

Six ways to build a brand that sets you apart (and why!)

POS | Retail

Retail is changing. Shifting market conditions and consumer preferences have made acquiring and keeping customers engaged a more difficult feat than it once was.

But despite the challenges, several brands and retailers still manage to not only survive, but thrive. There are even retailers who have such a loyal following that customers choose to buy from them despite numerous cheaper alternatives. Do Whole Foods and Starbucks ring a bell?

What do they have that gives them a leg up? Many factors come into play when we talk about retail success, but one thing these companies all have in common is a strong, resonating brand.

The Importance of a Brand

Every retailer has a story to tell — how they were founded, what motivates them — and that story is what sets them apart. When done well, it resonates with your employees and customers and helps cultivate a community that will stand behind and support your story. And it's something every retailer can do — starting right now.

1 Figure Out Your "Why"

Today, consumers are starting to look beyond price tags and good deals. They want to connect with a back story and the people behind the products. As a retailer, you need to know the why behind what you do — and not just because you want to make your sales plan.

Take the time to focus on the purpose of your brand beyond products and profits; that's what's going to connect with your customers and help you win their loyalty. And your story doesn't have to be dramatic — just remember why you got into the industry in the first place. To figure out your "why," ask yourself:

- What is our mission?
- Why does our company exist?
- How do we contribute to the world?
- What was my initial motivation?



Brand loyalty isn't built on convenience and price, so consider why your customers should be loyal to you. When people connect with something more than a price tag and can see your passion, they want to be a part of it.

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2 Know Your Product

It's important to know your "why," but also critical to know your "what" and how your products fit into your brand. Ask yourself the following questions and then tailor your inventory to your answers:

- Does my product solve a problem?
- Do my products make a customer feel a certain way?
- How is my product different from competitors'?
- Do the quality and price point of my products align?

Then, tie it back in to your brand story. If you're selling all-natural, homemade pasta sauce, that's what sets you apart from mass-produced, additive-filled alternatives. Know what makes your products unique, and then use such to your advantage.

3 Know Your Audience

To resonate with your target audience, you need to know who you're talking to. Just as you need to know why you do what you do, you also need to know why your potential customers do what they do, and how your brand fits into their lives. Ask yourself:

- Who is my current customer?
- Who is my ideal customer?
- What motivates them to stay loyal to a brand?
- What do they get out of buying my product?

Don't worry about appealing to every single customer as much as appealing to your target audience — after all, you can't please everyone, and for the sake of your brand, it would be questionable if you did!

4 Be Authentic

Consumers can spot a phony from a mile away. [Customers say](#) loyalty is primarily driven by two things: likeability (86%) and trust (83%). If you come off as inauthentic, you won't succeed as a brand. Ask yourself whether you're walking the walk or just talking the talk when it comes to your mission, your values and the message you send with your brand. If you find a lack of authenticity in your branding, that can usually be attributed to not really knowing why you're in business, not being able to explain it or not clearly understanding your target audience.

5 Humanize Your Brand

Remember that your customers are people, and they want to interact with someone they can relate to. Don't communicate with them like you're a robot or a big box retailer. Talk to them like they're real people; it sounds obvious but is often forgotten. One way to accomplish this is by having a real person represent your brand — be it you, your staff or selected brand ambassadors. This allows customers to put a face behind the brand, which makes you more relatable and memorable.

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6 Involve Your Customers

You can't drive five miles without seeing a Starbucks, and they most often boast a healthy, lengthy line. That's because they're experts at not just coffee, but also branding — and involving their customers in that branding.

Enter a site called MyStarbucksIdea.com where customers can submit ideas and comment on other customer submissions. Whether it's about their corporate social responsibility or a suggestion for a new drink, Starbucks is listening, and they actually do something with that information! When the company deems an idea worthy of actualization, they make it a reality.



Think about that the next time you're designing a logo or introducing a new product line, and consider involving your customers in the process. This can be done through social media, an email campaign or simply by talking to customers in your store. Aside from a good way to explore new ideas, keeping your customers involved can deepen your bond with them. If they contribute to building your brand, they'll feel more invested in it.

Your brand doesn't have to be set in stone.

Don't be afraid to evolve as the market changes. That doesn't mean you should chase after every new hot trend that you see and sacrifice your core values, but rather that you take the time to periodically and critically examine all the components of your company and your brand. If something is outdated, make an effort to keep up with the times.

In order to facilitate your brand-building efforts and track the impact on your sales, make sure to invest in a [best-of-breed retail POS](#) with the CRM, inventory management and robust reporting required to know your product, know your audience and involve your customers across every sale at every channel.

Remember that building a brand doesn't happen overnight, but with careful and strategic planning, it will help set your retail business apart from the competition.

Heartland Retail is a cloud POS and retail management platform designed for retailers, by retailers.

Highly flexible, comprehensive and data-centric functionality that gives you the edge to compete.

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