

From "The Brand Gap" by Marty Neumeier.

<http://www.peachpit.com/store/product.aspx?isbn=0321348109>

The gist:

A brand is not a logo. A brand is not a corporate identity system. It's a person's gut feeling about a product, service, or company. Because it depends on others for its existence, it must become a guarantee of trustworthy behavior. Good branding makes business integral to society and creates opportunity for everyone, from chief executive to the most distant customer.

WHAT A BRAND ISN'T

A brand is not a logo. The term LOGO is short for LOGOTYPE, design-speak for a trademark made from a custom-lettered word (LOGOS is Greek for WORD). The term logo caught on with people because it sounds cool, but what people really mean is a trademark, whether the trademark is a logo, symbol, monogram, emblem, or other graphic device. IBM uses a monogram, for example, while Nike uses a symbol. Both are trademarks, but neither are logos. Clear? What really matters here is that a logo, or any other kind of trademark, is not the brand itself. It's merely a symbol for it.

Second, a brand is not a corporate identity system. An identity system is a 20th-century construct for controlling the use of trademarks and trade-dress elements on company publications, advertisements, stationery, vehicles, signage, and so on. Fifty years ago, lithography was the communication technology du jour; identity manuals were designed to dictate the sizes, colors, spacing, and architecture of the printed page. Today there's still a need for identity manuals and the visual consistency they bring. But consistency alone does not create a brand.

Finally, a brand is not a product. Marketing people often talk about managing their brands, but what they usually mean is managing their products, or the sales, distribution, and quality thereof. To manage a brand is to manage something much less tangible—an aura, an invisible layer of meaning that surrounds the product.

So what exactly is a brand?

A brand is a person's gut feeling about a product, service, or company. It's a GUT FEELING because we're all emotional, intuitive beings, despite our best efforts to be rational. It's a PERSON'S gut feeling, because in the end the brand is defined by individuals, not by companies, markets, or the so-called general public. Each person creates his or her own version of it. While companies can't control this process, they can influence it by communicating the qualities that make this product different than that product. When enough individuals arrive at the same gut feeling, a company can be said to have a brand. In other words, a brand is not what YOU say it is. It's what THEY say it is. . A brand is a kind of Platonic ideal—a concept shared by society to identify a specific class of things. To use Plato's example, whenever we hear the word "horse" we visualize a majestic creature with four legs, a long tail, and a mane falling over a muscular neck, an impression of power and grace, and the knowledge that a person can ride long distances on its back. Individual horses may differ, but in our minds we still recognize their common "horseness." Looked at from the other side of the equation, when we add up the parts that make a horse, the total is distinctive enough so that we think HORSE, not COW or Bicycle.

A brand, like Plato's horse, is an approximate— yet distinct— understanding of a product, service, or company. To compare a brand with its competitors, we only need to know what makes it different. Brand management is the management of differences, not as they exist on data sheets, but as they exist in the minds of people.