

## The Value of Corporate Identity

by Neil Tortorella

Consider for a moment that you are a buyer for a company seeking a Polybendum supplier. Now, you know that Polybendum is pretty much the same across the board, so you're just looking for the lowest price. You contact several suppliers, request their literature and look over their web sites. With your short list in hand, you put out a Request for Quote. The competition is fierce in the Polybendum arena, so each supplier gets out their pencil and starts to work out ways to get their price down.

As the sales reps start to make their presentations, one company begins to stand out. Their sales rep is bright, sharp and professional. Their presentation is tight. Their literature is smart and consistent. You notice that even their web site ties seamlessly into their other communications materials. But their price is higher than the next guy.

You make a few calls to each supplier on your short list and notice that the company whose price is higher (let's call them Polybendtech) always answers the phone with a human. They help you get the information you need quickly and ask if there is anything else they can help you with. You can sense the smile and energy on the other end of the phone.

Polybendtech's competitor (let's call them TitanTech), a much larger enterprise, answers their phone with a voice mail operator asking you to enter the first four digits of the last name of the person you want to talk to. After a several annoying minutes, you find the extension of your rep and are turned over to their voice mail.

You call to set up a walkthrough of the candidate's facilities starting with TitanTech. Although you've never dealt with them before, since they're the biggest, you feel they're most likely the best. TitanTech's security guard meets you at the gate and starts giving you the third degree about why you're there and who you want to see. You feel that he's making every attempt to keep you out. Once you (finally) reach the lobby, you're asked to take a seat. You look around and notice the lobby is furnished in somewhat worn early 1950s and no one even asked if you'd like a cup of coffee. The tour goes downhill from there. The manufacturing facility is unkempt, material and artifacts piled along the walls. Workers are wearing worn smocks and their trucks are dirty and unidentified. But hey, their price is lower.

The next group is only slightly better and you're thinking about a job change, when you drive up to the guard at Polybendtech. His uniform is pressed and crisp. The Polybendtech logo is displayed on the back of his jacket. He smiles, greets you by name and tells you that the team is waiting for you in the lobby. Then he asks if you like a cup of coffee, tea or other beverage in the lobby.

After the initial shock wears off during the short walk inside, you find your sales rep and several high ranking company officials standing by a welcome sign with your name on it. The lobby is stylish, but not lavish. People are smiling. The sun beams through the glass giving the room a bright and energetic feel. After a brief meeting in a conference room, you begin your tour of the facility.

You notice the workers appear happy and are dressed in clean smocks with the Polybendtech logo on the front pocket. The production area is organized. Even the fork lifts are clean and humming. You see the Polybendtech vehicle fleet outside each with the company logo emblazoned on the sides of each truck. All in all, you see that this is a tight ship and committed to customer service.

Soon, price seems to take a move toward the back seat. You start thinking about which company will be there when you need them. Which company will pull off the impossible for you? It becomes apparent that Polybendtech, even though their price is higher, is the company that will give you the assurance that the product will be of the highest quality and get there when you need it. You recognize that when you have questions and concerns, Polybendtech will most likely have the answers. Their attitude and attention to details makes them the right choice. Polybendtech wins out, even though they're higher priced, because of their commitment to their corporate identity.

Back at TitanTech, the president is screaming to the sales manager about why the account was lost and if they can cut their price even more.

This is corporate identity in action in the real world. This example may be a bit exaggerated, but you, no doubt, get the idea. Companies are people. Buyers are people. People seek to have their needs met. Our buyer in this case is looking for a low price in the beginning. Soon though, our buyer realizes that working with Polybendtech will give him or her peace of mind for a few dollars more. Peace of mind that he or she will get a quality product. Peace of mind that if things go wrong or there's a problem, Polybendtech will get it fixed.

Polybendtech knows the value of a well managed corporate identity. They know that it creates loyalty within its structure. Their strong, well thought out identity has created a feeling of belonging within its employees that flows out to their customers. The company has insured that graphic standards are in place so that every presentation of the Polybendtech name and symbol is consistent. They have over the years created a sense of tradition. It is this tradition that permeates through the company and through all of its communications.

The company's audience, its customers, suppliers, the media, government agencies and the like have come to know this as well. Polybendtech's communications to the public are consistent with regard to visual style. There are no surprises. They have created a seamless system that flows, apparently effortlessly, through its literature, signage, product brand identities, interactive media, advertising and people. Nothing is left to chance.

TitanTech is opposite end of the spectrum. They have a workforce that focuses on simply punching in and out. They're there to get their paycheck and then go home with the least amount of effort in between. There is no sense of joint purpose. Their communications are disjointed. Remote offices use different logos than the one used at their headquarters since there are no standards in place. The facility shows a lack of pride and enthusiasm. Their web site and literature don't match up. Without a strong identity they are forced to focus on price to compete.

Corporate identity is expressed in names, symbols, logos, colors, architecture, product design and many other facets. At one level these serve the same purpose as religious symbolism. They inspire, create a sense of belonging and purpose. At another level, they represent the consistent standards of quality and therefore encourage customer loyalty. For the corporation, identity is concerned with:

**Products and services -**  
what you make or sell

**Environments -**  
where you make or sell it

**Information -**  
how you describe and publicize what you do

**Behavior -**  
how people within the organization behave toward each other and to outsiders

Identity is the sum of the parts of what it does, how it acts and how it communicates. Every company, the monolithic conglomerate or home-based independent consultant, has an identity, whether it recognizes it or not. The real question is whether the company chooses to control its identity in a structured, planned manner or let the identity control it.

Some corporations have come to understand the power of their corporate and brand identities, and work hard to protect them. Other enterprises often put their identity management in the back seat to other

management tasks. Few companies have investigated the relationship between the various parts of their identity and therefore put themselves at a disadvantage to competitors who rigorously insure a consistent, strategic identity program.

This is of particular concern to commodity businesses as we've see above. These are enterprises whose products, distribution and quality or roughly

equal. What separates company A from company B? Often the only factor is price or perhaps delivery time. These are companies where reputation and identity can make the difference between getting the order or losing it to the competition. In our example, Polybendtech has successfully created the perception that it is easy to work with, has a better level of quality and better distribution.

In addition, the names of the organizations used here reflect their identities. Polybendtech, a smaller and younger organization realized that it's name needed to clearly communicate what it does. TitanTech gives the feeling of being a large enterprise without a clue as to what the company is involved in.

Visual style is often thought of as secondary to other management operations. This is most likely due to fact that the return on investment of visual style can't be quantified as easily as some other business operations. However, given the potential and realistic impact corporate identity can make on a company's bottom line, it is wise to invest in a strategic program. Think of the impact identity has on the P&L of companies like Coca Cola, McDonald's, Starbuck's and Microsoft.

The perceptions created by a strong corporate identity can increase customer and shareholder loyalty, It can aid in dealings with vendors and suppliers as well as employees since it clearly communicates the purpose of the enterprise.

Mission statements tend to be about being responsive and dedicated. TitanTech has one like this. The difference between TitanTech and Polybendtech is that TitanTech's is a wish list rather than a commitment to breathing life into the mission statement as Polybendtech has done through a well planned corporate identity program.