What is product branding? The ultimate product branding definition

Category: Branding,Strategy
written by Stewart Hodgson | 26 January 2022
What is product branding? Today, we're going to provide you with the complete product branding definition, and help you to discover what it really means to build an identity for a product.

You've heard of branding for companies, perhaps even personal branding – but what does it mean to create a brand specifically for a product.

Product branding is part of what makes some items more desirable than others in an increasingly competitive landscape.

Just like a business brand can build affinity with your target audience and boost your chances of your customers becoming repeat clients, a product brand has its own power.

Particularly, in an overcrowded market, branding a product can help to separate the item from similar solutions in your industry.

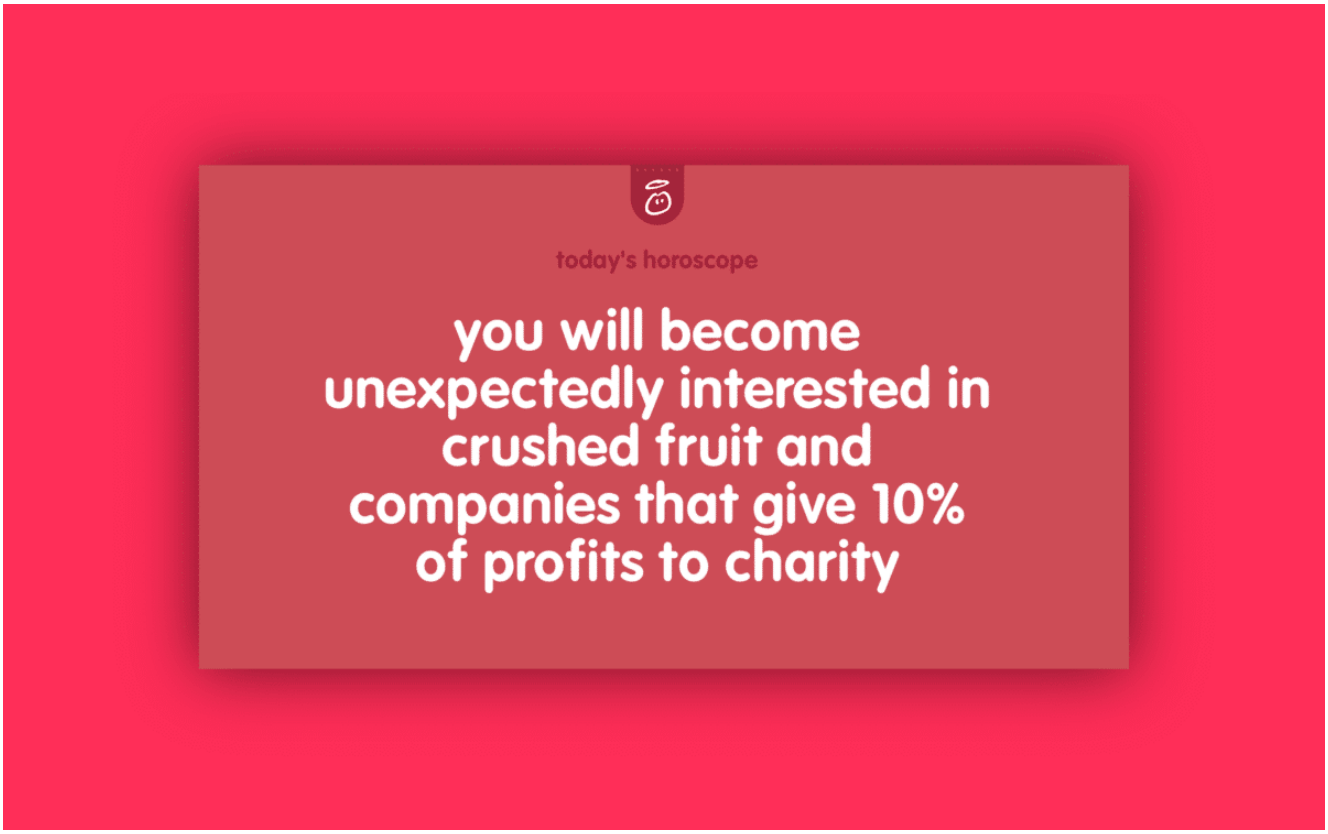
So, if you're ready to create your own product branding strategy, read on…

What is product branding? Product branding definition

Branding, in any format, is the act of giving something a specific design, identity, or presence intended to create familiarity. A business uses things like a tone of voice and a

specific logo design to create a connection with customers.

Just think about the Innocent Smoothies brand, and their consistently cheeky approach to marketing messages.



The branding of a product, then, focuses on bringing brand identity to a specific item in your portfolio. It might be your flagship product, like Apple with its “iPhone”, or it may be a full series of products, like the Coca-Cola line-up of flavored beverages.

Typically, a product branding strategy will align with a company’s primary branding strategy, to help build awareness for the organization, strengthen customer relationships, and unlock new sales opportunities.

So, how is branding your product different from branding your business?

Product branding:

- **Has a specific focus:** Product branding concentrates on

bringing attention to a specific item in your portfolio, whereas business branding is about creating an identity for everything you do, and your entire product line.

- **Looks at different markets:** Your specific target audience is likely to change based on your product. For instance, the type of people a company targets with "dairy-free" ice-cream is going to be different to their audience for "low-cal" ice-cream.
- **Adds another unique element to your brand image:** The branding of your product gives your audience another way to differentiate you from your competition. It's an excellent way to give more depth to your identity.



Product branding strategies: Questions to ask

Branding a product is similar to branding a business. You need to consider the audience you want to reach as carefully as possible, as well as the kind of image you need to create. To

begin your product branding strategy, start by asking the following questions:

What is the purpose of this product?

When branding a product, it's important to focus on what the product actually does. Think about what kind of problems you're addressing with this item, and what kind of value you can offer. What sort of market needs and demands does your product satisfy?

For instance, if you're offering a non-dairy milk alternative, are you giving people a creamy and satisfying substance without the threat of issues for people with lactose intolerance?

Who does the product target?

Your "target market" or intended audience for the product will dictate everything from the language and imagery you use, to the colors of your product branding. Think about the kind of audience you're going to be reaching out to.

You may already have a user persona available for your brand identity. The chances are the audience for this product will be a sub-section of the larger market. If your company sells accounting software, for example, this particular product might be designed for freelancers or solo entrepreneurs.

Product branding is a strategy designed to ensure a brand has its own identity and stays true to features aimed at a specific market. For instance, there's a huge difference between the design of "Simply Delish" products and "Jell-O".



What are the direct competitors of the product?

Analyzing your competition is a good way to ensure your product branding strategy separates you from other companies. You don't want people to see your item as just another option in a crowd – this is the purpose of branding the product in the first place.

With this in mind, examine who's already selling products in your space. Supposing you're selling bathing accessories, you might look at companies like Lush, and notice their products are branded with a focus on environmental responsibility.

What can you concentrate on to make your business stand out?

Branding a product: How to create a

product brand identity

With the three questions above answered, it’s time to start doing your research.

Just like your company needs a range of branding assets, from a logo to a set of brand colors and images, your product brand needs the right assets too. Start by creating the visual assets for your product.

You’ll notice, if you look at Coca-Cola, the Company has different color schemes and logos for each of its products. Fanta has a quite different image to Sprite.

The first thing you might want to start with is a logo for your product. This will help to highlight what makes the product unique and should support you in reaching your target audience.



While you’re working on your logo, think about other visual elements you’ll need to market the product, such as:

Color schemes

A color scheme is something you can use on your product, and any of the marketing materials you use for the product. In the example of Fanta, the colors include white, blue/purple, orange, and green.

These colors will usually remain consistent in all of the marketing and branding you do for your product.

Font

The font and typography you use in your logo, on your product packaging, on marketing campaigns, and in other environments will say something about the personality of your product. Your choice of fonts, just like your colors, will help to make an impact on your audience emotionally.

Make sure you keep your fonts consistent and think about what they say about the overall image of your product brand. For instance, the new “Fanta” logo uses capital letters for extra impact.

Packaging

Packaging is a crucial part of making your product stand out on the shelf. If you want your packaging to make the right impression, you need something visually appealing, and unique compared to the competition.

You might even get creative with your packaging and change the shape or style to make it more unique.

This example from “Fit Bums” for high protein bread is an excellent example:



The reasons for product branding

Branding a product means spending extra time and money on developing your image and voice as a growing brand. If you've already spent significant effort on building a business brand, it can be difficult to convince yourself to go through the whole process again for a specific product.

However, a product branding strategy can have benefits.

If you're in a competitive market, the reasons for branding your product start with setting your item apart from the other options on the shelf.

A product branding strategy:

1. Makes purchasing easier for customers

Customers can handle purchasing decisions easier if your product brand makes your solution stand out. Imagine visiting a grocery store where all of the different brands of washing

up liquid looked exactly the same. The only difference was the name on the bottle.

You'd have to spend a long time looking through different options or make your decision entirely based on the company name.

Products packaged and presented in different ways highlight the unique benefits offered by each brand, so you can decide based on what captures your attention first. Look at the difference between Joy and Dawn for instance.

Both products are made by the same brand, but Joy conveys freshness and zingy scents, while Dawn is more reliable, and calm looking.



2. Product brands help you reach a specific market

All of your brand assets help you to capture the attention of a specific audience. However, when you're building and

marketing different products, you want to attract an even more specific audience.

Powerade, for instance, was a drink made by the Coca-Cola Company to help reach a specific sub-section of their audience – people looking for refreshing sports drinks.

Rather than just creating a sub-brand of the Coca-Cola company with “Coke Sport”, the brand decided to create a new image entirely.

This separated the product just enough from the sugary sweetness of Coke to make customers feel like they were buying a product aimed at fitness and health.



The specific audience a company wants to reach with a certain product won’t always be the same as the people they want to reach overall.

It’s helpful to think about specific audience when you’re looking for a way to brand your product and decide whether your new image should create a separation between the brand and the company.

3. Product branding protects the parent brand

Sometimes, product branding can help to separate a new product from the rest of the company. For instance, if Powerade suddenly ended up failing entirely, this wouldn't necessarily have a detrimental impact on the rest of Coca-Cola's products.

The Company can continue to create diverse product brands for each of its items to separate from the product which wasn't a success.

Similarly, if San Pellegrino suddenly lost the interest of the entire sparkling water community, most people wouldn't see the loss of the drink with the destruction of the much larger parent company, Nestle.

In some cases, a differentiated enough product brand can even separate the product from the company in a way which allows the business to keep earning money after a scandal.

When the Nestle Scandal hit in 2021, for instance, people had a hard time figuring out what they should be boycotting.

Product branding examples: Ideas for your strategy

Product branding ensures a brand can properly represent the value and unique potential of a specific product. This value can either be linked to the parent brand or company, or completely separate, as is often the case with big companies like Coca-Cola and Pepsi.

The right product branding ensures you can attract the right audience for the right product and generate another avenue for consumer/company connections. To help you better understand

the value of product branding, let's explore some product branding strategy examples.

Nike product branding examples: Converse

Nike is regularly referenced as one of the best examples of branding in the worlds. The legendary swoosh logo, the incredible marketing campaigns, and Nike's unique tone of voice makes the Company impossible to forget.

As well as investing in standard branding practices, Nike also creates brands for certain products too.

For instance, Nike owns the "Converse" product brand, though not many people are aware of this fact. Converse, though similar to Nike in its authentic approach to advertising and sales, sits aside from the rest of the Nike image.



Unlike Nike Golf, Nike Air Max, and Nike Skateboarding, Converse has its own distinct image and style.

With Converse, Nike was able to create a new image for the "alternative" footwear scene. The shoes are some of the most

popular in the world today, and even have their own logo.

Nestle product branding examples: San Pellegrino

When people think of Nestle, they often imagine things like chocolate bars and milkshakes. However, Nestle also owns a wide variety of other products, each with their unique brands.

Nestle's San Pellegrino drink, for instance, appears much like an entirely separate brand from Nestle. The product, with its refreshing appearance and luxurious bottles stands apart from other creators of refreshing beverages.

The decision to create a new product brand with San Pellegrino helped Nestle to create a new image for its items which appears natural and exotic.

San Pellegrino is an excellent example of how a product branding strategy can help a company separate its new products from an existing image. It's easy to imagine this beverage company being a family-owned company from some sunny location far away.

This makes the drinks available seem more enticing and more "premium" in their image. The complete product naming and branding strategy adds to the appeal.

Unilever product branding examples: Cif and Cornetto

Unilever is an excellent example of a huge conglomerate with multiple sub-brands to advertise. The gigantic enterprise owns a range of companies, offering everything from body sprays like Axe, to Comfort for laundry, and the Cornetto ice cream brand.

When it comes to product branding examples, Unilever offers an insight into how applying different brand images to different products can help to deliver clarity to customers and avoid overlap between different items in a portfolio.

You wouldn’t naturally think of the same brand as being the number one choice for bleach and cleaning products, as well as a market-leading ice cream vendor, for example.



If Unilever sold Cornetto ice creams under the same branding as Cif and Domestos (bleach and cleaning products), they’d quickly scare all their customers away.

Creating different brands for each product offering ensures Unilever can attract the right customer and build the correct reputation for everything they sell.

What about multi-product branding?

Multi product branding is another element of product branding which can apply to a wide selection of companies. Otherwise known as family branding, multi product branding involves

adding the same name, logo, or specific identification elements to all products within a class.

If you see a product from Sony, for instance, you'll usually notice the "Sony" name on it, such as the "Sony PlayStation". Pepsi has a wide range of separate product branding strategies for its sub-brands, but it also has a multi-product branding strategy with things like Pepsi Max.

Multi-product branding can have a direct impact on your ability to design a memorable brand identity. (Learn more about branding identity here).

Here are some multi product branding strategy example ideas to help you understand what makes this kind of product branding a little different:

1. Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola has a wide variety of sub-brands in its portfolio, from Fanta to 7UP. However, the organization also has multi product branding strategies for many of those brands.

The central Coca-Cola brand uses the same colors, font, and logo designs for all Coca-Cola products, including Coke Zero, Coke Vanilla, and countless other products.

Within the sub-brands of the business, you'll also find the same strategy with most different "versions" of the central product. Fanta has a huge selection of flavors with their own names and differing logos, but the underlying branding remains the same.

2. McDonalds

The McDonalds multi product branding campaign is one of the better-known in the world today. McDonalds has a huge range of items to offer in its menu, and most come with their own specific branding.

Although you can get things like the “double cheeseburger” without any specific branding attached, iconic recipes associated with the brand use the “Mc” name for branding.

The McCafe selection of coffee products helps to distinguish McDonald’s range of snacks and beverages, but it still connects to the central McDonalds brand.

There have also been various examples of McDonalds food products with the “Mc” name strategy included, like the “Big Mac”, and the “McChicken sandwich”.

3. FedEx

Even FedEx has its own dedicated multi-branding strategy. There are tons of different FedEx services under the main FedEx Corporation brand, including FedEx Express, FedEx Ground, FedEx Freight and so on.

Each of these products are differentiated with the “FedEx” brand name, as well as the same iconic logo, although the “Ex” part of the naming often has its own color for differentiation.



Adding a unique graphic or color into the mix, along with an extra descriptive term like “FedEx Smart Post”, helps to differentiate the services FedEx offers, while still reminding customers they’re dealing with a consistent company identity.

Discovering your product branding strategy

Product branding comes in a range of different formats. You can use product branding strategies to separate a new product from your existing identity and portfolio, or to connect a range of items in the same line with a multi-product branding effort.

Either way, building a specific identity for your products is just one of the many ways you can make your solution stand out.

In an environment where it’s becoming increasingly easy for anyone to design their own business and sell products online, it can be tough to make a lasting impact on your audience.

Branding efforts help you to connect with your customer on a deeper level and unlock new degrees of loyalty.

Want to learn more about branding? Check out this book about creating an identity in branding, or catch up on the five steps of branding from Michael Johnson.

Alternatively, you can find additional guidance right here on the Fabrik brands blog.

Fabrik: A branding agency for our times.