

Put your start-up company on the road to success



By [Linda Botha](#)

11 Dec 2013

You're the proud owner of a brand-spanking new business. You're all geared up with a killer idea and a sheaf of registration papers hot off the press. So what's next?

Well, do you have a brand yet? Like most four-letter words, this one packs a punch as well - it's what will distinguish your business from everyone else's. Your brand - who you are and what you look like - should speak to people's hearts and minds. They should go, 'Aha!' when they see it.



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Be your brand

At this point, you may be wondering what exactly a 'brand' is. A simple definition is that it's [your promise to your customer](#). This promise is found in what you offer the customer, and how it differs from other offerings. Pull your brand through right from your logo to your vision, mission, image and identity. Rather than being *about* you, it should *be* you.

It should be woven into the very fabric of all facets of your company. This includes your USP (unique selling point - what makes you different) and general company philosophy, as reflected in all your web and other content.

A good starting point when trying to find your company's branding 'voice' is to brain-storm a powerful vision and mission for it. This will help you give some body to the spirit that drove you to start it in the first place. Personally, I was greatly inspired by the SA Navy's description of their business, which I happened to notice written on a building at the naval base in Gordons Bay while jogging past it.

While I'm not confrontationally inclined myself, at least not on the Navy's scale (I think - although my better half may not always agree), I have to admire the clarity and brevity with which they tell the world what they're about:

- [the core business of the SA Navy is.....fighting at sea](#)
- [the mission of the SA Navy is.....to win at sea](#)
- [the vision of the SA Navy is...to be unchallenged at sea](#)
- [the slogan of the SA Navy is....."Unchallenged at Sea"](#)

Going digital

Once you've established your brand, in a marketplace that has moved very much into the ether the next clever move would be to announce yourself on the world-wide web. A good start is to have a website built - and not just any old website. You've probably heard of search-engine optimisation (SEO in techie language), and the importance of SEO can hardly be over-emphasized.

What it means, basically, is that you follow certain strategies to get your website into the faces of people Googling for your product offering. Think the right keywords, but also think refined website parameters and solid, expert content that is meaningful to Internet browsers.

Google is set up these days to give preference to sites with industry-specific information rather than simply a repetition of relevant keywords. And all the while, keep in mind that the most crucial part of your website and social media presence will

consist of...? Yes, your brand!

Once you have set in motion your website's SEO, the next clever step would be to get e-marketing set up on all the major social networks. You may still be in two minds about the merits of this marketing strategy, but the truth is that you ignore the likes of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter at your own peril.

Social media

A solid presence on social media means a solid presence in the minds of a rapidly increasing audience - nearly one in four people world-wide is cruising the social media these days, according to [eMarketer](#). And it's not only new customers you're after. (Re)connecting and validating your business with existing clients may be equally valuable. Make sure your social network marketing ties back in with your website content by, for instance, putting up links to magazine articles you've written (or had written by a professional content creator).

Now let's back-track a bit. You should already have had a business plan in place before even registering your new business; but if you're like most people, you still may not. Now's the time to take that bull solidly by the horns, though. A business plan will not only allow you to go knock on the doors of financing institutions for start-up financing, should you need to. It will also act as a compass that guides your business to success.

A good business plan will give direction to your business and help you make the best decisions as you get to the crossroads you will inevitably encounter in the business world. Components include an analysis of your business's position from the perspectives of a SWOT analysis, business structure, financial position, contingencies, business identity, key objectives, market analysis, competition... the list goes on, and it should be as comprehensive as possible. Don't skimp on this invaluable tool.

To recap: Position your new company by giving it a voice and a face in the form of a unique brand. Give it a Google-friendly website home. Find it some friends through the social networks. And write a business plan to guide your business where you want it to go.

ABOUT LINDA BOTHA

Translator, content creator and editor, Linda Botha, has established herself firmly in the language services industry over the last 25 years. Her experience includes corporate and educational content development and publishing, and managing large document projects. Linda currently offers a free business writing course through Linda Botha Language Solutions at www.lbls.co.za. Reach Linda at linda@lbls.co.za, or connect with her on Facebook.

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