

Trade Secrets

Larry Gulko knows firsthand what it takes to focus a company and create a winning brand. And his success follows the philosophy of author Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

“To build your business value in today’s ever-changing competitive landscape, you must create a new market niche, focus your business and own something in the mind of the consumer” said Gulko, principal of Gulko Brand Marketing in Boston. “By differentiating your product and owning something special, you’ll position your brand to capture mindshare, dominate your market, and be known as the best-selling brand in your product category.” Here are tips from Gulko for enhancing your own brand.

Focus your business

Every brand should be known for one thing, Gulko said.

“Callaway is known for the *oversized driver*, FedEx is *overnight delivery*, Trek is *mountain bike*, Mont Blanc is the *fat pen*, Swatch is *fashion watches*, and BMW is called the *ultimate driving machine*.”

Each of these companies created a new product category, built their brand in the customer’s mind and established leadership credentials that allowed them to drive revenues to new heights, he said.

“When you try to be all things to all people, you generally end up being nothing to many,” Gulko said.

Create a valuable brand

People tend to justify and spend more money on a brand than on a commodity.

“When you offer premium value, you eliminate being viewed as a commodity and you’re able to command your price relative



LARRY GULKO

To build brand value, focus your business to own something special in the customer's mind

to the perceived value one expects from consuming your product,” Gulko said.

Be your customer

Marketing is a battle of perceptions and perception drives reality.

“If you don’t intimately know what’s happening on the street level, you’re working in a vacuum,” Gulko said.

To avoid that, he said operators should become a part of

the fabric of their customers’ world to better understand their lifestyle and drive success.

“Everyone in your company who is involved in the customer experience should know exactly what the experience feels like from the customer’s perspective,” he said.

Define what you’re really selling

Gulko said to adopt the proper branding mindset, recognize that

The Gulko File

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you are not just purely selling 18 holes, the 19th-hole dining, golf lessons or pro shop products. Your competitors offer the same facilities on their green acres, he said. “Define a point of difference and communicate you’re selling something much more grand and relevant: unique social activities, specific tournaments or simply a great atmosphere to kick back and enjoy a wonderful experience.”

Deliver premium value

Gulko said consumers purchase favorite products because they perceive a specific value that can’t be duplicated elsewhere.

“So deliver on your brand promise, demonstrate integrity in your message and at every touchpoint, and continually assure your customers they can depend on this unique experience every day,” he said.

Drive revenue

“Create a targeted and innovative communications program to attract, retain and build the most valuable customer relationships, Gulko said. “Marketing is fun. Be creative. Develop new, focused brand marketing ideas to get your customers to rave about you. It’s one thing to know your customers’ expectations ~ it’s a pure thrill when you exceed them.”

—Scott Desiere