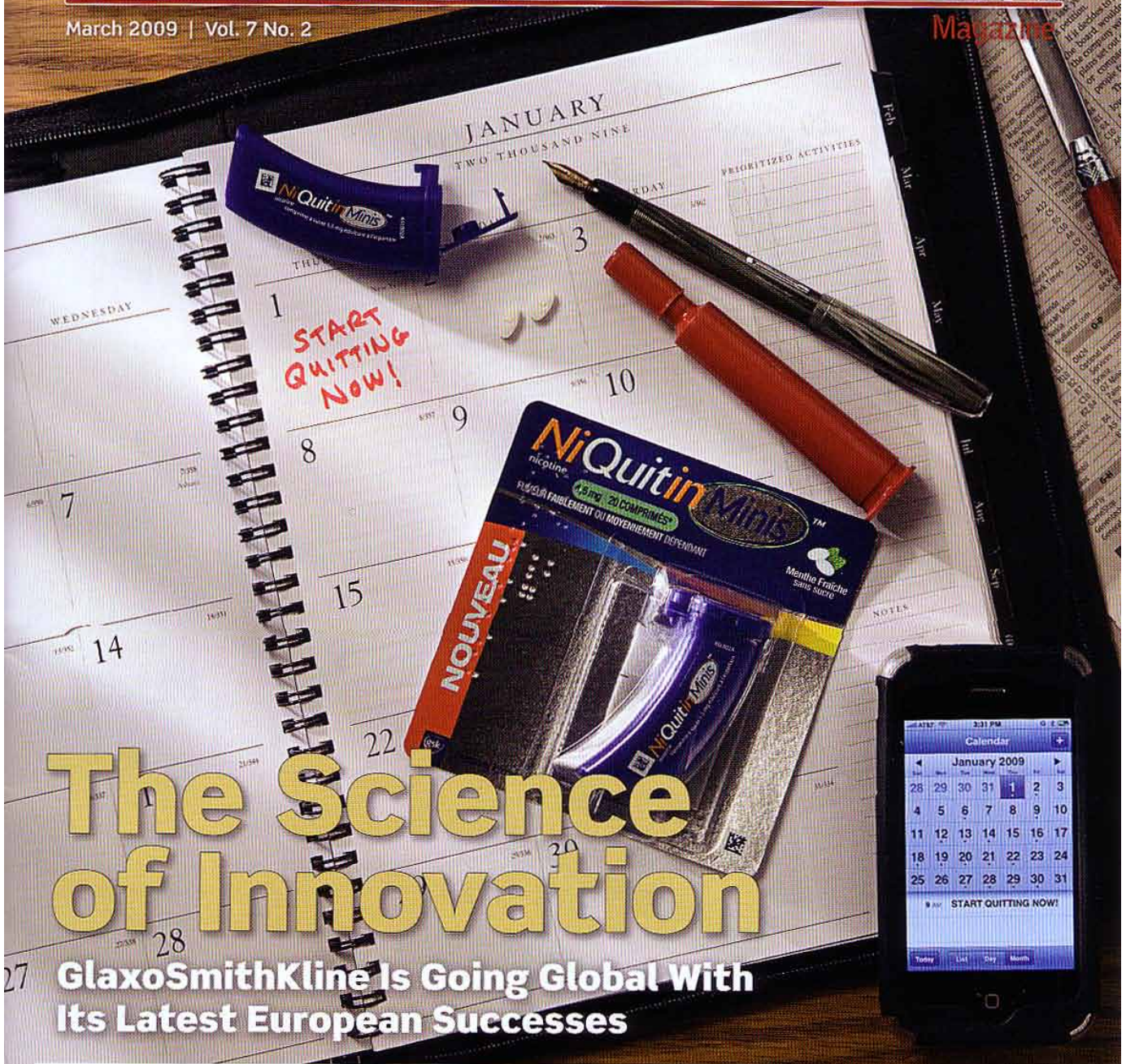


PACKAGE DESIGN

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Five Branding Myths: Misconceptions Every Business Owner Should Know

By Aniko Hill

The concept of branding can be a mysterious one. Most business owners know that it is an essential part of running a successful company, but many don't know exactly how to approach it. Many of the same misconceptions emerge as business owners look to establish a brand for the first time or to elevate their existing brand to the next level. Although good branding is often hard to measure and there are no real rules, understanding these common myths can save the business owner both time and money.

MYTH #1: "I only need a logo."

One of the most common myths in brand development is underestimating the scale of an effective branding system. I have heard many business owners say that they just need a logo, a brochure, a package design, or a website in order to successfully brand or rebrand their companies. If a branding effort is approached from a narrow point of view, it may actually work against the company as the audience will not trust an inconsistent brand message. A strong, dependable brand must be communicated across all touch points to be successful.

Although the scale of brand development can seem daunting, it may be approached with a methodical and gradual process.



SPECIFIC TO THE MARKET

The rebrand of Agera, a comprehensive medical skincare line, had to be appropriate for a dermatologist's office as well as a salon or spa environment. The Kitchen approached the challenge of balancing beauty and science by combining a soft, feminine mark with clean lines and traditionally masculine colors. They used a color system and subtle changes to the packaging design to create separate solutions for each distribution outlet—the more beauty-oriented blue packaging for salons and spas and the clean, clinical grey for medical offices. Supplementary icons and an organizational lettering system simplified this complex product system for the user.

The initial investment to approach the problem holistically may be more than expected, but will actually save money in the long run as it will avoid the inevitable costs of repairing the results of inconsistent messaging.

MYTH #2: "My customers don't care about the way my brand looks."

In industries that may be less glamorous in nature, I have heard business owners claim that they don't need to work on their brand expression because their audience doesn't appreciate it. Audiences are much smarter and more savvy than many business owners perceive them to be—it doesn't matter what the industry. A brand is an expression of the company, so if the company makes quality products and the brand doesn't convey the same level of quality, there will be an inevitable lack of confidence.

As marketers, if we are doing our job correctly, we will create a brand expression that appeals directly to a client's consumers. This may mean that a brand may not always look "pretty"—it may look tough, gritty, or clinical if that is the appropriate brand voice. While it's generally true that looks are superficial, if the look is an authentic expression of the brand, it will feel appropriate and connect with the audience.

MYTH #3: "A down economy is not the time to address my brand."

While it is understandable that business owners are fearful in



A STRONG BRAND FOR A YOUNG COMPANY

The Kitchen knew that the current teen market was more sophisticated and marketing-savvy than they have ever been before. The TESS brand, which stands for Teen Everyday Skincare System, had to be strong but also had to accommodate a new company with small production runs where cost was a concern. From research and brand strategy work, The Kitchen determined that individuality and self-esteem were the key brand expression points and informed how they would communicate to the TESS girl. The unique characteristics of the target market and the product's clean, natural ingredients were the basis for the brand's core values and informed all subsequent projects. They were able to bring the TESS brand to life utilizing labels to communicate all facets of the brand message through bright colors, clever naming, and positive affirmations running in the background.

THE FRONT PANEL *continued*



PHOTOS BY JESSE HILL

investing in their companies in today's climate, it is actually more important to have a strong brand in a soft economy. When money is tight, consumers are more selective of which products they choose to buy. A strong brand message can make all the difference in choosing to purchase your product over competitors if benefits and price are comparable.

Slower periods can also be the best time for companies to focus and retool in preparation for the inevitable upswing. If cost is a concern, search for agencies that can tailor their process or teams to fit your budget. If the creative team is clever, there are many other ways to save money in areas such as printing and production while not compromising integrity of the brand expression.

MYTH #4: "I don't need research or strategy."

Starting without proper research or strategy is one of the most costly misconceptions a business owner can have. Not only does it hinder the overall effectiveness of the brand, but can end up costing the company more money in the long run correcting inconsistencies due to changes in direction. Starting without a strategy is similar to building the walls to a house before laying the foundation. The house may look good for a while, but inevitably will fall down!

Through research, it is critical to analyze what the competition is doing and saying to define and maintain your competitive edge. It is also important to know the customer, not just from a marketing point of view, but from a product development point of view. If a company doesn't know their audience, it is impossible to develop products that will connect with them. If strategy is well-informed and targeted, a brand's core values should naturally align with the values of the target market, creating the foundation for a successful consumer lifestyle brand.

MYTH #5: "Branding is only for large corporations."

There are many different creative agencies out there in all shapes and sizes—the key is finding the agency that works best with your company, regardless of scale. Smaller companies should not

CONSISTENT ACROSS ALL TOUCHPOINTS

In early research and strategy work for XCVI Wearables, The Kitchen found the company's commitment to creating wearable, decadent, and detail-oriented clothing would be the strongest attributes and the focus of all brand touch points. The "comfort" brand positioning was communicated with a clever twist through the model's interaction with the fabric in the photography with setups that included a club chair made from the actual clothing samples. The theme of tactility was also explored through embossed elements in the stationery and real fabric on the cover of the lookbook. The showroom/retail space included branded elements such as custom hanging racks that mimicked the maze logo mark, a graphic art piece featuring detail shots of the clothing, and warm furnishings to make the customer feel comfortable.

be intimidated by approaching a larger branding agency as they may be open to gaining experience in a new industry or building on a specific part of their portfolio. On the flip side, larger companies should not rule out smaller agencies as adding manpower to accommodate a larger workload may be a possibility. The most important thing is that the agency does quality work and the business owner is confident in their abilities.

When considering a branding agency of any size, find out the experience levels and credentials of the team that will be assigned to your project. Industry awards and press are also important—recognition by other branding experts is the best form of vetting available. If you don't know where to start, take note of work you like that is currently out there and ask for a referral. With a smart investment and the right agency, a well-executed brand campaign can help a smaller company to level the playing field and compete with much larger competitors. ■



Aniko Hill, founder and creative director of The Kitchen Collaborative, formed her firm with a determination to innovate the traditional creative business methodology. Her distinct creative and professional vision has produced award-winning work with quantifiable results for clients in categories including health & beauty, fashion, home products and pet care. She can be reached at www.kitchencollaborative.com.