



THE HIGH-CONCEPT BRAND BIBLE™

Think Big, Find Your Focus and
Achieve Small Business Success

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The High-Concept Brand Bible™: Think Big, Find Your Focus and Achieve Small Business Success

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INTRODUCTION

First of all, thank you for purchasing this book. It is a sign of trust in my work, for which you have my personal utmost gratitude – and even more importantly, it's a sign that you're ready to take the plunge and turn your entrepreneurial venture into a major success. What an exciting place to be!

But forget about my cheerleading for a second.

Applaud *yourself* for being one of a select group of entrepreneurs who are taking their marketing to the next level by creating a solid platform, **a brand upon which to base all their marketing efforts from this point forward the High-Concept™ way.**

What this book will do for you

Just by purchasing *The High-Concept Brand Bible™*, I can predict a few things about you:

- you are self-employed or want to be
- your current marketing efforts aren't yielding the results you've dreamed of
- you've followed a lot of other marketing experts who've talked about branding in theoretical terms till the cows came home (in which case, brace yourself because this isn't your average brand handbook) and still don't feel confident that you're headed in the right direction
- you feel like you're marketing like crazy to your clients and still can't seem to make enough sales to pay the bills

and/or

- you can't seem to figure out the "magic formula" that your competition uses to soar ahead in their businesses

Although I need to mention now that there is no magic formula to achieving success in your small business, there are plenty of principles that you can learn and apply that *will* get you results – the most important of all being your brand, the center of your marketing universe.

All the big players from Nike to Sony and Apple spend a fortune on branding themselves each and every year – and the fact is, every small business can

benefit just as much (if not *far more*) by using the branding principles and tactics that work for large corporations you know by name. As you may know, I have spent a good portion of my career developing branded communications and tactics for big companies with multimillion-dollar budgets just for their branding alone – and I’ve seen what works and what absolutely, positively doesn’t. This manual contains all that I’ve learned over the years about branding your business, including the method that I developed myself to simplify the process for small businesses: High-Concept Branding™.

What’s more, I have included plenty of inexpensive branding tactics that I have developed for my own business, Avenue East, as well as for small business clients just like yourself. If it’s not tested, it’s not in here. And if it’s just fluff, you won’t find it in these pages. Unlike many branding specialists, I won’t recommend that you do anything that doesn’t make sense for your small business even if “everyone else is doing it.” If it doesn’t have real impact on your business, why on earth would you even consider it as a possibility?

So whether you’ve been in business for a decade or are a total newbie to entrepreneurship, if you want to learn how to take your small business to the next level, you’re definitely in the right place.

This manual has 3 main sections, each one designed to help you with your branding in a specific way.

Part 1: All About High-Concept Branding™ gives you the insights you need to understand the High-Concept Branding™ process, from what really counts in the minds of your clients to the principles behind a successful High-Concept Brand™. You’ll also learn about the attitude you need to develop in order to get ahead in your business.

In **Part 2: Create Your Own High-Concept Brand™**, I will walk you step-by-step through the branding creation process to develop your High-Concept Brand Blueprint™. You’ll dig deep into your business and determine what makes it special, which prospects are ideal for your brand and how to differentiate yourself from the competition in order to find your “wow” – that special something that makes your prospects grow to love your small business and all that it stands for.

What’s more, by the time you wrap up this section, you will have established your key brand message, turned it into a High-Concept Brand™ idea and outlined your branding goals.

In **Part 3: Expand Your Brand**, you learn how to put your newly created brand to work throughout your business in order to get real results. Not only will you learn how to turn your prospects and clients into a highly motivated, highly responsive group of fans who cheer you on and buy from your brand on a regular basis – you’ll also discover which tools and tactics are easiest during each step of the marketing process.

At the end of this manual, there is a supplementary section of **Appendices** with information on how to outsource your brand communications to professional designers, copywriters and/or agencies, as well as other key advice to help you stay on track with your branding.

Helping your prospects, staying true to yourself

In my own career and business pursuits, I have found out that the more I learn about other people's priorities, the more I understand myself and my own motivations in life. In other words, I have gotten in touch with what was in my own heart and mind by expanding my understanding of other people – both of which, in turn, help me with my marketing and allow me to give you, my valued client, what you need to grow your business.

That might sound a little “touchy-feely” to you, but it's absolutely true. You must have a solid understanding of your prospects in order to be able to meet their needs – and you must have a clear focus in terms of your own priorities as well. By finding a balance between your goals and those of your prospects, you will find that marketing your business becomes easier and easier.

Many people have bad associations with marketing, however, thinking that it is necessarily over-the-top and unpleasant. But that isn't the case. Although you want to keep in mind what your prospects and clients need from you and give it to them, there is no reason for you not to be true to yourself and your strengths.

The type of marketing that works best and feels the least hard-sell is authentic and speaks from the heart. Your brand is the core of everything your business represents, so it too must be true to your vision. As you work through the chapters of this manual, make sure that you examine the ideas you come up with for your own business to ensure that you stand behind them 110%.

Before I go any further, in case you're already a connoisseur of branding resources, I want to make it clear that this isn't a typical book on branding. Lots of them are out there and they tend to fall into one of two categories:

- **overly corporate and full of jargon**, which may be great for the big brands of the world, but don't do squat for the little guy (or gal)
- **very generic, giving you a thousand things that you *can* do** to kick your marketing into gear if you have lots of time on your hands and don't mind doing a lot of experimenting, but not outlining any set plan of attack.

This manual is neither full of jargon, nor full of generic, theoretical information.

I outline a simple process and techniques you can use to evaluate your ideas, brand yourself and determine what will work best for your own business. You might find that you've been off-track all along with your marketing – or, worse, inconsistent in significant ways, and just by making minor modifications to your current approach or ensuring that you are more consistent, your business will take off! Likewise, although there is some theory interspersed throughout this manual, it is all based on real, practical experience and is “must-know” information if you want to grow your business.

Neither I nor my firm, Avenue East Communications, Inc., give any guarantee that your small business will generate more income if you use the branding approach illustrated in the pages of this book, but I have seen time and again how the system has worked in other businesses when people take action and put these principles into play. If you're not

afraid of a little hard work and self-examination, you will find yourself learning things about your market that you have never before considered.

Furthermore, when you embrace a positive approach toward helping your clients, if my own experience and that of my clients is any proof (and I absolutely do believe that to be the case), you will find that you feel better about your business, about marketing in general and about the results you will achieve.

Notice that in the paragraph above, I mention the term “clients” and not customers. Marketing guru Jay Abraham often discusses the difference between customers and clients as a critical difference in attitude toward the folks who buy what you sell – and I have to say that I love the distinction.

When you talk about “customers,” you indicate that someone casually approaches your business (or vice versa), buys once and moves on to the next vendor without a second thought. You don’t have a chance to connect with such a customer; nor does the customer connect with you (more on the importance of this in subsequent chapters). And part of this “customer” idea means that you see the people who purchase from you as solely about the money they bring you, rather than as people about whom you care. Dangerous at best, such a customer-oriented philosophy will never allow you to grow your business, unless you spend all your time working to bring in additional customers who may buy from you once or twice, but have no loyalty to your business. Talk about a waste of marketing effort!

On the other hand, Abraham attests that by referring to your client base as such, you are showing an attitude of caring. When you help a “client,” you are treating that person with real respect and giving them reason to become loyal to you. By looking out for your clients’ best interests over time, they will come back to you again and again – and even refer other prospects to you, so that your marketing efforts pay off again and again. **This is your absolute goal.**

The more you get into the heads of your clients and understand how to give them what they desire, the easier it will be for you to bring in more business – and the easier it will be for you to come up with better and better ideas of how to grow your business even more.

This manual will help you get into gear with your marketing, starting with your brand and moving onward to reach your prospective clients in a clearly branded way – but the first switch that must be made in order for you to succeed has to come from within you. You have to desire to change your ways, expand your thinking, focus your efforts and come increasingly closer to what your clients and prospects need from you in order for any of these pages to work.

Are you up for the challenge?

Good!

Even more help is available!

The High-Concept Brand Bible™ is more than a static manual with content that stays the same over time. You also have instant access to **The High-Concept Brand Bible™ Members Site**, where you’ll find a set of **Frequently Asked Questions** (FAQ) where

you can determine whether you're on the right track throughout your own High-Concept Branding™ process, **significant members-only discounts on other Avenue East products and services** and a simple single-page **list of all hyperlinks** (Web addresses) found in this manual, including books and websites mentioned in the Recommended Resources section that appears periodically throughout this manual.

You can access this set of resources using the login info that you received in your welcome e-mail at any time at:

[<link available only for full version of book>](#)

Share what you've learned with others

If you like what you've read so far, consider signing up for Avenue East's Associate Program to recommend this manual to your colleagues and clients. All you need to do is sign up and add a simple link to your website to let them know about our products. When people click your link and purchase from you, you will receive a 25% commission for this manual, as well as up to 50% for teleseminars and courses made available from Avenue East.

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Help me improve this manual!

I'm dedicated to ensuring that the quality and helpfulness of every Avenue East resource is the best it possibly can be. If you've come across a concept that is unclear or could be explained better in future versions of this manual, have a suggestion or simply find a (dreaded) typo, please feel free to contact my office at any time at contactus@avenueeast.com or **via the Members Site Contact Form**. This course is designed to help you, and I want to make sure you're able to get all you can out of it.

Good luck, and all the best in your marketing endeavors!



P.S. Keep reading! The good stuff's yet to come!

HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL (A Quick Rant)

Please indulge me for a second. I need to share something with you that could hurt your business if you don't pay attention.

Some of the chapters in the book contain theoretical principles that you just need to absorb. The rest have tips you can use right now to build a brand for yourself and ensure your marketing is working the way it should to boost your business and your standing in your field.

And some of the pages require you to do a little work! A brand – like all other solid business advice – requires effort to achieve. Now, it's effort wisely spent because it will pay off tenfold (or thousandfold or millionfold, depending on how high you set your sights).

If I include a worksheet to fill out, please don't skip it and move on.

Every time you read a book on marketing and don't act on it, it's a waste of your money. Don't think you've learned all you need to know unless you've actually tried it, written out your answers or taken action in the way that's recommended.

Rant mode off. Let's get your branding off to the right start!

PART 1

Principles of High-Concept Branding™

CHAPTER ONE

“Exactly What Is A High-Concept Brand™ and Why Do I Need One?”

When I first begin speaking to people about what I do, I find that the moment I bring up the word “branding,” confusion immediately arises. Comments run the gamut from ...

- “Oh, do you do logos for a living?”
- “Why on earth would a small business need a brand? Isn’t that best left to the Nikes of the world?”
- “I’m no good at marketing.”

... to zingers like ...

- “A brand is just fluff.”
- “Only companies selling mass-market products need a brand.”
- “My market is too full anyway. I’ll never get ahead, so how could a brand help?”

These and many other ideas are common misconceptions that I regularly encounter among otherwise intelligent people who often have been running their own small businesses for a long time.

For the record, all of the above comments that I mentioned are inherently false statements.

First of all, let’s go through the answers to these questions:

BRANDING MISCONCEPTION #1

Branding is all about your logo.

Logos are just one element of the outward expression of your brand – not your brand itself. That would make a brand a very superficial thing, after all, which you will learn shortly.

If you see your company's brand as a logo, and you do nothing further to attract clients your way than implementing that logo, you are losing business each and every day. No solid brand strategy would ever focus solely on a simple graphic image.

BRANDING MISCONCEPTION #2

I'm no good at marketing.

First things first. Stop with the negative talk. It won't get you anywhere except stuck – and since my focus is on helping you get *unstuck* in order to succeed, the phrase "I'm no good at ..." should be struck from your vocabulary from this day forward.

If you want to be successful in business – and in life in general, for that matter – you have to be willing to learn new things, even when they extend you beyond your current comfort zone. The point here is that you don't have to be good at marketing ... yet. All you need to be is open to new ideas, which you will learn to apply in the course of reading this manual.

And now, some definitions to make sure it's clear why marketing and branding aren't quite the same thing:

Marketing is finding people who need what you're selling and giving them what they need in the way that they need it.

Branding is the way your company presents itself to your prospects and clients, which includes understanding what you are selling, knowing what your prospects need and packaging it in the way that they need it. A good understanding of how your prospects think is essential to creating an effective brand. Your brand becomes the foundation for all of the marketing decisions you make – and it sets you apart from the competition.

You can learn how to market yourself effectively using techniques that you will learn right here in this manual, of course – but the focus is on branding your small business. Without a baseline message for your business, it's awfully hard to get the word out, after all ... because what would you tell people you do? How can you convince them that your company is the right vendor to trust when you market to them?

I often find that people have a negative picture in their minds about marketing. Somehow they assume that if you want people to buy your products, you must lie or manipulate or be pushy. That might work for some, but it doesn't have to work for you.

But I won't lie to you – as you brand yourself and then use savvy marketing techniques to get the message out about your incredible newly branded business, you will still need to come up with ways to capture the attention of your prospects. It doesn't have to be a bad experience for you or your prospects; it's all about finding simple techniques that work for your business and using your brand to back up your claims. And that means taking the time to learn how your prospects think. It's easier than it might sound, and you'll likely have more than a few "a-ha moments" as you go.

BRANDING MISCONCEPTION #3

Brands are just a whole lot of fluff.

It’s easy to see how you might assume that – if your knowledge of branding was limited to big agency “branding tactics” that have little or no substance, that is. For what it’s worth, I saw little evidence of fluffy branding in my own experience as a creative director for brands like Sony and Adobe, though a handful of our competitors delivered meaningless so-called brand strategies that did little or nothing to focus the companies’ brand messages in any way.

However, developed using my High-Concept Branding™ methodology, your brand will be neither fluffy nor frivolous, *and* it will help you stay focused in all of your marketing efforts from this point forward.

BRANDING MISCONCEPTION #4

Only mass-market products like toothpaste need a brand – not my small business.

Big companies selling mass-market products like toothpaste and athletic shoes absolutely need brands. You won’t ever catch me arguing anything to the contrary. However, small businesses vitally need a clear brand in order to get ahead. **If you don’t brand yourself, your prospects are branding you one way or the other.** It’s the way the world turns, like it or not.

When you establish a High-Concept Brand™ for yourself, you find your sense of direction for your business, your vision for how it should work now and in the future, while at the same time learning how your prospects think so that you can meet their needs more effectively. It sounds simple and it is – but you would be amazed at how few small businesses really take the time to get their brands right.

Likewise, a lot of people see branding as something expensive and fancy – out of reach of a small business’s budget. If you see a brand purely as a logo or other superficial item, you can see how cost might figure in, and you might think that having a brand is out of your league.

However, creating a brand is not about a visual or other costly item – it is about investing in your company’s overall business growth strategy and costs more time than anything else. And once that time is invested, you are better focused, so getting certain items taken care of such as a logo becomes a small stepping stone rather than a huge financial issue.

BRANDING MISCONCEPTION #5

A brand won’t help me succeed in my market, which is too full already.

Lots of people say to me that their business is “special,” and branding won’t work in their market. Don’t talk yourself out of branding just because of this sort of self-defeating thought. It’s true that some markets are more competitive than others. And if you have the option, you always want to be one of the first to start offering products or services in a particular arena.

But bear in mind that it is very difficult to measure market size in any industry, so things might not be as bad as you think. **And besides, there’s always room for a better alternative.** Without them, we wouldn’t have options in *any* market – whether we’re talking about personal or professional services, items like cleaning products or car rental services.

Competition helps every industry achieve better quality and get more advanced options, so it’s not all bad.

Secondly, **if you are a better choice than the market leader and you use your new High-Concept Brand™ to show why, you have the potential to reap greater rewards than you can imagine right now.** Avis, #2 in their industry, used this tactic to boost their car rental results by stating that they “try harder” than Hertz, which was #1 at the time – and ended up reaping huge financial awards. A High-Concept Brand™ will help you refine your message and set yourself apart.

Likewise, if you have competition, it means that there is a clear demand for your services or products, and you don’t have to spend as much time educating your prospects and clients about your business as much as if you were forging completely new territory.

If your desire is to be truly innovative, great! That’s another subject that will come up again when you get down to details about your brand. In the meantime, however, if you are simply looking for reassurance that “too much competition” is *not* a deterrent to brand success, please know that you can enter nearly any highly competitive market and come out ahead with a clear brand strategy for your small business.

Furthermore, as a small business owner, very often you will find that your competitors do not brand themselves at all. When you *do* brand your own business, you make it harder for competitors to get a leg up on you by far – regardless of the type of business you run.

For example, the small business marketing arena is packed with marketing “experts” of all kinds. Some offer great products and services, others try to convince you to buy the latest get-rich-quick solution and still others just don’t know how to get the word out. But the fact that the market is technically full up doesn’t mean that it was impossible to launch my own business. It just meant I had to be very focused on my goals and pursue the kinds of clients that I knew I could help the most, and not lose sight of that.

Take a look around at your competitors. I’m sure you can come up with at least 1 that is going above and beyond in the brand department and gets more business than most others. Your competition can’t help every single person in the world who needs that service or product, so there’s still room for you – if you brand your business right, that is. Together, you and I are going to find a way to put their efforts to shame and get you headed in the right direction!

And on that note, I’d like to answer the question ...

What is a High-Concept Brand™?

If you’re around me for any period of time, you’ll hear me rant and rave about how **every contact with your prospects and current clients is an opportunity.**

That’s right. **Every single time** you communicate with your prospects – that includes everything from phone calls to invoices to your e-mails and promotional materials to how you deliver your products or services – you are sending them a message about who you are and what you stand for.

They’re forming an opinion about you literally the first moment they meet you or encounter your service or product, and it sticks with them. And it’s important that you send them the right signals.

Initially, you want your prospects to see and, yes, *feel* that you anticipate their needs and offer them something special. I will discuss the basic human needs that come into play in your marketing in an upcoming chapter; in the meantime, understand that from the moment you make contact or a prospect encounters your business, you should be showing your savvy at whatever you do ... in the way that best meets your prospect’s needs.

HIGH-CONCEPT BRANDING™ PRINCIPLE #1

Your brand is the sum total of *all* of the impressions your company sends to your prospects and clients over the course of your relationship with them. When you brand yourself properly, you create the right signals to send your prospects to help them get past their doubts and start trusting you.

From your brand, your prospects and clients can see in a matter of moments what you stand for – whether you operate a business with employees or simply want to brand yourself as a solo entrepreneur.

Think of it this way: When you think of Oprah, Madonna or a Volvo automobile, you immediately have an image in mind, don’t you?

Oprah Winfrey is a strong, bold woman who succeeds using her own mix of confidence, opinions and commonsense. In case you’re not from the U.S., Oprah is perhaps *the* most successful woman in show business here, hosting and producing her own talk show, leading a book club that literally turns authors into overnight successes if she recommends a title and producing movies that are often based on the books she features in her book club. *Forbes* ranked her as the number 1 celebrity in 2005, as well as the 9th most powerful woman in the U.S., and the talk-show host can be found on many other similar lists issued in the past decade. When the name “Oprah” is spoken, people listen.

Madonna is the eternal chameleon who will never stop impressing audiences with what she’s come up with this time. Like it or not, she is an icon – and a well-branded one at that.

Volvos own the “safety” brand. If you want a car secure enough to keep your loved ones safe and sound no matter what, you know that a Volvo is the very best because the company has been so consistent in using safety as their key brand concept for years and years. They’ve cornered the market using a very basic message.

Brands can be funny or serious, wild and crazy or somber and respectful. Take Disney, for example. Their focus is family, family and more family entertainment. Nothing more. Nothing less. From the moment you first encounter a Disney movie, product or theme park, you’re in a wonderland of family-oriented fun.

The cable TV show “South Park” is the complete opposite. Although at first glance, you might think it’s a kid’s show, within 30 seconds of watching, you can see that this cartoon is for adults only and wicked fun for folks with an irreverent sense of humor – or a *major* turnoff if it’s not your thing.

See how just saying the name “South Park” gives you an instant feeling? Same with “Disney” or “Oprah” or any number of other well-branded household names. You immediately grasp what’s being discussed and have a sense of what the company or individual stands for.

Why many small businesses fail

The statistics for small business success are pretty dismal – and there’s good reason for that. When many entrepreneurial types start a business, they just want to do their favorite money-making activity for a living – but they forget about the part that means that owning their own business entails marketing said activity or product in order to make that living.

As a result, they concentrate on what they want to do and begrudgingly spend a little time here and there on marketing activities that don’t pan out because they don’t get to the heart of what their prospects need. And more than that, they don’t grasp what their prospects *think* – which is even more dangerous.

If *you* have seen your competitors zipping past you and gathering up all the business in your market, you’re not alone.

Chances are that you are losing business because you haven’t yet begun to make use of simple psychological triggers that connect with your prospects. That’s where a High-Concept Brand™ comes in, namely because ...

Your High-Concept Brand™ is a solution

Ever think about why people buy what they do? It’s a far more complex process than you probably think. Take pencils, for example. People purchase pencils for office use, personal use, for their kids to take to school – or any of a handful of simple reasons.

But why pencils? People don’t go out looking to buy a pencil because they want a piece of wood with graphite in the center. They purchase a pencil because it allows them to communicate their thoughts on paper effectively.

In the minds of the people buying that writing tool, the pencil is not *just* a writing instrument, even though they might not be aware of their thoughts during the buying process; rather, it represents a solution to their problem of wanting to get their thoughts across. Taking this a little further, you might even say that a pencil represents freedom of expression.

Furthermore, the concept of “pencil” is so well-branded that the moment I write it, you already know what it means and what it will do for you. This is perhaps an oversimplification because very few brands are as simplistic as this one, but I use the example to show how a solid brand conjures up a powerful set of images that indicate a real solution for your prospects’ problems – simplifying their search for a solution to their current pressing needs, whatever they may be.

But I’ll extend the pencil discussion further to get across the idea of brand as solution more clearly.

When you go to your local office supply store and see the wide array of different types of pencils, you’re given choices of which company’s pencils to buy. In other words, there’s more than 1 type of pencil brand available, each of which has its own set of connotations. You can select sophisticated mechanical pencils that look sleek and sexy, geeky mechanical pencils that look most at home in a pocket protector and pencils with little gadgets on top for kids to play with to make school a little more fun ... and the list goes on and on. Each of those individual pencils has been branded in a certain way so that it appeals to the right target audience – the ideal clients who would be inclined to purchase them. **In other words, each branded pencil offers a solution specific to its prospects’ needs and desires.**

All you technically need in a pencil is something that is easily held, sharpened and written with. But by creating different solutions for different needs, there are hundreds of pencil choices – or brands if you will – that each cater to different needs.

Now, this is branding at the micro-level – focusing on an individual product, and this program isn’t specifically about branding a single product. It’s about branding your small business as a whole.

But the same discussion can also apply to the companies that sell the individual pencils. You likely recognize certain companies’ product lines as reliable or creative or <Fill in an adjective here>, and you feel more confident purchasing from that firm over another one because you know the company’s reputation to be one that is solid, trustworthy and different from the competition.

When done right, a brand creates an image in people’s minds that helps them keep track of what your company does – without their having to think for a single moment. It’s like a virtual “cheat sheet” that does the work for your prospects, making it easier for them to choose you when they need what you offer.

HIGH-CONCEPT BRANDING™ PRINCIPLE #2

Your High-Concept Brand™ solves problems for your prospects – showing them that you have *the only* answer to their needs and desires.

Consider this: From the moment you encounter well-branded individuals or companies, large or small, (or yes, even TV shows, books like Harry Potter, and so forth) you know what’s what.

You know what you will experience, the type of story or item or service you will receive and you know what level of quality and even the emotional feeling you will get when you deal with these people or firms. And that means they have done an excellent job refining their own brands to enable you to have that instant impression.

In other words, if the person or company or book or what-have-you is well-branded, you know whom to call when you need that particular thing or where to get your family fun fix. A good brand does all that work for you, the prospective client who needs to know right away if you should tune in or tune out.

- Have clogged pipes? Wouldn’t you want to call the plumbers specializing in pipes? Roto-Rooter comes to mind instantly because the company has branded itself the expert on ensuring that “all your troubles go down the drain,” which is a variation on the firm’s tagline, but is also their main brand idea.

- Need a killer website that will get you ranked high in the search engines? Hire the website firm that has branded itself as the search engine experts.
- Have a kitty that’s sick? If a local veterinarian has branded herself a cat specialist, isn’t she the right choice?

Why would you spend time calling around if you knew who would do the job right the first time? You wouldn’t – and neither would your prospects.

HIGH-CONCEPT BRANDING™ PRINCIPLE #3

People like to categorize the things they see, the people they meet and the vendors they do business with – and a High-Concept Brand™ takes care of that for them. It’s not that people necessarily *want* to overgeneralize, but it’s an ingrained trait in our brains so that we can make sense of the world around us.

By simplifying the message you send your prospects and clients (in other words, by branding your small business effectively using the High-Concept Branding™ system), you allow them to place you in the right category!

To put this a different way, think about a day in your life. On a workday, you likely have to make dozens of decisions before lunch! Do you like having to scramble around to find vendors to help you who actually offer what you need? Wouldn’t it be easier to be able to call a company specializing in exactly the solution you need for each problem so that you don’t have to take a stab in the dark?

Your prospects are just as busy as you are – or maybe even more so, depending on the type of clients you serve. A clearly defined brand helps your prospects and clients understand how and why they can rely on you in no time flat.

And once they understand what they can count on you for, you will see that it becomes easier and easier to succeed in your small business ventures.

To use some marketing terms you may be familiar with, your brand helps define your **USP, or Unique Selling Proposition** (the qualities about your company that set it apart). By figuring out what makes you special, you can use your strongest assets to pack power into your marketing message.

Furthermore, brands show where you stand in relation to the competition in the market, also known as your **positioning**. In other words, brands help your prospects determine whether you have something to offer them that they cannot get anywhere else, so you want to get *your* brand right.

Do you communicate the problems you solve for your prospects clearly and effectively? If your prospects don’t know what it is you really do, what you’re capable of, what your small business can offer them that no one else can, why would a prospect have a reason to get to know you beyond their initial confusion?

Your brand comes from within

In case you're not aware of how best to position your brand or communicate your USP, rest assured that you will learn how to do this later on in this manual. But I want to make something clear right now ...

Remember that there is never any reason for you to lie or even simply exaggerate about any skills or special qualities that your small business has that others do not. Lying breeds trouble, and besides, it's hard to live up to promises you make if you aren't being honest about your business. And if there's one thing that will zap a brand's strength fast, it's giving your prospects ammunition *not* to trust you.

When you brand your small business, you need to work out an idea that focuses on what you do best for your prospects. In other words, **your High-Concept Brand™ idea should take full advantage of your business's key strengths and turn them into a winning concept that your prospects instantly "get."**

The High-Concept Brand™ difference

It's time for me to be perfectly frank about the High-Concept Brand™ system, which you will learn in this book. There are good brand ideas and lousy ones. There are brands that attempt too much and fizzle out fast. There are fluffy brands and solid brands that speak the language of their prospects. Some brands pan out and others flop.

I want your new brand to be a success. But getting the right balance is hard unless you have some help.

This manual outlines Avenue East's method for developing powerful brand ideas, working out the kinks in your own ideas before you implement them and systematically applying them to your new brand so that your business can reap the rewards quickly. This is the system that we use for our clients, as well as for our own ventures. I like to call our method High-Concept Branding™.

Why High-Concept?

Although it may seem like a strange place for a marketing idea to originate, my inspiration for the idea of "High-Concept" came from the movies.

The folks in Hollywood are always on the lookout for movie ideas that are special, instantly understandable and appeal to a specific target group. And when they find an idea that can be explained in a sentence or less, they call that winning script "high-concept."

HIGH-CONCEPT BRANDING™ PRINCIPLE #4

When you create a winning marketing approach that gives an instant positive impression, is unique, has appeal for the right people and can be implemented in every aspect of your business, that's your High-Concept Brand™.

It's the theme or foundation for the rest of your marketing, and you'll be repeating it in some form or fashion for years to come, so it's pretty important.

In short:

A **High-Concept Brand™** is the key idea, that instantly graspable something, the first impression and all subsequent impressions that your business gives to everyone that comes in contact with it. It is emotional, powerful and has a human touch.

Such a clear definition for your business makes it a snap for your prospects and clients to turn to you when they need what you offer. The simpler the concept, the better. And if your High-Concept Brand™ has a little of the "wow" factor – well, achieving success in your business just got a lot easier.

Your brand *is* your business!

A High-Concept Brand™ isn't actually just an idea unless you use it improperly. You must implement your brand throughout your business.

Think of it this way – if you want to build a reputation as the spirited, yet quality-driven vendor in your field who will do literally anything it takes to make a deal work, you have to make sure that you actually can deliver on that promise. And that means reevaluating how you pursue deals, how your employees treat your clients and prospects and what you do internally to streamline things so that all of this happens seamlessly from your prospects' perspective. You have to walk the walk and talk the talk to make it happen.

That brings me to ...

HIGH-CONCEPT BRANDING™ PRINCIPLE #5

More than just an idea, your High-Concept Brand™ should be the core concept behind your business model from this point forward.

And last but not least ...

HIGH-CONCEPT BRANDING™ PRINCIPLE #6

A brand isn't a brand if it isn't implemented consistently.

People are easily confused by muddled messages. If you're usually in the motivation business, it might be an acceptable segue for your brand to create a series of books about entrepreneurship if inspiration is a part of the key message. But communicating about self-help products and monster trucks using the same brand – that's just plain confusing! You'll want to brand yourself correctly by keeping your focus.

Likewise, if some of your communications – whether promotional items, your newsletter or even simply your voice mail message – send mixed signals, your clients will be confused. And your prospects won't quite know what it is that you really specialize in.

Never forget to focus. After all, you're going to brand your business in order to ...

Achieve your business goals more easily

Isn't that the main goal, after all? Sure, finding ways to connect with your clients is rewarding, but I assume that you're here because you want to grow your business.

In addition to making life easier for your prospects, creating your own High-Concept Brand™ will assist you in reaching your goals.

For starters, it will mean that you have the opportunity to sell more services or products more easily. Who would complain about that?

When you establish a High-Concept Brand™ and implement it consistently, you connect with your prospects emotionally – to the point that your prospects and clients actually feel like they know you. As you get to work on your High-Concept Brand™, you’re creating a clear approach that will help you establish a relationship with your prospects, an emotional connection that is unsurpassable in its marketing power (and it’s a “feel-good” thing too). They will learn from the signals you send them that you offer the quality that you and only you can offer; a smart brand builds trust, which in turn sends more business your way.

As mentioned already, by branding yourself, you’re letting your prospects know who you are and what your company stands for.

This is great for several reasons:

- **To help people decide whether you offer the right stuff.** Have you ever been to a website or looked through the phone book for a vendor and been utterly confused about what someone does? You might spend a lot of time explaining what you do for a living to others and get blank stares.

Your brand will clarify your business and help you communicate what you offer more effectively, so you won’t get as many confused prospects and will be able to concentrate on more important issues.

- **To simplify your life.** By defining your business clearly, you end up keeping your prospects’ basic questions about your business down to a minimum, while ensuring that you have enough time to help serious prospects learn all they need to in order to convince themselves to buy from you.
- **To stay focused.** Your own High-Concept Brand™ also forces you to clarify your vision and determine the direction you want your business to head.

One of the most common complaints I receive from small business owners I work with is that they have trouble staying focused on their business goals. Your brand will give you guidance every step of the way by determining what fits into your business model, what doesn’t and where you should be focusing your attention.

In other words, you can benefit from your brand’s laser-targeted approach just as much as your clients!

What’s more, by following the High-Concept Brand™ system, you are saying that you want to take charge of the way in which your prospects experience your business so that you can control the outcome. If you aren’t aware of how you come across to your prospects, you can’t figure out what you’re doing wrong. Later on in this manual you will develop a plan to ensure that you put your best foot forward.

YOU (yes, you!) need a High-Concept Brand™

As you're beginning to see, the benefits of branding are tremendous for both you and your prospects. But I'm not sure you fully grasp the power of the brand you are about to create.

Here are a few more reasons to motivate you ...

- **Your brand will help you communicate more easily with your prospects,** starting with your first impression and continuing on for years to come. If you can summarize your business concept in a sentence, others will be able to grasp it.
- **A brand helps you prove that you're an expert.** By being consistent and following the brand plan contained in this manual, you may even come to be regarded as *the* leader in your field. In some cases, people won't know anyone else *but* you in your field. In other words, your brand serves to turn your body of work or range of products into a reputation that precedes you.
- **A brand gives your clients and prospects good reasons to trust your company.** Although you might not believe it just yet, following the plan in this book will see to it that your clients will actually say to themselves, "If <Your name> said it, it must be true!" or "If it comes from <Your company>, it will be good!"
- **Over time, your brand will allow you to generate buzz for your business with less and less effort.** Just think about it – the more people know about you and what you have to offer, and the less you have to tell them what it is that you do, the less selling you have to do.
- **Others will start bragging for you so that you don't have to, once you've established your brand, that is.** Just imagine – less promotional cost and more bang for your buck! Word of mouth is a highly powerful tool.
- **It makes every aspect of your marketing easier for you.** Your brand will serve as a sort of blueprint for all of the steps you will take to get the word out. Remember – if an idea isn't consistent with your brand, you won't even have to entertain it as a possibility.
- **You will be able to charge more for your products or services** because others trust in the value of what your business has to offer.
- **People will start coming to you rather than the other way around.** That alone is reason enough to brand your small business – after all, the hardest thing to do in business is get your name out to the people who need what you're selling.
- **You will find that others start asking you for advice before they set foot elsewhere.** I moderated a now-defunct copywriting forum years ago and had people asking me for advice prior even to looking around for another copywriter. At the time I wasn't in a position to help the people with my own products, so I ended up sending a good bit of business to other marketers that I knew and trusted. The same applies to all types of businesses.
- **It's fun to be slightly famous.** Enough said.

- **Your brand will give your business longevity.** A little branding goes a long way toward securing business for your firm for years to come.

And furthermore, it's high time you branded your small business because ...

By having a well-defined brand, you set yourself apart from 99% of the competition. The vast majority of small companies do not brand themselves, instead limiting their potential. That means you have more opportunities to get ahead!

Action Steps

1. Think about the way you have been handling your marketing to date. Do you currently have a clearly articulated brand? And if so, have you implemented it throughout your business? If not, why not?

2. Do you feel like you understand your prospects' and clients' needs right now?

Key Points to Remember

- **Brand:** The unmistakable impression that every single one of your communications gives to people (and that includes the impression *you* give to people!).
- A **High-Concept Brand™** is a winning marketing approach that gives an instant positive impression, has appeal for the right people and is implemented in everything your business does.
- **High-Concept Small Businesses™** get what branding is all about and use it to their advantage.

CHAPTER TWO

First Impressions and Your High-Concept Brand™

With every action you take, with every communication, you send signals that your prospects' radar picks up without knowing it. **In order to brand yourself effectively, you must understand how your prospective clients perceive you.**

Why? Because without knowing how you come across, it's nearly impossible to create a brand for your small business that speaks to the needs of the folks who need what you sell. **Branding has a lot to do with how people perceive you, so a little mind-reading is in order.**

That sounds dramatic, doesn't it? How can you read your prospects' minds? Of course you can't read people's minds entirely, but you absolutely must find ways to understand basic human motivations and needs so that you can better serve them with your brand ... and with all of your marketing that follows.

Secondly, **you need to do *all that is in your power* to ensure that you are perceived correctly by your target market – throughout your relationship with them.**

Perception is powerful stuff, after all. And once you recognize that, it becomes easier to get further with your branding – with considerably less effort.

Branded in an instant

Have you ever noticed what happens within seconds of meeting someone for the first time? A silly T-shirt, a weak handshake, a cool car (defined however you like) or a stain on the person's shirt – all of these things and many more cause you to form instant opinions about the person.

Although I think we'd all prefer to assume that people aren't superficial, the simple fact is that impressions count. People, by their very nature, make snap decisions about the people and things that surround them. They brand everyone and everything they meet within moments of meeting them – and the same goes for your marketing communications, products, services and so forth.

This fact is so important that I call it the **Hard-Wired Perception Principle™**. When we meet new acquaintances, we make decisions about each of them within seconds; in other words, an image of those acquaintances sears itself into our brains just like a branding iron sears its way into cowhide.

This instant branding behavior is literally hard-wired into our brains. Many psychologists state that just 3 seconds is all it takes for someone to determine whether you're a contender or not.

Please note that when I refer to prospects interacting with you, I am referring to anything to do with you, from your marketing materials to your work to your website – as well as, yes, *yourself*.

First impressions count the most

Most people will not hire you or purchase from you the moment they meet you or encounter your products or services.

I repeat: Most people will not hire you or purchase from you the moment they meet you. It's just not something that happens often unless you sell an extremely low-ticket item like toothbrushes or detergent. Even then, unless price is the only concern, brand is still a major consideration.

The High-Concept Branding™ process you are learning about in this book focuses on creating a fundamental idea for your firm with a minimum of fluff and a maximum of results. But since everyone lives by the Hard-Wired Perception Principle™, you are being judged from the moment you first meet someone, so as a business person who wants to get more clients, you need to ensure that you pass the "first impression" test.

Truth be told, we like to think that we are above this superficial stuff. Some marketers even say that trying to monitor this aspect of your business is a waste of time. But those marketers aren't striving for excellence or long-term success – they just want to make a buck any which way they can right now. Creating lasting relationships with your clients is the key to success in the long run, however.

But truth be told, first impressions count more than all the rest – in life and in business. It's a fact that we as business owners have to accept in order to be able to use it to our advantage. And when your prospects first come across something about your business, they only have 4 main options of how to respond:

- positively
- negatively
- neutrally
- ambivalently (mixed feelings)

Let's get the negative stuff over with first ...

Negative impressions count far more than you'd like to think

Whenever I make a comment about the power of negative impressions, someone always immediately pipes up that he or she has met plenty of people who made a bad impression the first time around, but ended up being a good friend or colleague over the course of time. And sure, there are exceptions to every rule.

I can even note several people close to me in my personal life who are truly wonderful but didn't necessarily make that connection with me initially. It happens.

But it's very, very, very rare.

Imagine that you want to hire someone to help you handle your workload as you expand, and your business is extremely detail-oriented. What would you think of the candidates with a sloppy resume?

I've personally been known to rule out candidates for copywriting positions due to applications containing poorly structured cover letters or a lack of understanding of my plight as a busy creative director who needs skilled writers with a full comprehension of the marketing process.

Why? Because those are the insights that copywriters must have to write effective copy. I couldn't care less about many other aspects of their resumes, such as where they received their college degrees, their experience in writing journalistic (non-persuasive) articles, their expertise in accounting or anything else – other than their copywriting skills and ability to get into the heads of the people they are writing for. That's the way their brand shines through in their resumes. Anything else makes a lousy impression because I don't need it, don't want it and feel that my time is being wasted.

When you are seeking business from other people – whether it be your services or products – you too are being scrutinized in a similar way to a job candidate; you need to mesh with your client's expectations. And unless you've just created the first-ever product or service of its kind, your prospects always have another vendor out there to go to. This isn't meant to discourage you. It's a fact.

Consider this: Back when our parents were young, there were many fewer choices, whether we're talking about the number of vendors to choose from to perform a service (calling "the plumber" comes to mind) or the selection of items for sale at the grocery store.

At the corner store, you might have had a couple of brands of flour to choose from, a handful of soaps, and so forth. But forget about a cereal aisle so massive that it could take you an hour just to determine which brand has the ghost-shaped chocolate marshmallows you've been dreaming of.

Sadly, those delicious little bits of chocolaty foam just didn't exist back in the pioneer days of marketing – nor did the literally hundreds* of other brands that grace the shelves of the modern U.S. supermarket cereal aisle.

And back then, it wasn't the modern, ultra-plugged-in world we live in now where we are barraged with marketing of all kinds.

Because there were few choices, it took little advertising of any kind to get consumers to part with their hard-earned money to buy what you were selling. They would pay top dollar because there were no options at any other price point.

Today, however, the marketing arena is a massive multimedia free-for-all because of a hugely expanded number of vendors to choose from in just about every field. Generally there are multiple high-, mid- and low-level options to choose from as well. Furthermore, it is much easier for people to contact their prospects thanks to the widespread ownership of televisions, the Internet and new media such as cell phone text messaging and the like.

All of us get exposed to thousands of marketing messages a day, and it's hard to know whom you can trust.

It's a scary world out there. If you pay attention to current events at all, you'll see scandals, theft, big companies stealing from their own employees, insider trading and much more – and that's just the day's business news!

And then take the Internet. These days just by getting online you are exposed to a huge amount of marketing messages that literally would have been impossible to achieve – from a financial standpoint, as well as from a technical one – 20 years ago.

But when you are constantly exposed to questionable ethics and have more choices than you ever had before – and the number keeps growing exponentially – who do you trust? How do you know someone or some company is trustworthy?

As a business person wanting to sell your wares, you need to understand that **people are seeking a connection, a reassurance that they can trust the vendors they buy from**, whether you're a multimillion-dollar corporation or a sole proprietor. Just like that job candidate sitting across the table from a manager in an interview, you have to bridge that gap and connect with your prospects.

Online businesses have an even tougher job of it. Make a bad impression the first go-round and see how fast your prospects click away. It's just too easy not to.

Now think for a moment about someone you've met who made a bad first impression and how hard it was for that person to overcome the initial image you had of him or her.

Realistically, most of the time, someone who makes a bad first impression never has a chance to get into your good graces ... no matter how open-minded you think you are.

* According to the *Natural Grocery Buyer* Fall 2002 issue, there were over 400 different natural cereals available to consumers. This does not even begin to measure the number of mainstream/non-organic cereal brands that you can likely name off the top of your head.

Here is an example of my own:

When I was first starting up my consulting firm, I had to investigate a specific type of insurance that I knew literally nothing about. After an extensive search, I ended up finding a single professional association that offered some insights into the purchasing process and referred me to a couple of vendors who specialize in that type of policy.

I contacted the vendors in question with a polite inquiry regarding rates and further information on the policies they offer. I needed basic information regarding their rate schedules so that I could see if I would even be able to afford such a policy.

One vendor responded with a straightforward inquiry about the size of my business, as well as some other particulars, and directed me to her company's website. The e-mail and website were well-branded, and I could see from the website that the company had been around awhile. Nothing wrong so far, right?

The other vendor, on the other hand, responded 3 times in a period of less than a day. The first response made it perfectly clear that the vendor was annoyed with my general questions and stated that he needed more info from me because "I can't just pull the rates for your business out of a hat, you know." Yikes. He did not include contact info or anything to indicate his firm's reputability.

The second response, written by the same agent, said that he had received my inquiry and would get back to me the next day. This would have been fine, but I had already gotten the previous response. Assuming that something got mixed up in the e-mail delivery process, this would not have been a big deal.

By the next morning, however, I had yet another reply from the same agent, again asking me for more information, this time slightly less aggressively, but still not even giving me a sense of what the company had to offer.

Each of the three e-mails was riddled with typographical errors and the agent had no e-mail signature to let me know his credentials. I was working off of a reference, after all, and his e-mail address was a generic @aol.com sort of address that gave me no way of finding his website, if he even had one.

Which vendor do you think I went with? Let's just say that the vendor with the attitude had three pretty nasty strikes against him before I even knew what he had to offer. And remember, I sought out these vendors; most of the time, it's the opposite.

It turns out that this man is something of a one-man show and does offer a reputable service; however, from the contacts I received, his brand wasn't one that I would want to associate with. Any company that doesn't appreciate its prospects isn't going to get my business.

What would *you* think if you ...

- walked into an interior designer's office that was unattractive and were given a sloppy black-and-white photocopy of what she has in mind for your home decor?
- accessed a Web designer's website and saw that many basic marketing rules were violated?

- went to the local cake supply shop in hopes of finding a specialty item for a special event you were hosting, only to find that everything was out of place, difficult to find and, worst of all, dingy?
- called a graphic designer who didn't have a portfolio of his work available?
- had to sit through a costly presentation given by a highly paid speaker who lost his place in his speech and didn't have the public-speaking skills to recover gracefully, leaving his audience to sit uncomfortably while he figured out what to talk about next?
- met a professional organizer for the first time whose car was full of clutter?
- hired an editor to clean up your new report manuscript, only to have it returned with corners tattered and several pages stained with coffee?

Barring the “bad day” factor that we all have from time to time, you probably would remember those flaws for years to come. And would you be able to get over your bad impressions that easily? Probably not.

Guess what? All of those things have actually happened in real life, either to me or to trusted friends and colleagues. That's not the kind of impression people tend to forget.

Given that there are nearly always competitors who offer the same or better service, why would you even *want* to make the effort to get over that bad impression? It's far simpler (and you're far more likely) to find someone else for the job who does the same level of work.

On the other hand ...

Positive impressions are your foot in the door

Have you ever met someone at a business meeting or conference and just instantly liked her? Perhaps it was her sense of poise and humor under fire. Maybe it was the calm, self-assured doctor who took the time to answer your questions rather than glancing at the clock and trying to move on to the next patient after 30 seconds.

Or perhaps it was simply that you tried multiple times to find a good vendor and came across only one who answered the phone like a professional, gave you a set deadline for when he could get the work done for you and then made good on his promise.

I haven't been able to determine which marketer first stated that your prospects must “know, like and trust” you before they buy, but this is absolutely a critical aspect of your marketing and starts with your first impression. **You must make a positive emotional connection with your prospects to encourage them to become clients, and the initial contact is critical. Your brand is the vital first leap into doing just that.**

More to the point, **your first impression determines whether or not your prospect will consider doing business with you ... or even entertain it as a possibility.** It's the Hard-Wired Perception Principle™ at work.

Consider this:

- If presented with a choice between that interior designer with the outdated office versus an interior designer with a lovely office, a professional demeanor and high-quality color printouts of his recommendations, which way would you go?
- Compare that Web designer who claims to be able to help you bring in more business yet whose website provided little or no information that you need to hire him with a Web professional with a solid, well-thought-out website that caters to her client's needs.
- If you could shop at a neat little cake shop with everything in its place, tons of character and staff that could easily find anything you needed, would you still go to the musty old shop that's been in business longer but has no flair or polish?
- Would you hire the designer who doesn't have any work samples available if you could view his competitor's designs online on your own time?
- Would you buy a \$1,000 course from that presenter who couldn't give a speech to save his life if his competition's products cost twice as much but she gave great insights in her speeches?
- What about our ditzy organizer with the car full of crumpled McDonald's bags? Would you choose her over the polished professional organizer with a tidy website and well-kept office? (I love the irony, but still ...)
- And last but not least, what about our editor who delivers his work to you by giving you a sloppy, war-worn manuscript with his edits? Would you stick with him if you had the chance to hire someone who gives clients a clean, easy-to-follow manuscript packet?

On the one hand, you might think that each of these is a no-brainer and instantly see the huge impact that impressions make on people's buying decisions.

You might even be gloating to yourself that your own business is a much more tightly run ship, in which case, congratulations. That will make creating your own High-Concept Brand™ that much easier!

Others of you might be thinking, "But what if the folks who give a bad impression actually deliver a better product?" It's a good point, and small business owners often claim that their quality speaks for itself, but this is often a way of deflecting criticism about doing too little branding or not the right kind.

What happens when someone is neutral or ambivalent about you ...

These are the "in-betweeners," the folks who either aren't as inclined to judge upon first interacting with you, or who aren't quite sure what to make of you in which case there's a little leeway. (Remember, when I state "you," I mean anything to do with your business, not just you yourself.)

There's potential in this group, and furthermore, even those prospects who have a good first impression of you also need to be shown that you live up to their impression in the longer term.

For this group, you want to ensure that your marketing approach is tailored to overcome the doubts of these skeptical prospects.

Get it right the first time

It's always easier to make a good impression the first time than to do damage control afterwards.

A quick Google search on "overcoming negative impressions" offers a number of solutions to the bad impression problem such as apologizing, making concessions (such as extra discounts or freebies in business circumstances) and generally having to work very hard to get back into someone's good graces.

But that sounds like a lot of needless time, energy and money, doesn't it? If you had a choice between doing things right to begin with versus having to make things up to your clients, which would you pick? I thought so.

What's more, with prospects, you'll have lost the battle already and won't even be able to contact them again, in most cases. It's all too easy for them to go elsewhere to find what they're looking for anyhow. Unless you offer something so unique that you literally have no competition, a bad first impression will keep you from getting new clients time and again.

Remember – you can't get that moment back!

What impressions have to do with branding

In a word, everything!

You have to give an initial good impression and follow it up with equally well-branded business practices. I've spent a lot of time in this chapter focusing on first impressions because they're the most important contact you ever have with prospects. But lest you think that branding is solely about the initial contact you have with your clients, it's not.

Remember High-Concept Branding™ Principle #1: **Your brand is the sum total of all of the impressions your company sends to your prospects and clients over the course of your relationship with them.**

Action Steps

1. What kind of first impression do you *think* you currently make with your small business? Walk yourself through the steps that most of your clients deal with when they first contact you. For example: How do they find out about you? How do you answer the phone? How do you answer their inquiries?

2. What reasons do your current clients give for working with you? Why do they choose you over the competition right now? To find out, you can:

- Do a survey of your mailing list, if you have one.
- Ask 3 trusted clients to lunch and pick their brains. It always helps to throw in something to make it worth their while.
- If you have employees, ask them to use their discretion in asking clients why they enjoy working with your company.

3. What are some reasons why your prospects might immediately reject you?

You could make it a practice to ask prospects who end up not hiring you why they went elsewhere.

4. What could you easily improve in your business practices right away to make a better first impression?

5. It's important for you to know how you're perceived in order to get closer to achieving your brand goals.

Here are some questions to ask yourself and then ask people close to you (colleagues, partners, even a trusted client or two) to answer as well in order to get a better sense of where things actually stand:

- What are your company's biggest strengths? Your biggest strengths as a business person?
- When I think about the look and feel of my corporate marketing materials, the best term to describe them is:
- How polished are your corporate marketing materials (website, business card, corporate stationery, brochures, flyers, memos, fax cover sheets, etc.)? What can you improve? If you don't have business cards or a website, why not?

Key Points to Remember

- Once you learn what your prospects need from you and how to speak to them based on those needs, marketing becomes a much simpler process.
- **The Hard-Wired Perception Principle™:** People, by their very nature, make snap decisions about the people and things that surround them.
- Your prospects care about the impression you make on them. First impressions count the most, but everything else is important as well. You need to take charge of the way your business comes across to ensure that you are meeting the needs of your prospects.
- It's always easier to make a good impression the first time than to do damage control afterwards.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Brand copywriter and creative director Jennifer McCay helps small business owners get better marketing results using her proprietary High-Concept Branding™ and High-Concept Copywriting™ methodologies through her company, Avenue East Communications, Inc.

Prior to founding Avenue East, Jennifer was a creative director at Rapp Collins Hamburg (Germany), where she worked closely with clients such as Sony Europe and Adobe on campaigns promoting key products, services, technologies and brands across Europe.

In addition to establishing and training a core team of English-language copywriters who translated clients' marketing and branding goals into powerful copy, she also worked to bring in business for the agency, delivering a winning pitch presentation and developing promotional campaigns to capture the attention of prospective agency clients.

Jennifer was also responsible for copy development for the largest European sales literature project of its kind – a 180-page Sony catalog created in English that was then adapted into 30 different European languages and distributed throughout Europe and in Israel. This \$10 million+ project launched all of Sony's core products into the market twice a year and kept the Sony brand on the forefront of consumers' minds *without* hype or hard-sell techniques.

Now she is dedicated to assisting consultants, coaches, creative professionals and other small business owners in growing their businesses using the big business techniques that work effectively – even on a small business budget.

Jennifer is the publisher of the *Avenues to Marketing Success Newsletter*, the author of *The High-Concept Brand Bible: Think Big, Find Your Focus and Achieve Small Business Success* and has written numerous articles on small business marketing and copywriting.

For more information on how Avenue East can help your small business achieve greater success, head to www.avenueeast.com

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