

Brand-New(s)

There's a lot of upside to being a family business, but...



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I work with a lot of family businesses and often get asked whether that influences how I go about helping them with brand development. The non-technical answer is that it's "same, same but different".

The principles don't change and the process that I take clients through is consistent, just as a doctor follows tried and true diagnostic procedures. The differences come about through the advantages family businesses naturally have and the potential complexities involved when a lot of people want to have their say.

Back in 2010 I was involved with research into Australian community attitudes to family businesses (you can read it at www.bit.ly/261VWjH) and little has changed in the six years since. Family businesses are seen as more honest, reliable and passionate and are perceived to work harder and to give better personal service. That's a major bonus!

From my experience there also are two other advantages; family businesses often have more stability at the top – because family are less inclined to leave and often find it harder to do so if they want to – and they tend to have a patient capital approach. Building a brand takes at least two years.

The danger comes if they assume that just being a family business is enough. It most certainly isn't. It can make it easier to sell your brand, because people want to believe what you say, but you still need to have a clear brand and a point of differentiation. That is particularly the case in industries where many of your competitors are family brands also. Think food and wine, for example.

The thing with family businesses, of course, is that they are all about families. There is often more in play than simply business considerations and there may be people not actually involved with the business who still feel emotionally attached to it and have expectations about how things will be done. Sometimes they just go off and do things!

I will talk in later blogs about how to keep things running smoothly in a family business, including the value of a Family Charter.

From my perspective the most important thing is to include family members in the brand building process; to let them have their say, alongside the executive team, and to be clear about how any change of brand or direction will impact the family, collectively and individually.

It's an interesting process. Often family businesses, because of the way they have got to where they are, have never attempted to put what they stand for onto a single sheet of paper. They usually find it empowering.

Have any questions regarding family business? Feel free to send me an email at lowen@peartree.com.au

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