What is a national brand? Your guide to national brands

Category: Branding
written by Stewart Hodgson | 16 September 2022
What is a national brand, and is national branding a good strategy for your company? On the surface, national brands are simple enough to understand. These organizations earned their name because they distribute products and services all over a country, rather than focusing on a specific area.

National brands dominate the commercial landscape today. Their vast presence makes them familiar and reliable to a wide range of customers. Vendors invested in national brands use extensive resources to boost brand awareness and generate sales opportunities.

Just look at the impact of companies like Dove Chocolate, or Hershey's.

Usually, national brands start relatively small, focusing on a certain area or niche, just like most companies. However, as their popularity and influence expand, they're able to connect with a much wider audience.

Some national brands even become "international" or "global" over time, branching overseas into different territories.

Here's your guide to national brands.

What is a national brand?

National brand definition

So, what is a national brand? Simply put, it's a company with a distribution strategy which covers an entire nation. They differ to regional or private brands which only sell in niche

areas, like your local family store, or a pizza company which only sells products in a handful of towns.

National brands are well-established in their industry. Their wide distribution network means they can connect with a broader audience, establish higher profits, and out-sell the competition.

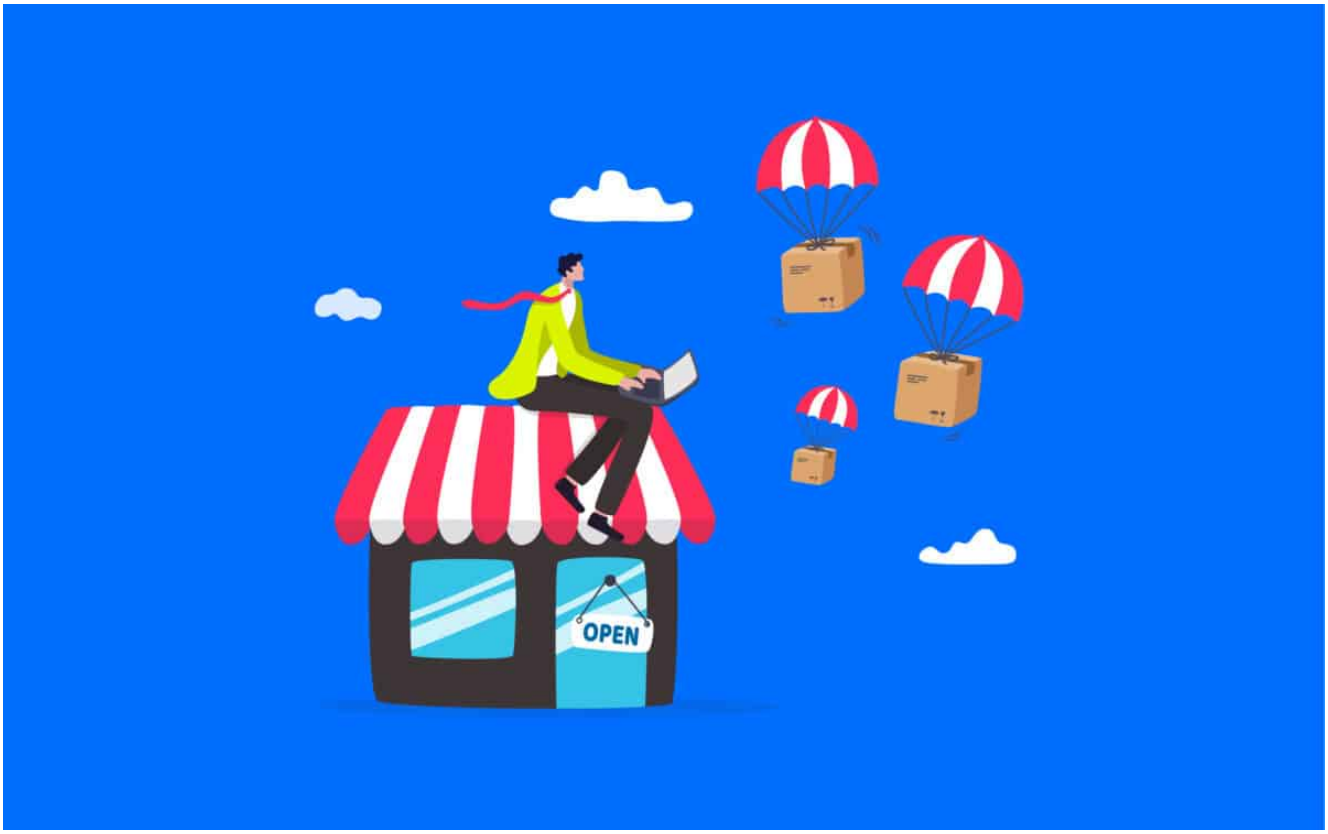
A great example is the Breyers Ice Cream Company, famous for selling its products in stores all over the United States market.

Customers are often drawn to national brands because they're deemed more reliable, and trustworthy. As buyers, we assume companies with a larger footprint are generally more reputable, well-established, and well-regulated.

If a company sells its products in multiple locations and stores, we assume it has to deliver reasonably good quality.

However, virtually all national brands begin small. The Breyers Ice Cream Company started with a man selling ice creams via a horse and wagon on the streets of Philadelphia.

What makes national brands unique is their commitment to expansion. Companies with a focus on national branding work hard to partner with other companies, retailers, and distributors, so they can connect with the biggest possible audience.



What are national brand companies?

The best way to define national brands is as a company capable of distributing products on a nation-wide basis. To ensure customers can purchase their goods throughout a country, national brands have multiple manufacturing centers and distribution channels dotted around a landscape.

If you consider most examples of national brands in the world today, you'll notice they also have a strong commitment to brand building and marketing.

Companies like Cadbury's in the UK invest in everything from television advertisements to online marketing campaigns across social media, website content, and partnership deals.

National brands are an alternative to:

Local brands

Companies designed to focus on a specific audience in a certain location. These organizations concentrate on a very

niche group of customers, with no plans to scale into other locations.

The smaller family-owned stores and one-person businesses in your local town might be a good example of this kind of branding.

Generic brands

Generic, or private label brands can have a nationwide presence, but they're also not exactly the same as national brands. Private label brands are distributed exclusively by specific retailers like grocery stores and restaurants.

The owners of the private label form partnerships with certain stores to exclusively supply goods to certain locations.

International brands

International or global brands are often the next step up from the national brand. They expand across territories and countries into different landscapes.

For instance, many vehicle companies started as national brands, like Ford, before eventually finding distributors and manufacturing facilities in other countries.



Advantages of national brands

National brands have a lot of appeal. Even in a world where younger customers are becoming increasingly drawn to the benefits of shopping local, national brands create a sense of trust. We're attracted by the brand names we've come to recognize in a multitude of stores and locations.

National brands build a powerful sense of familiarity among their target audience through the use of extensive advertising campaigns and promotional efforts. Many national brands also expand their credibility by partnering with other companies their customers already know.

In some cases, national brands also play on the general distrust and concerns people have towards local and private label brands, indicating they can offer better quality.

Some of the most significant benefits of national brands include:

Brand recognition

A well-designed national brand is easily recognized by a wide audience. Companies spend a huge amount on marketing and promotion to make their companies as familiar as possible to their target audience.

Customer loyalty

Because companies gain a sense of familiarity with national brands, they’re more likely to trust them, leading to consistent loyalty. Many clients would rather buy from brands they’re already familiar with, instead of purchasing from new companies.

Better turnover

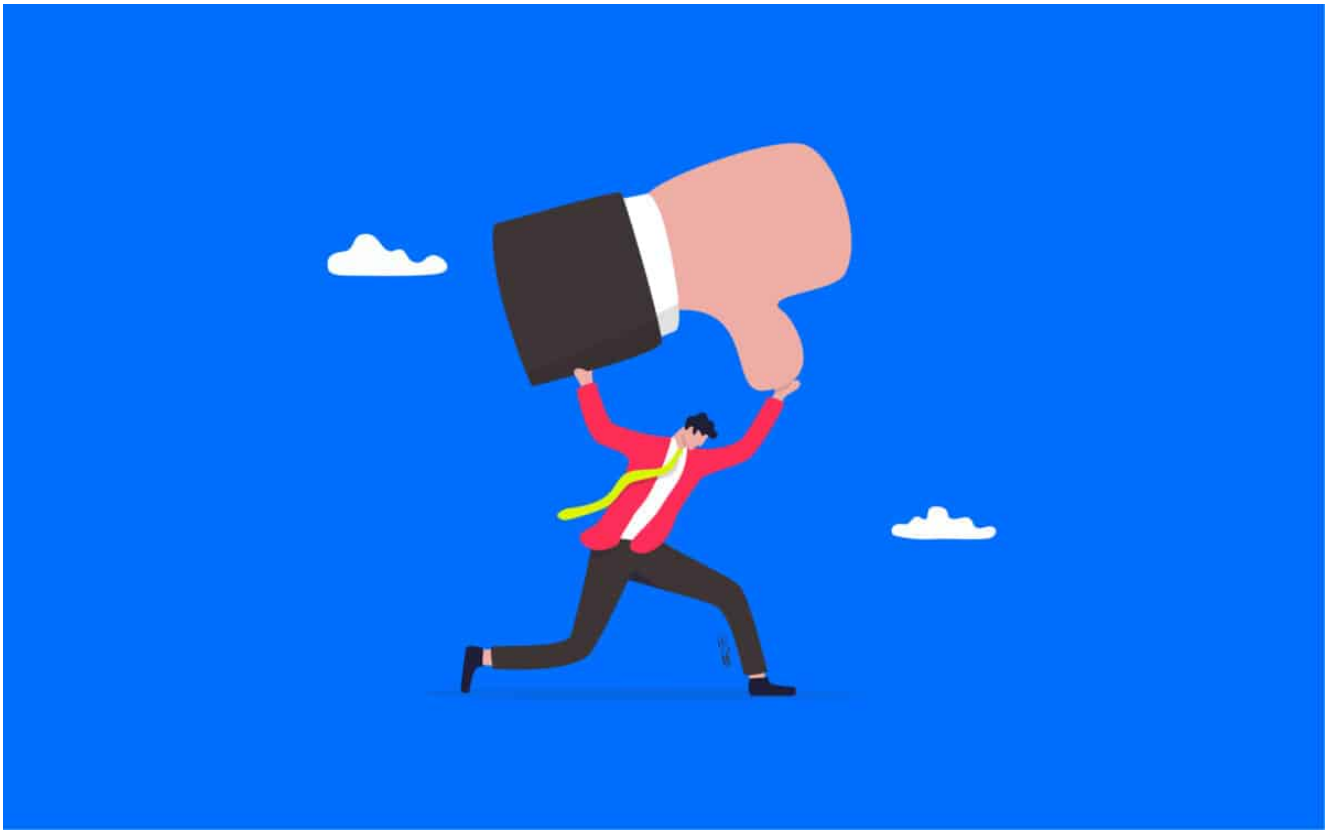
Nationwide distribution of national branded products means companies can generate bigger profits, and access higher sales opportunities. They can even charge a little more than generic brands in some cases.

Consistency

National brands focus heavily on quality control and maintaining a consistent partnership with their distributors, so customers always know what to expect. This improves the chances of repeat purchases.

Partnerships

Strong partnerships held by national brands with other retailers make it easier to connect with an audience wherever they are. This also helps with things like distribution, and production flow.



Disadvantages of national brands

Of course, there are downsides to creating a national brand too. For instance, building a national brand is rarely something a company can do straight away. To achieve success as a national brand, you need a lot of capital to invest into partnerships and distribution models.

Well-known national brands spend significant amounts of money on things like promotion, advertising, and building brand recognition. National brands also have to do extensive research into each market they're branching into, to ensure they can continue to make a profit.

Major disadvantages of national brands include:

Cost

You'll need to invest a lot of extra money into building your brand, distribution methods, creating manufacturing centers, and promotion. This isn't always possible for smaller brands

and can require a lot of capital investment.

Effort

It takes a lot of work to make sure a national brand continues to deliver consistently good quality across an entire country. You'll often need a huge team of professionals working with partners and distributors on a regular basis.

Expertise

National brands need to invest a lot of time and effort into understanding their target audience, wherever they may be, and ensuring they deliver a fantastic experience to every consumer they target.



Fantastic national brand examples

Examples of national brands from across the globe can offer an excellent insight into just how powerful these companies can be. There is no shortage of options out there to explore.

Some of the national brands you may be familiar with include:

Walkers

One of the better-known snack companies in the UK, Walkers is one of the most popular brands in the country today. The company sells products all across the United Kingdom, and even works with other distributors to create additional labels throughout the world.

Wrangler

Founded in 1904 and famous for its clothing collections, Wrangler is a fantastic example of a national brand in the United Kingdom. This company connects with its customers by promising exceptional value, comfort, and style in everything it produces.

Heinz

A national brand responsible for a huge selection of products, Heinz has grown to incredible heights over the years, and even has a strong presence in multiple parts of the world. The company started off as a UK national brand but has since become a worldwide name.

Exploring national brands

Now you know the answer to “What is a national brand?” you can begin to determine whether this far-reaching branding opportunity is a good strategy for your company. Notably, not every business will be able to thrive as a national brand.

In most cases, to become a successful national brand, you’ll need to start by building a memorable local brand, capable of capturing the hearts and minds of your target audience.

Once you’ve developed an identity your local customers can recognize, you can begin to expand into new environments around the world.

Fabrik: A branding agency for our times.