

WHITE PAPER

# Forget About *Type* of Brand Strategy. What is *Your* Brand's Strategy?

by **Ed Holme**

“DO NOT GO WHERE THE PATH MAY LEAD  
GO INSTEAD WHERE THERE IS NO PATH  
AND LEAVE A TRAIL.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

If you Google *Types of Brand Strategy*, you'll be faced with countless illustrations of corporate brand structures / architectures, blog links promising the definitive guide to the five, or seven, or however many different types of brand strategy there are—depending on the author and the date the blog was written—and of course, Wikipedia. I clicked on one link—*18 types of brand*—only to find that the actual blog had been updated to 21 types of brand.

Names of strategies you will encounter are: House of Brands ... Multi-Brand ... Branded House ... Private Brand ... Co-Brand ... Product Brand ... Product Line Brand ... Product Range Brand, etc. And they are all legitimate if you are the type and size of company that warrants their consideration.

However, if you are a small- to mid-size product manufacturer (the focus of this article), and you sort through all the brand strategies, most are not pertinent to you.

In a random database search of 100 mid-size, durable product manufacturers in the US, we found the predominant brand strategy was Multi-Product (75%) e.g., a John Deere or Kobalt strategy—many products or lines of products under one brand name. A distant second was Multi-Brand (17%)—like Procter & Gamble, a variety of stand-alone brands under a somewhat invisible corporate umbrella. And finally, bringing up the rear, the Hybrid (8%), such as Electrolux—marketing their own name brand, but owning and operating other brands in the same or similar categories—Electrolux, AEG, Eureka, Frigidaire, Gibson Appliance, Kelvinator, and the list continues.

So for the sake of this article we're going to assume you have one of these overarching brand structures, and that it already makes sense for your business and channels of distribution, and does not cause confusion or disorientate your customers and end users.

The big question then becomes: **What is Your Brand's Strategy?**

I'm referring to the *right now* strategy. The set of directional imperatives in sync with your business goals that are the guide and filter for everything your brand does. That are the how, what, where, when, and why your brand does them. That work to create value for you and your customers. Today. Tomorrow. And into the future.

If you have this clearly stated and documented, and everyone from sales and marketing, HR and PR, product development and engineering, operations, customer service, finance and legal is singing the same tune—then great! You are rare and to be congratulated.

If not, here is a template of six essential tools you can use to create your brand's strategy:

**1) Brand Purpose**—Why does your brand exist? Specifically, in respect to the positive difference it aims to make in people's lives. What does it seek to achieve day-to-day in your competitive marketplace? This *raison d'être* will not only help you paint the vision of your future, but also help imbue your business and employees with an understanding of why they come to work each day, to diligently strive for the brighter future your brand seeks to create for them and your customers.

**2) Brand Pillars**—What are the three or four clear attributes or elements that, when combined, make your brand distinct, important, and secure? These are the compelling truths of your brand, describing the core beliefs, values, and culture that create the foundation of your brand. And, as will be discussed later, each of these should be present in every touchpoint of your brand, with both internal and external audiences.

**3) Brand Position**—There are many definitions of brand positioning, but by answering this simple question, you will get very close to defining where your brand should stand in your competitive marketplace. *What is the unique place of value our brand seeks to own in our customer's mind and heart?*

Once you answer this, test it by asking whether your position is: Unique, Ownable, Desirable, Believable, Defensible, and Sustainable. If it is, then you're on track. If it isn't, keep at it.



© BOLTGROUP

## So by defining the value of your brand through their eyes—fully appreciating their needs and preferences—and communicating that to them, they will hear an understanding tone and feel a closer connection to your brand.

---

**4) Brand Personality**—Who is your brand? How does your brand speak? What tone of voice does it use? What gender is it? Is it compassionate and approachable? Or is it an authoritative expert—factual and precise? Is it inspirational and challenging like Nike? Or is it happy and neighborly like Coca-Cola? Does it lead autocratically, or does it support sympathetically? How your brand expresses itself should be guided by this personality in everything from customer service to sales and marketing to accounts payable. It should be the filter used for all communications.

**5) Brand Story**—Where did your brand come from and why? This story should weave the above elements together in an engaging narrative that shares why the brand exists, portrayed through the brand's personality. It should be emotionally charged with the brand's purpose, and give meaning, believability, and relevance to the brand's position. For a great example of a brand story that does this, visit the [Starbucks Company Information page](#).

**6) Brand Value Propositions**—What is your value, and to whom does it matter? As described in a recent blog—[Brand Value is in the Eye of the Beholder](#)—your brand must have multiple value propositions to connect with your different **7) brand customers**. Everyone from your employees to your vendors, from your direct customers to the ultimate end users of your products. All need to hear and feel the value of your brand. Yet each of these audiences has a different set of priorities and preferences.

With value propositions built from your purpose and pillars, taking into account these specific priorities and preferences, your brand can be relevant to a multi-faceted audience. Just consider your brand's value proposition to a distributor, versus an end user, versus a vendor. Their needs are vastly different. So by defining the value of your brand through their eyes—fully appreciating their needs and preferences—and communicating that to them, they will hear an understanding tone and feel a closer connection to your brand.

Voila! You have created your strategic brand foundation. And by doing so, you now have the platform and filter to inform, build upon, and measure everything you do.

Now what? Well, whatever you do, don't proudly pop it into a file cabinet. Make it one of your chief business tools.

How do you make your brand's strategy actionable and meaningful in your market? How do you use it to overcome challenges and take advantage of opportunities quickly and effectively? To compete and to win?

## Making it Real

Through the rigorous research you conducted to understand your audiences (in ways you may have never done so before), and armed with these user insights and market analysis, including competitive benchmarking, you are totally confident that your brand's strategic foundation is solid, relevant, and when "delivered", will represent superior value.

So now you have to fully align your brand with your business goals. This is the ultimate step in securing your brand's future position in the hearts and minds of your customers and audiences.

Let's say that one of your key business strategies is to aggressively penetrate the online distribution channel—with the goal of generating 20% of your company's revenue through online sales within three years.

Excellent. How are you going to achieve this?

The primary place you should look for the answer is your brand. Yes, YOUR BRAND.

Here's why:

Through all the rigorous work you've just done, your brand now has purpose. It has a foundation built on strong pillars, and a well-defined position it aims to own in the world of your customers. It has a personality with a tone of voice, character traits, and a point of view. And it has a value proposition for each audience it seeks to engage. Your brand is in the perfect position to tell you how to implement your strategy and achieve your goal.

So go ahead—ask it! "My brand, how would you do this?"

Assemble your executives in sales and marketing, HR and PR, product development and engineering, operations, customer service, finance and legal, and lead them—moving forward—to assume the mantle of the brand. Ask them to become your brand, to think like your brand whenever they are making decisions.

# BRAND



## Valuable Asset

© BOLTGROUP

It may be hard at first, because of ego and pride and personal opinion, but imagine the strides in building your culture, achieving your mission, and realizing your vision if everyone is guided by the same compass—your brand.

Your brand is one of the few unique assets you own. It is distinctly yours and belongs to no one else. It has the opportunity to be one of the most valuable assets to your enterprise. And because of that, it should be held sacred. And if this is its latent potential, then harnessing and leveraging this power should be an imperative for the leadership team in any organization.

So take a look at your brand again. Examine it in a new light. And then, once you create *Your Brand's Strategy*, make it your guide as you seek answers. Allow it to become the source of inspiration and purpose for everyone. ■



### MEET ED

*Since joining BOLTGROUP in 1994, Ed's experience in brand strategy, research, and sales and marketing has been instrumental in building high-value client relationships through the strategic alignment of their needs and goals with BOLTGROUP's expertise to maximize our impact on their business.*