

Who are you? Your customers really want to know.

Who are you, really?

Your brand, I mean.

What do you want other people to think when they think about your business, your service, or your product?

Do you want them to think your brand is the life of the party, or the designated driver? Is it a trusted friend, or a glamorous rock star? Are you a Volvo or a 'Vette'?

So I repeat...who are you?

You may already know this, and if that's the case, I congratulate you! Many small businesses struggle with this. If, however, you need a little help in defining yourself, here are a few questions to ask yourself:

1. How am I currently perceived by my customers?

If you don't know, do a quick focus group with a target segment of your market (10 - 20 people), customers and non-customers. Have a list of questions ready to ask.

2. How do I want to be perceived by my customers?

Realize that your brand needs to reflect and resonate with your target market. If you want to be a sports car, but your customer wants you to be a sedan, you should probably reflect what your customer's value unless you're trying to attract a different set of customers.

3. How far apart is how I'm currently being perceived to how I want to be perceived?

What will it take to bridge the gap? Do I really need to bridge the gap, or should I enhance my current image?

Once you've got a general idea of perception, time to make your personality more definitive. So, ask yourself these questions:

4. What are my brand's human characteristics?

As crazy as it may sound to you, many branding experts suggest you do this in order to put your brand on a level everyone in your organization can understand. Is your brand male, female? Old, young? Rich, poor, middle class? Where does it work? What does it do for entertainment? These are just starter questions...you can think of a lot more yourself!

5. If my brand was an actual person, what would be its name?

Think about it, when you hear someone's name "Biff," an immediate picture comes to your mind. I bet you can think of a dozen such examples! Pick a name that personifies your brand. Paris, Tom, Jane, Inga, Ian, Jeff, Elsa...

6. What is my brand's "life story?"

Biff needs to know where he came from, so create a brief, fictional biography of your humanized brand.

Once you figure all this out, consider building a **Personality Board**. This is very helpful in giving your brand a visual personification. Cut out pictures, stories, headlines, or any other visual reference you think would work to define your personality. You may even want to find a

photograph of someone who is the image of your brand personality (your Biff) and place it in the middle. Display it proudly, and make sure your employees know what it is.

Now, when you create your advertising and marketing materials - from print ads to tv and radio spots, from websites to packaging, and beyond - you know what personality they need to reflect. And you will be on your way to delivering a brand with which your customers can identify.

About the Author: *Donna Williams is the founder and creator of BusinessBurrito.com - a website dedicated to helping small businesses grow to their maximum potential. She is also a 25-year advertising / marketing executive, creative director, writer, and producer. Together, Donna and her husband currently own and co-own five small businesses. To learn more about Donna and read more of her articles, visit her website at <http://www.businessburrito.com>.*