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How Independent Agents Can Connect Clients with Their Brand

By: *Doug Coombs*

We have all seen a brand grow and define itself in the minds of consumers. Apple, Google, Nike, Amazon, McDonalds and thousands more have effectively captured the attention of many. Developing a consistent brand is critical to the growth of an independent agency as well. As your agency grows, delivering your brand on all platforms communicates verbal and visual messages to your audience.

Branding is more than a consistent font, logo, color scheme and variety of images on your website. It is the perception created when your brand intersects with clients at every turn. Branding is a feeling, an assurance that the client can trust you, and will receive the knowledge they need and the value they expect in each transaction.

Is your branding complete? Is it streamlined? Are you and your staff communicating well with all audiences and seeing results? These are important questions. Your clients and prospects are very different groups requiring different messaging and engagement. One already trusts you, has purchased policies from you and is the greatest source

of new business for you. The other is still testing the waters, gathering information to make the best, most informed decision on what to do next.

The GEICO gecko and the Aflac duck are recognizable parts of brands that talk simply and differentiate their products through savings or customization. Your agency branding may not require a mascot, but its messaging can differentiate you from the competition with every type of client you serve.

Consider Your Audience

Independent agents today are engaging a younger, more technologically savvy audience with millennials (age 24-39) now comprising the largest segment of the U.S. population and Gen Z (under age 24) not far behind. The different expectations of these age groups need to be addressed when they interact with the agency and its brand: does the client prefer fast service and online transactions, professional advice on a phone call or a detailed email rather than an in-depth discussion face-to-face?

Your branding begins with creating a strategy to develop more conversation

and more opportunity for various audiences to listen and learn from you. Then it's about content that is engaging and results in calls to action to move people further along the sales pipeline.

"By using a distinct voice consistently across touchpoints, brands are able to make connections, strengthen relationships and build loyalty and affinity over time," according to marketing consultancy Prophet.

Using the latest technology, sharing useful insurance advice and changing your content regularly can define your agency as contemporary. Be aware of who is using each platform and understand which audiences are reading your content at any given time. You may have a great range of products, pricing and a good community network, but your branding should be targeted to convey your value and knowledge to each type of client as an independent agent.

Weigh self-service options versus one-to-one customer service for each audience you serve. Understand your clients' perspectives as well. Ask for feedback regularly and encourage clients to

review your service to determine likes and dislikes. You can then understand what content to change over time.

Millennials may want to use your agency's app, text you or ask the chatbot questions for fast and reliable service. While mature clients may call you and purchase products directly rather than embracing the same technology, these newer tools will show younger clients how convenient you are to work with and how you have embraced modern technology to make doing business simple and transparent.

Innovations in technology help us to analyze what clients want, and know what they are clicking on, reading and interacting with through every channel. Analyze what these data tell you to discover what appeals to which clients most and least. Use technology to meet expectations, increase client engagement with your agency and encourage long-term brand loyalty.

Language and Visual Identity

The language you use to correspond with clients and consumers is important. "Language is a crucial element in your brand strategy because it frames the entire user experience for your customers. When you choose to adopt a certain vernacular, you're creating the foundation on which customers will build their perceptions," according to online publishing platform medium.com. Your branding should include words that convey trust, value and reliability, while assuring clients and prospects that your professionalism will address their most pressing needs.

The task is to "create a brand language that portrays your brand, sits well with

your customers and helps customers — new and returning — identify your brand easily," according to online tech marketplace g2.com.

When considering a brand's visual identity, the saying, "Work smarter, not harder" comes to mind. The visual identity on your website and other channels is an opportunity for clients and prospects to meet your team and learn about your mission, vision and values, conveying a visual brand impression in an instant. It enables clients to get to know your staff, see their faces and read their bio and/or the success stories of your business. It can result in a strong connection to the audiences you are trying to reach.

"The first thing you need to know about your brand is the fact that it's the image people see when they hear about your business. This alone is more than enough to testify about the importance of visual identity when it comes to building a strong brand," stated The Logo Creative, a logo design and brand identity company.

Every agency can be stronger by appealing to and building a diverse client base (including personal lines and commercial lines books of business) — and getting this right in your visual branding efforts can draw in people to talk with you and trust the agency.

Are your images or videos representative of a wide range of ages and stages in life? Do you capture the attention of particular segments within the community? Whether a person is in college, single, married, having a family, retiring or a business owner determines a different targeted approach.

Being where your clients congregate is also important. Beyond posting on your own channels, consider posting your content on online channels that engage people positively, offering inspiring photos, stories and community history. Include photos from places outside of your office, at the popular spots your clients like to go. Feature client photos with a story or testimonial, including positive messages, identifiable surroundings and familiarity to help your branding succeed.

Marketing Campaigns

Once the groundwork is done and your brand messaging solidly portrays your mission, vision and values across all channels, you can launch marketing campaigns using that same segmented approach to bring in new business.

You have the flexibility to run campaigns that share this cohesive brand on the medium of your choice: email, direct mail, rack cards, blogs, newsletters, radio, podcasts, video and more.

As you target your brand messaging, your clients may respond to you faster, answering your calls to action and showing interest in products they may not have considered before. As your brand gets stronger, awareness of your agency's brand will grow in the community.

Solid branding, which will naturally grow and evolve along with your agency, will be reflected in your dedicated staff, healthy client base and overall agency success. ■

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