

## The brand playground

2 things you can control about your brand...

...and 2 things you can't

## Who controls your brand?

A brand can be thought of as the bundle of rational and emotional benefits that your product offers to your customers. Rather than simply buying a commodity, they buy a brand that has positive characteristics they want to associate with. A brand gives their purchase social meaning; your customer sees themselves, and is seen by others, as more stylish, more astute, more down-to-earth, or more sociable for making that purchase. Or whatever other desirable social attribute your brand offers.

A brand appeals to the emotional reasons we buy. All purchases are made for one, or both, of two reasons: to solve a problem, or to reach an aspiration. And emotion underpins both.

If you think that this only applies to consumer products, think again. Emotion plays as much a role in business-to-business purchases, however rational the formal buying process might appear. The phrase “no one ever got fired for buying IBM” refers to the decision to play it safe, avoiding the risk of making a poor decision and the consequences that could follow. Something that clearly has an emotional component.

However, what this emotional involvement means is that the customer’s own experiences, attitudes and perceptions also come into play, and have a direct impact on your brand. Indeed, their involvement with your brand is such that they, in part, have ownership of it. Which means that you can never entirely control your brand because the customer will always have that influence.

Let’s look at some pieces of marketing jargon, which are often used interchangeably but actually refer to separate elements of your brand strategy, before we see how they fit together.

### **Brand**

A ‘playground’ where you and your customers interact as you present the rational and emotional benefits of your product.

### **Corporate (or Brand) Identity**

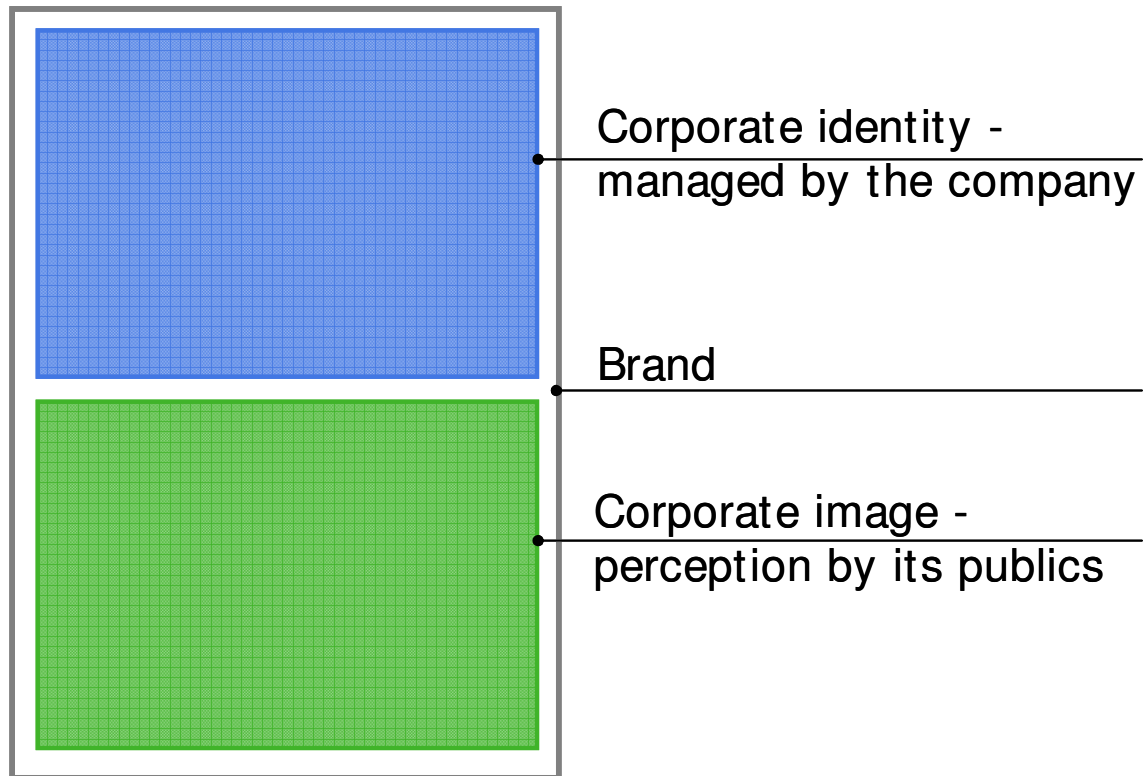
The visual and behavioural aspects of your brand that you can control.

### **Corporate (or Brand) Image**

The attitudes and perceptions that your customers, and other interested parties, (collectively, your publics) bring to your brand and over which you have no direct control.

## The brand playground

As with many playgrounds, the brand playground has two teams: your company and your publics. But unlike many playground activities you win when both teams are equally matched.



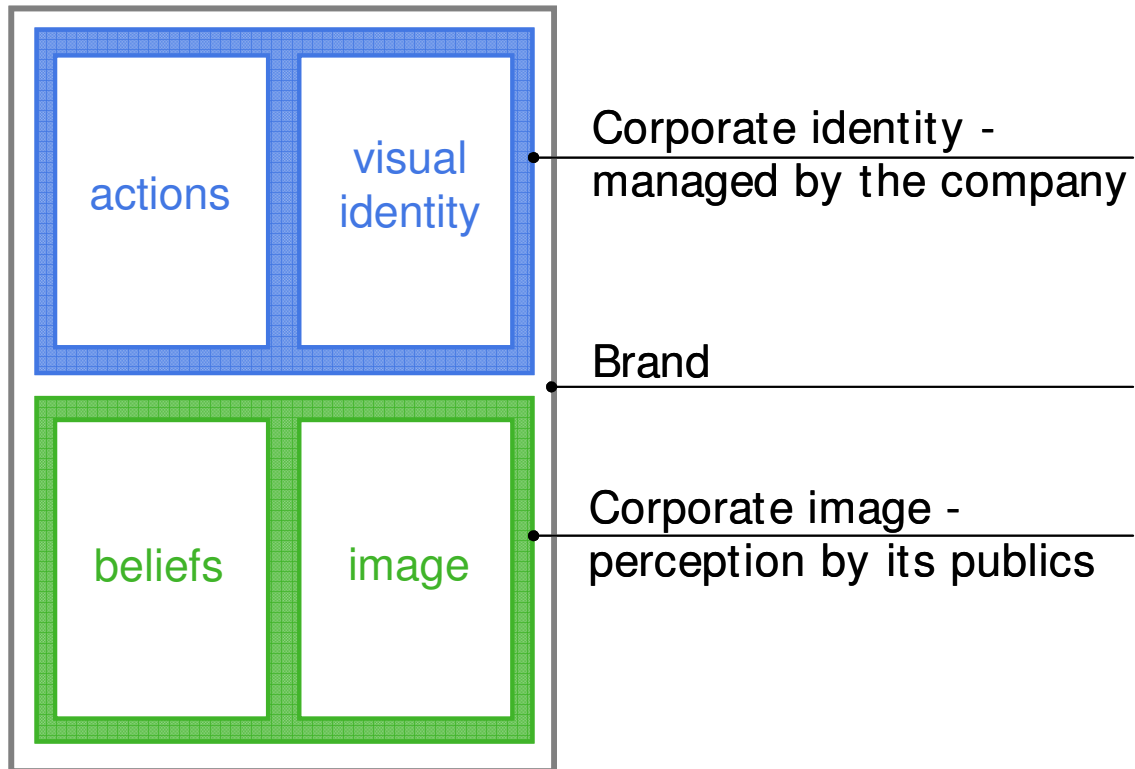
Within the brand playground, you need your corporate (or brand) identity to fit comfortably with your corporate (or brand) image. That is, the way you portray your product, service, or organisation should fit the way that your publics see and feel about them. Your identity and your image are congruent.

In some situations, you might need to use your brand management process to change people's attitudes and perceptions because typical attitudes and perceptions will not be favourable. Such situations might be:

- An over-crowded market where it is difficult to find a way to stand out.
- A commoditised market where selling on price has been the norm but is difficult to sustain financially.
- A 'reputationally challenged' sector where players are typically assumed to be cowboys.
- A 'traditional' market such as the professions, where you need to stand out but where being *too* different, in the wrong way, can be detrimental.

## 2 brand elements you *can* control

Within your corporate (or brand) identity there are two facets that you can control: they way you behave, and they way you appear. Often when talking about branding, people are referring to their logo, strapline and corporate colours, but in fact your identity encompasses everything you say and everything you do.



Where your actions and your visual identity are aligned, you will have more credibility with your audiences. For example, if the values of your brand are those of being friendly and approachable, this needs to be communicated in your promotional material and in the way your staff behave; a grumpy receptionist will mean that all the money you've spent on brochures will be wasted. Equally, you can have the friendliest staff in the world but if your literature is stuffy and boring they might never meet a customer!

As a mirror image, the two factors you can't control are the beliefs and attitudes your customers hold and the way they see your brand. By controlling the factors you can, you are, at least, in a position to influence those you can't.

Clarity Marketing Ltd. provides brand strategy services to small and medium sized businesses. If you would like some help developing your brand strategy, contact us on 0115 964 8222 or [enquiries@clarity-in-communication.com](mailto:enquiries@clarity-in-communication.com).