

How to communicate with your customers in the digital age

The 3 pillars to successful business communication.



Is this how you still communicating with your customers?

Image by Sergey Zolkin

One of the most beautiful and naturally diverse places on Earth, with a coastline of near 7000 km and more than 310 national parks, Queensland is the perfect place for a healthy outdoor services industry to grow and thrive.

The outdoor sector has many added challenges and responsibilities compared to other industries with lower-entry level requirements. While many businesses have the luxury to get started with nothing but a laptop, others with a storefront and products, those in the outdoor industry are exposed to a variety of challenges, from dealing with strict government regulations to the ever-changing weather. One thing, however, remains the same as any other industry: the importance of effectively communicating to your customers.

We are fast approaching the halfway of 2016 and long gone are the days when all you needed was a Yellow Pages ad and a business card at hand in order to promote your business. In this era we live in, where technological advances seem to be happening by the second and with an ever growing customer need to establish deeper connections with products and services, the basic requirements to build a strong business communication foundation are much more complex.

If you are in business and you plan to stay that way, customers expect you to have:

- A strong brand
- A professionally designed corporate identity
- A strong online presence

Ok, so what exactly does that mean?

Let's break those down.

Branding

Many confuse branding with a logo. One of the hottest buzzwords in business these days, Branding is much more than your logo. If you think of your logo as the face of your business, your brand is the personality. Your brand is how your business walks, talks and even how it carries itself through tough situations.

Your brand is your purpose, your values and what you stand for.

You establish your brand with every interaction with a client, supplier etc. Whether you are doing it consciously or not you are always leaving an impression, be it good, bad or plain neutral. Every interaction counts.

While many businesses can survive without putting much thought into how they are communicating with their market and industry, for most this is a fatal mistake, there are many ways you can take control of your business' brand.

Corporate Identity

After you understand your brand and have taken control over how you are communicating with your customers we move on to the corporate identity design, which means we are ready to bring our "friend" the logo back into the conversation.

Everyone understands what a logo is and the importance of having one professionally designed, but what many businesses unfortunately forget to address is every other element that is being used in their communications.

Your corporate visual identity isn't just about pasting your logo on everything you have (yes, I know that's what most businesses unfortunately do. Think of:

- Logo
- Letterheads
- Signage
- Uniforms
- Business Cards
- Marketing collateral
- Etc, etc, etc (yes, the list does goes on...)

Good design is great for business

Most importantly, your visual identity isn't just the sum of all those elements, but rather the system that brings them together, with items such as:

- Your corporate colours
- Corporate fonts
- Graphic elements
- Patterns
- Textures
- The application of all the above and more

Online Presence

Ok, so we have made this far! Once again, rather than isolated items a business' online presence should be an extension of its brand, further communicating its values and purpose. A business' online presence is the combination of:

- Website
- Social media channels such as
 - Facebook page
 - Instagram Account
 - LinkedIn page
 - Pinterest etc..
- Online directory listings
- Google places and maps
- Etc

A business website is the core of its online presence and should act as its home on the internet. While making use of social media channels such as Facebook and LinkedIn is (and should be) paramount for a strong online presence, it does not replace the importance of having your very own customised platform.

A good SME website can and should also double as a lead generator, possibly a booking engine, a CRM etc..

In the fast paced world of “busy-ness” is very common to forget to look after such systems. Many SME owners go through years, sometimes decades, without taking a step back to assess how they are communicating to their customers and how they could improve.

So, how’s your business communication going?

Do you have a strong a brand your customers believe in, a modern and relevant website and a corporate identity that works and tells the world your story?