The basics of a great dental brand

By Joel Harris

What does your brand say? It’s easy to explain how Coke has become a brand after 100 years of advertising and marketing efforts, but sometimes, it is very difficult to explain how a dentist creates a brand with relatively few resources, in just one community, and in a short period of time.

It always starts with a great product, a great location, and a great in-office experience. However, many dental practices with all of these necessary requirements, (and they are all necessary) never really build a “brand.” Something else must be required and I’m going to try to explain it in very simple terms in this article.

Many marketing experts talk about brands, but for this discussion, lets not be so concerned about brand building as we are building a loyal community of believers in your dental services. We may even refer to them as patriots, fans and advocates. As a dental professional, you may not relate to actually building a brand, but you do think a lot about the group of people that prefer your products and services–your patients.

In the simplest of terms, brand building can be boiled down to the fact that brands are belief systems. Once you think of a brand as a belief system, you automatically understand the things that giant companies spend billions of dollars trying to obtain: trust, quality, vision, values, leadership, and on and on.

4 simple steps

Building a brand for a dental practice can be broken into four simple steps. These steps are critical to brand building for any small service business, but they are a perfect plan for any dental professional to follow.

Number One is a creation story. Apple Computer is about a couple of guys who built personal computers in their parent’s garage. Nike started with a guy making running shoes with a waffle iron. UPS was started by a 15-year-old with a bicycle. Who are you?

Even if you don’t have a personal creation story, where were you born? Where did you go to high school? Where did you go to dental school? Are you married? Kids? Do you love dogs?

Branding pioneer Jack Trout asserts that the creation story is critical, simply because that story “is often at the heart of being different and successful.”

Number Two. What are you about? All belief systems have a creed that boldly claims what you believe in. Do you think different? Do you have any special training that influences your treatment philosophy? Do you provide an extra level of service, or do you provide any products and services that other dentists don’t?

Number Three. Once we know where you’re from and what you’re about, show us who you are. All great brands have visual icons or symbols that sum up who they are and what they’re about. The Nike swoosh, The Stars and Stripes, The Olympic Rings. Icons are not just...