

GYMFUSE

**5 KEY
FUNDAMENTALS
TO LAUNCHING A
FITNESS BRAND
THAT STICKS**

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A book? Don't you sell clothes...

Some have risen to great heights, worldwide acclaim; others failed to make a mark, whilst appearing to have done nothing ostensibly wrong.

Having observed a great number of brands over the past three years, what nuances or radical values differentiate these brands? This book aims to introduce five key concepts which we have found to be commonplace in the growth of successful brands. The ideas are designed to be flexible. We encourage you to think about your brand in a new, non-traditional way.

Branding has developed dramatically over the past decades and is undoubtedly a complex phenomenon. It is attached to the products and services of one seller differentiating them from other sellers. It can be seen as a subjective impersonification of those products or services, nor merely by its utility but the meaning and emotive properties that may be derived from a brand in everyday social life.

As of today, there is a more complex understanding of a brand culminating in a co-created, socially constructed phenomenon. Customers are now, more than ever, equal partners for a brand. This is even more poignant in the world of digital transparency and the power of social media. Something that has been leveraged incredibly well by companies such as industry leader, GymShark and their army of fans and social media influencers.

Consumerism is fluid, values and beliefs are ever-evolving. To succeed, brands must help a consumer do something different, or be something better. We are human after all.

Fundamental One

Moving beyond 'icon' thinking.

A sensible starting place may be to define the topic we are discussing. The Business Dictionary begins its definition with 'unique sign, symbol, words or combination that differentiates a product.' Whilst this definition is accurate; it focuses you, the creator, to place larger than necessary importance on visually pleasing symbols and icons and neglect the subconscious and often overlooked values that they underpin.

Rather than the visual representation being born with inherent meaning and power, it is the brand's actions, positioning, and communication that lead us to associate buzzwords and emotive responses upon seeing the logo or emblem in question. Nike has been incredibly successful in transforming their trademark tick into a synonym for the 'winner.'

Rather than dwelling on the visual icon (although undoubtedly important) and using this as a crutch leading to inaction, spend some time thinking deeper about what you would like it to represent. This, in turn, will allow you to accurately articulate the design elements you require in your logo and visual brand identity as a whole.

To summarise, the art of brand building comes from orchestrating a 3-way marriage between the visual (logo) the attitude (how the brand acts) and the core purpose (the brand's view of the world). Customers will be imparting their own interpretations on all of the above which may or may not be congruent with your own intentions. How do you want to make your customer's feel when they connect with your brand through whichever medium they choose. Consumer's tastes are fleeting, yet their values and beliefs more rigid and powerful. The success and longevity of a brand are built on solid foundations.

Fundamental Two

Developing dynamic relationships.

Defining 'brand' as a customer's perceived or actual experience remains entrenched in the traditional value flow from producer to consumer. It is useful to shift this thinking into a prolonged two-way relationship where value flows back and forth, with regularity.

The direct integration of the customer into the core business model refers to processes of opportunity co-creation. This is based on a service-dominant logic that stands in stark contrast to a goods-dominant logic that has historically been prevalent in how business approached marketing in the past century, often ignoring the potential that customers elicit, and instead integrating them into becoming a central part of the value and opportunity creation processes. Customers are today more interested in a mutually beneficial service exchange intended to co-create value and either member of an exchange could create the original idea for an opportunity.

To use an industry-specific example, we can look at how GymShark approach this relationship. It would be naive to suggest that the market leader's success has come due to being solely product innovators. Whilst the quality, innovation and design of the products is an important facet of the business, the experience and what it means to purchase and wear an item of GymShark clothing goes far beyond functionality and style. By coining the term, 'family' the company have been able to open up regular, free-flowing dialogue between themselves and their customer base.

Furthermore, brand advocates release incredibly valuable content to their customer base daily. What kind of relationship do you want with your customer base? Conversely, what relationship do you want them to have with you?

Fundamental Three

Identify your true fans, go find them.

An interesting notion in the world of marketing stems from an article by Kevin Kelly, aptly titled '1,000 True Fans'. This article introduced a new way of thinking when discussing how to build a customer base. We highly recommend reading the original article (a quick google will lead you to it). The core concepts will be simplified and discussed below.

Occasionally we will talk to a customer who will state 'the market is growing so quickly if I can just get 1% that would be amazing!' We encourage you to veer away from this mentality for many reasons. Primarily, it leads to a confused message and strategy. Applying a scattergun approach invariably leads to mediocre customers who may be unlikely to hold any loyalty to you or your brand. The 1,000 true fans approach is at the opposite end of the spectrum. The core concept of this approach is aiming for the few, not the many. Seeking that group of people who are real advocates for your brand or product, so much so that they will not only consume anything and everything you create but fiercely endorse it within their respective social circles.

The number 1,000 is not important, in your case, it may be 350 or 3,234. Think broadly about the company you are building and hone your offering and message to the die-hards. You are in a unique and powerful position, being small in size is no longer a pain point; it can be a huge advantage. Your smallness may present the opportunity for deep relationships with your audience and resonate with their core beliefs. Only you can do this, this has to be organic and not contrived. It is not possible to cover for a lack of authenticity and the art of being loved by your customers is not always scaleable.

Fundamental Four

Create a category and own it.

Your brand is not first to market, *damn!* The dream is over. Not so fast, there is a solution.

Nobody can be the first in a pre-existing category, the obvious but often overlooked solution is to move forth and create a new one. There are countless examples of this in action, to use a widely known example think of Apple's Mac. Rather than go toe to toe with Microsoft they simply created a new category and subsequently lead it. This, of course, was the category of computing software for graphic designers.

The Blue Ocean Strategy, a famous strategy book (highly recommended) discusses a similar concept, by adding or subtracting product offerings attributes it is possible to carve a new niche category with zero competition.

It is important to ponder this concept when launching your brand, which category do you want your name to be synonymous with? Is there currently a brand who own this area of the consumer's mind? How can you re-define the category and further narrow your target market focus?

Thinking in this highly focused way can help to mentally clarify your intent when designing, branding and releasing your products to market.

As a rule of thumb, when you think you have a narrow focus, go narrower.

Fundamental Five

Don't always rely on social media.

With the instant accessibility, and often incessant pull of social media, temptation looms to leverage every available platform in a scattered attempt to find your soon-to-be customers.

Going from zero to a large following on social media can be likened to a marathon, as posting on social media can be sometimes likened to talking aimlessly in the middle of the London underground. This is not to deter you from using social media as a marketing channel, just a call to think twice before making a large time commitment in generating content. As a start-up, it is vitally important to pick your battles wisely, time is your most valuable asset. In spite of this, we are under no illusions that there is undoubtedly value in getting your content 'out there', and adopting an iterative stance whereby effectuation may take hold and you start to strike up a dialogue with your audience to hit that sweet spot.

A number of brands have had great success by using 'offline' approaches. The ability to command far more of a potential customer's attention. By partnering with gyms, supplement stores or retail outlets, these brands have been able to engage far quicker with customers and generate sales whilst building their online presence.

This fundamental circles back to the 1,000 true fans discussion earlier; focus on growing a following that interacts and cares about what you have to say. We encourage you to practice some deep thinking around where you can have extended conversations. Social media isn't always the best option.

Thank you for reading

Wrapping it all up.

We hope this short guide has empowered you to think about your brand in a new light. The aim of this book is to channel your vision and creativity rather than impede it. The fundamentals explained above have been gathered from our previous study and work with brands who have achieved ever-increasing levels of success.

Key Fundamental Summary:

One: Move beyond 'icon' thinking.

Two: Developing dynamic relationships.

Three: Identify your true fans, go find them.

Four: Create a category and own it.

Five: Don't always rely on social media.

If you have any questions leading on from the points discussed above, do not hesitate to email us at info@gymfuse.co.uk.

We are proud of the brands we work with, some have been fortunate enough to have been featured in the following industry leading publications:

