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The key to standing out

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Strategy is about making choices, trade-offs; it's about deliberately choosing to be different.”

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n his book, “The Old School with New Tools,” Tim Brown talks about what’s needed to create exceptional sales experiences for your clients. The strategy he endorses, which was crafted through 20-plus years of developing and implementing powerful sales engines, fuses the synergies of old school techniques with today’s ever-changing technologies.

In the high-pressure world of leading sales efforts for entrepreneurial ventures, of which Tim has spent the majority of his career doing, finding ways to stand out from the competition can be the difference between getting the job done and exceeding beyond expectations.

Over a 10-year span, Tim worked with both established and

start-up companies in Denver, Chicago and Sydney, Australia, including the likes of Cisco Systems, Alteon Web Systems (Nortel Networks), American Power Conversion and Xircom. Among his myriad successes was selling \$186 million of Cisco Systems equipment to Qwest Communications within a two-year period and growing the revenue of Sign Language, a large-format printing company, from \$32,000 to \$10.2 million within a five-year period.

Ask him, and he will tell you that his success was rooted in making himself - and his brand - stand out over the people and companies that provided similar products, services and value propositions. “That is really critical today,” says Tim, who serves as president of Northstar Commercial Partners, along with overseeing Three Creative, a life leadership organization. “How brands were marketed



30 years ago – or less – is very different in today’s digital and social media world. You no longer need a lot of money to build the essential components of a brand, and then place that brand into the marketplace.”

For example, in just one generation, brand competition has shifted from a local/regional competition to a national/

global scale. The reason: Innovative communications tools and platforms like social media continue to lower the traditional barriers to entry, i.e., it’s easier to create and launch a brand.

The downside: The marketplace is more crowded than ever before.

Separating yourself from all

this noise is a strategy more brands must embrace to win the war of differentiation. The strategy, he says, really depends on the brand. For example, if your brand is built on risk, be risky and even a bit snarky or sarcastic. If your brand image is built on stability and being conventional, take a more conservative and

traditional approach.

“What’s important is not whether you are risky or not, but ensuring the message you are portraying is in alignment with your company’s overall mission, vision, values and goals, which hopefully is already in alignment with your overall product and brand deployment strategy,” Tim says.

I remind myself every morning: Nothing I say this day will teach me anything. So if I’m going to learn, I must do it by listening.

– Larry King

Stop, listen, learn –

BRAND

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uring an informal study that Three Creative conducted, Tim and his team found that at least 95 percent of the people they surveyed on LinkedIn did not publish content of any kind. A golden opportunity missed. “These employees are seen as experts by prospects and employees,” he says. “It is an ideal way to boost the identity of your brand with just a few simple posts.”

Brand messaging – which will help your brand stand out – must be consistent and relentless. That means the message must start at the top and

trickle down. In any and every company, nearly every person who is directly or indirectly responsible for selling to a prospect or customer has a public facing social media page.

The key is to remember that these personal brand pages are a direct reflection of your brand and your company, too. “Be sure to give everybody in your company the resources they need to post,” Tim says. “Those posts will be the reflection of your brand. Remember, if you don’t create materials that are a positive and aligned representative of your brand, your employees will.”

How that plays out depends on how your employees – and your customers

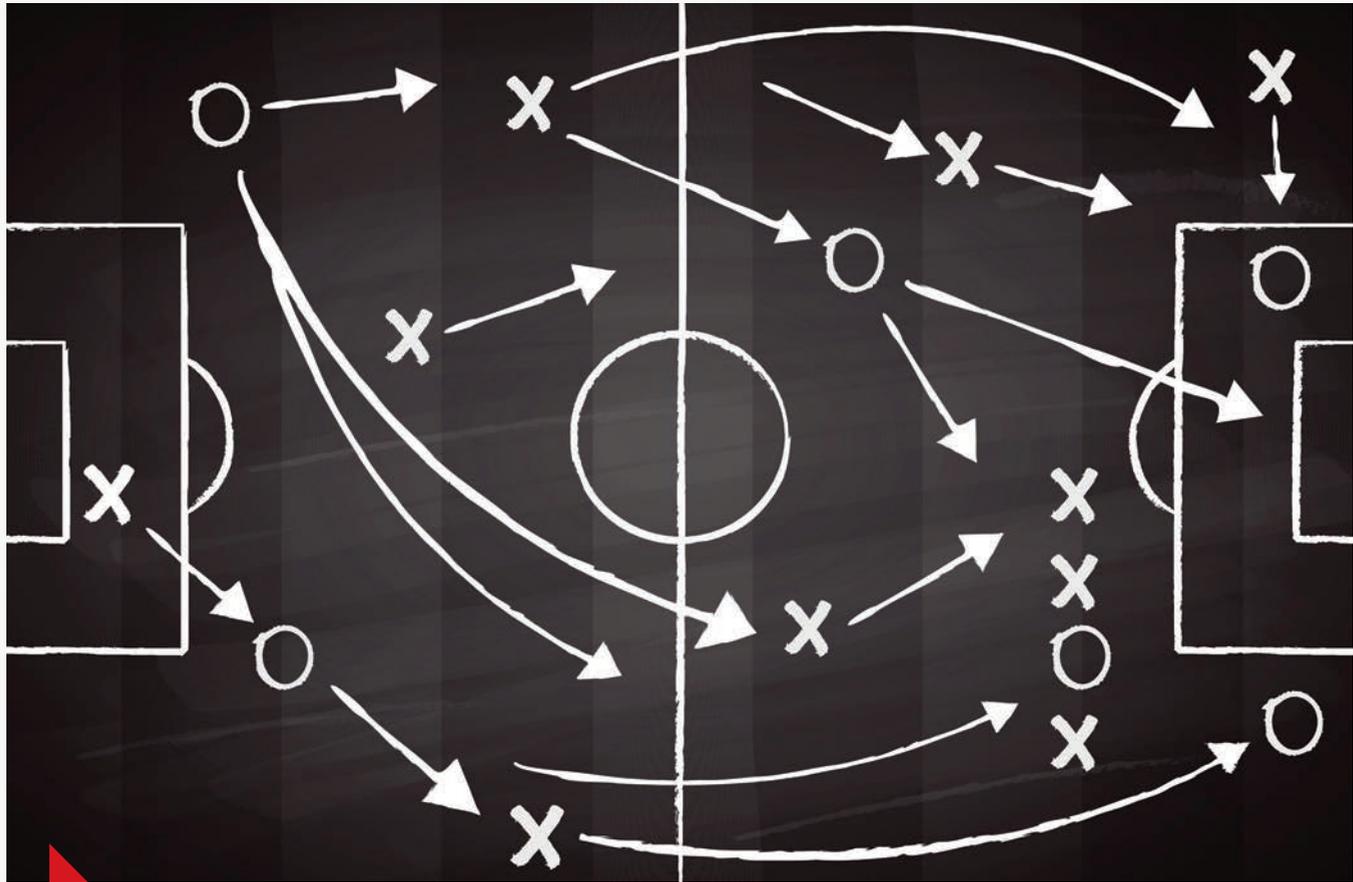
– view your brand. Abe Brown, founder of Momentum Coaching, says one of the real keys to standing out above the fray is the connection you make with your audience.

“If you can be the leader in your marketplace, you win,” Abe says. “But the ability to win means you must cultivate trust with your audience. It’s how brands like Apple and Coca-Cola continue to be leaders in their spaces. At the end of the day, consumers have the ability to purchase from whomever



they want. But if your brand builds trust, and you can deliver on the promise and value you promote, you will stand out.”

While listening to what your consumers have to say seems like a simple strategy, too many companies get lost in all the noise that surrounds them. “This is a people-centric, customer-centric landscape today,” Abe says. “If you are able to listen to what your customers, and even your competitors’ customers are saying, you will have the power to be significant, instead of insignificant.”



Strategies you can use

NOW

You have to learn the rules of the game. And then, you have to play better than anyone else.

– Albert Einstein

Marketing experts will tell you that there is no time like the present to kick the identity of your brand and its message into high gear. You can start by asking yourself a few simple questions, which Tim Brown says is key to getting your message heard. For example:

What is your external and internal messaging? How does it align with your corporate mission, vision, values and goals? Be intentional about every word that you use – they all matter.

Are your employees, prospects and customers able to share their stories about their ideas, growth, pains and gains with others within the company? Do you have a “brand board of directors”

consisting of employees, prospects and customers who can help you navigate the creation and evolution of your brand?

Are you remarkable? In Seth Godin’s book, “Purple Cow,” he writes about the difference between a brown and a purple cow. Give people a reason – or several – to remark about your brand.

“Your reputation is at the heart of the brand of your company,” Tim says. “Whether good or bad, you build a reputation through stories. And if you do not define your stories, others will create those stories for you. Take the approach that if you don’t write anything on social media, nobody will. Brand leaders must lead not only from within, but from without. Don’t wait to react to the competition. Dictate the playing field to your competitors and establish a standard of excellence with your own day-to-day habits, your commitment to authentically serving, and your brand’s pure business ethics.” **■**