packages available to suit sole traders through to medium sized businesses. We can work with you on a per project or retainer basis. Whether it is for a health check or to make some real changes or complete a particular exercise, we can help. Our work covers everything from branding to annual reports, from strategic advice to producing brochures, from advising on content structures on your website to writing the words. We will help you make the most out of your marketing budget, thinking outside the square to give you the best solution to reach all your stakeholders.

The founder of CommTogether, Anthony Perl is available as a speaker at your next event. Let his passion for communication motivate your business or not-for-profit to make a difference.

Contact CommTogether today and we will help your business or not-for-profit find its voice.

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## About CommTogether Services



**CommTogether** bridges the gap between understanding a business or not-for-profit organisation and engaging with their audience.

*We implement strategies and deliver practical solutions.*

### Our services:

**CommTogether** uses its accumulated experience and professional network to deliver quality communications that is critical to the success of any business or not-for-profit organisation. We will deliver a solid foundation and help maintain an ongoing competitive edge.

The range of services **CommTogether** can deliver through its own resources and coordinate via its trusted network include:

#### Ideas:

- Strategy
- Opportunities

#### Marketing:

- Branding
- Brochures
- Events
- Market research
- Merchandise
- Website

#### Communication:

- Articles
- Communication audits
- Crisis media management
- Intranets
- Media monitoring
- Newsletters
- Podcasts
- Public relations
- Reports
- Social media
- Websites

[www.commtogether.com.au](http://www.commtogether.com.au)

CommTogether on:



*Through quality communications,  
together we can make a difference.*

For more detailed information about **CommTogether** services, including some introductory packages please contact us today.

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## CommTogether packages

# Packages

When you run a business you think you're expected to know everything.

When you're a business leader you realise you need to surround yourself with experts.

Communications including marketing is the foundation upon which any business is built and it is the key to its success. You need to find what people need and how that is evolving and continue to make sure they know what you produce and deliver.

Can you afford not to seek advice from an expert with more than 20 years experience?  
You can afford the CommTogether Insight package!

### Insight package

You receive insight, ideas and direction either on a particular item like a brochure or website or an overall assessment.

We will quickly analyse your current situation and offer valuable insights to help clarify the direction for your communication and marketing needs. During this session we will also generate some ideas and recommendations for how you might improve and better engage your target market. Use this package to help ensure your communications and marketing materials are on track, whether they need updating or are about to be developed, to assess your brand or particular communications both internal and external.

Cost: \$349\* - this is a no obligation package worth thousands

### Insight package plus

In addition to everything in the Insight package, you will receive a brief report that includes the assessment and recommendations. This is an ideal record for ongoing reference and something you can take to others in your business as a platform from which to build.

Cost: \$500\*

### Workshop

CommTogether can facilitate a communications and marketing workshop to better understand your circumstances and ways to improve through better engagement.

Cost: Ask us about tailoring a package to suit your needs and budget

You need to contact CommTogether today...

*Through quality communications, together we can make a difference.*

\* Prices quoted are in Australian dollars and do not include GST