

The Incredible Image—8 Steps to Put Your Business' Best Foot Forward

By Eric Gelb, Copywriter and Business Development Expert

Would you take a moment and look into the mirror? Do you see your image—the You that others see? Either way, consider these eight ways you can shape and sharpen your image.

Last month, I visited '*Tuxedo Dry Cleaner*.' Larry, the manager, was wearing a nice blue oxford shirt with his name embroidered on the pocket. Neat—the owner purchased uniforms. That's good marketing. As Larry reached for my shirts, I noticed that his collar was frayed; the cloth had split at the seam...Hmmm.

I grabbed my clothes, raced to my car and examined my shirts to see if 'Tuxedo' had damaged my shirts...That is '**The Great Marketing Anomaly**.'

In our quest to present our 'best business image' and close the sale, sometimes (and it is inevitable to miss now and again) we stumble and our actions contradict our image and brand.

We all know that Image counts Big-Time in today's super-competitive world, but the secret to developing a strong brand identity is to crystallize—in your target market's mind and heart—the image you want to convey and broadcast that message Actively and Consistently.

Consider These [Other] Real Examples:

Pass the Pea Soup. In the 1980s, my favorite hamburger joint in New York City was 'Joe's.' I loved their big juicy cheeseburgers and fries. They featured pea soup on Wednesdays. Joe's pea soup was thick and creamy—like homemade. Since pea soup was my favorite, whenever I could I arranged my schedule (and my budget) to dine at Joe's.

After a few visits, I became disappointed because there was no pea soup. I asked Anne why the menu featured pea soup when they rarely served pea soup. She replied, "What's the difference; it's just Campbell's®...You can make it at home." Ugh!

Yet another example of ***The Great Marketing Anomaly***. While Joe strived to create a homey atmosphere, his server busted that image and my affinity for Joe's. Joe's was never quite the same for me.

> How do you and your team treat your customers?

Pens & Pencils and High Finance. Last year, I met with my insurance agent to sign a new \$1 million life insurance policy. Pete handed me his 79¢ pen. When Pete wanted to run some

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financial projections regarding my retirement income, he sported his \$4.99 solar-powered calculator. Was he kidding?

Yikes! This allegedly sophisticated financial advisor expected me to sign a million-dollar life insurance policy. Yet he handed me a cheap pen. Then he sported a lousy \$5 calculator to make some financial calculations regarding my family's future.

Did Pete think my family's future was important? Not that the fancy calculator's answer would be any different or better than the answer supplied by the solar calculator mind you...but perceptions drive all.

> How do your customers perceive you?

I won't bother repeating my choice words to Pete. But rest assured, the next time we met Pete proudly showed me his new Mont Blanc pen and his Hewlett Packard 12C financial calculator.

> Do your tools and style match your customers' expectations and level of sophistication?

> Do your actions, marketing tools and branding efforts enhance or detract from your image?

Drape the Drop Cloth. A few weeks ago, I happened to be driving behind a Painter's Van. The 'white' van was gray, streaked with dirt and grime from top to bottom. Dried, caked on Mud laced the back bumper. The sign on the side of the van featured the Painting Company's name—a smart marketing play. However, the sign was at a 30° angle—Sloppy. The sign on the rear door featured the Company's name and telephone number. The corner was torn so the area code was missing.

I don't know about you, but I won't be calling that Painter any time soon.

> What do your signs say? How do they look?

Follow these 8 steps to help you develop your personal brand and your business' incredible image:

1. Decide what message you want to send your customers and the image you want to display.
2. Figure out what is important to your customers and then design or redesign your image accordingly.
3. Study how other leading organizations, including your competitors, send out their message. Do you have it right? What steps can you take to improve?
4. Select the optimal way to broadcast your message and present your image.
5. Make sure your actions Enhance your image.

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6. Analyze whether any of your actions detract from your image. Take smart actions to make changes.

7. Analyze whether your actions, business cards, website, e-mail signature files (sig files), brochures, letters, etc., are consistent with the image you want to broadcast.

8. Make sure your marketing programs are consistent from start to finish—Internally and Externally—and consistent with all your other business activities and initiatives and with your customers' expectations.

After we originally published the Tuxedo Dry Cleaner anecdote, I brought two copies of the story to the store. Larry's colleague Irwin congratulated him on his 15 minutes of fame.

At the same time, Irwin winked at me and grabbed Larry's shirt. Amazingly enough, he revealed yet another tear on Larry's back. We laughed. Truth *IS* stranger than fiction!

Remember, every marketing and promotion effort can and does make a difference! Even a small yet novel approach, special trait, or standout quality will help you create your own distinctive brand, which in turn will set you ablaze in your marketplace.

Then you will truly multiply your business fivefold, tenfold, or more.

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