

# Living your brand



By [Anton Ressel](#)

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In previous articles I have written about branding in the creative and small business space, I explored some of the benefits of a strong brand, and some cost-effective ways of developing and positioning a brand. It is probably a good time to take stock and look at what it means to 'live your brand,' since this is what the most successful brand owners do, on a daily basis.

## Do it right from the beginning

Remember when you were just starting out in business (some of you may still be in this stage)? The common approach during this phase of the business life cycle generally involves selling what we can, when we can. It is about survival, not long-term strategy, and your brand can and often does become a victim in this tug-of-war between necessity and expediency.

Consider the following scenario: you are approached to develop a branded corporate gift for an insurance company. The minimum you usually sell similar products for is R50, owing to the quality of the materials you use, but they want something for R20 and they are prepared to order 1000 pieces. Taking the order will mean sacrificing your usual quality standards and using cheap materials, but you really need the cash - so what do you do?

I already know the answer, because I have been in that same place, but from a brand-building perspective such a move can be far more damaging than you think - if you have used pleather instead of leather for example, anyone receiving the gift item (and there will be at least 1000 people who do) will associate your product with inferior materials. Of course, you could just do the job and not brand it with your logo in any way, but that is also a self-defeating process.

In truth, building a strong brand starts right at the very beginning, and questions like the one posed above need to have been thought through and answered as much as possible before you even start marketing your brand to the world.

## Live the brand in all areas of operation

Boring, staid areas of operation such as costing and pricing, administration and financial recordkeeping have nothing to do with building your brand, right? Wrong. In fact, these are the most common areas where we drop the branding ball. Remember, your brand represents the sum of all elements of your offering to the potential customer or supporter - and this includes much more than just the product, the logo or your Facebook page.

In terms of costing and pricing, where you position your products from a pricing perspective says a lot about how much

value you attach to your brand - look at luxury brands like Rolex and Ferrari, who use price as a brand-building exercise as much as anything else - if it is so expensive it must be amazing, we think enviously. Similarly, the quality of your administration and particularly of your administrative and financial interactions with clients (such as quotes, invoices, statements and other general admin-related communications) speak volumes about how much value you yourself attach to your brand.

If you send me a cut-and-paste, unbranded and poorly structured quotation for a product or service you are trying to sell me for a lot of cash, you are shooting yourself in the foot. Making me wait two weeks for a quote will also have the same negative effect.

Living the brand in all areas of operation also extends to things like how the phone is answered at your place of work - if you work from home and have small kids, you may want to do a bit of roleplay with them, or rather give out your cell number. "My mommy is on the toilet, can you call back?" is not the most inspiring sales pitch for a prospective customer to hear...

## **Little things speak volumes**

Fortunately, these neglected areas offer a real opportunity for anyone trying to build a brand and stand out from the herd. If you do them well, and pay as much attention to areas such as the quality of your client communications and interactions, the look and feel of your non-client facing materials such as quotes and invoices, and the battle between maintaining product integrity and keeping the doors open, you will reap the benefits.

Anyone can have a glitzy website and a sexy logo, it is the less obvious stuff that separates a lasting brand from a flash in the pan.

## **ABOUT ANTON RESSEL**

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