

Daniel Hall Presents



Episode 88

Branding is Like Sex – Branding Advice for Authors, Publishers & Content Creators

with Deb Gabor

Welcome to this episode of the Real Fast Results podcast! Deb Gabor is the special guest, and she is here to offer advice on branding for authors, publishers, and content creators. Deb is the founder and brand dominatrix of [Sol Marketing](#), which is a brand strategy consultancy that is obsessed with building winning brands.

Since 2003, the [Sol Marketing](#) team has led brand strategy engagements for organizations ranging from international household names like Dell, Microsoft, and NBCUniversal to digital winners like Allrecipes, Cheezburger, HomeAway, and RetailMeNot as well as dozens of early-stage tech and digital media tycoons. Deb has thorough expertise in thinking through and setting up a brand that will continue to sell you today, tomorrow, and well into the future.

Promise: DIY Framework for Building Your Brand

What I promise people today is that in the next 20-25 minutes, we are going through the “branding is sex” methodology that’s covered in my book, [Branding is Sex: Get Your Customer Laid and Sell the Hell Out of Anything](#). We’re going to go through that, and I’m going to give everybody a pretty easy and practical DIY framework for building the strategic underpinnings of your brand.

So, a lot of people think of a brand as the visual representation, or how a brand actually articulates itself in the marketplace, such as how it shows up, like what color it is, what kind of logo it uses, and what kind of personality it uses. **A brand is so much more than that, and before we go on and I explain how to do it, you have to buy into the idea that a brand is a strategic relationship that you have with your customers.** This is true whether you are a small business owner or you work for one of those big corporations, like those mentioned before. Even if you are an individual publisher, content creator, or a writer, and also if you are just trying to market yourself to find a job, this is true for you as well. You are a brand, whether you like it or not.

A brand has two parts. The brand construct includes the brand identity, which is the part that you control and your own, but more importantly, your brand includes the part that everyone else owns, which are the perceptions, and the relationship, and the experience they have about you as the brand. So, just to kind of backtrack a bit, the importance of having a brand is making sure that your brand shows up in a way that in encompassing of that relationship with those customers. It is not just a logo, it's not just a color scheme, it's not words that you use, it's not photographs that you use, or anything like that. It really is this strategic relationship.

Why Is This Relationship so Important?

My first job, when I moved to Austin, I worked for a brand research consultancy that actually is in the business of calculating the financial value of brands. There's a financial value associated with brands that comes from the assets that those brands bring to the table, namely awareness, right? **If someone is aware of something, the more aware they are of it, and the more awareness there is about it, the more of a likelihood there is that it's going to be purchased.**

There is also the goodwill that is expressed by a brand. So, people have a relationship with the Real Fast Results brand that makes them want to come back to you, which creates loyalty and repurchase, and it costs less to market to the same customer than it does to go out and acquire another customer. That's another way that a brand can be advantageous and increase in financial value.

The third way is through the condition of irrational loyalty. Have you heard of this? **I love the condition of irrational loyalty. This is when you are absolutely in love with a brand to the point that if you were to use a competing brand, you would feel like you were cheating on the other one.** An example would be smart devices, right? People are either an Apple person or an Android person. I personally own every "i-thingy" ever made, not because I like the way that they work or because they are cheaper than anything else, and by the way, they are not. It's not because they are easier to get than anything else, because they are not. I am fiercely loyal the Apple brand because of the story that it tells about me.

You know, I was an early user of Mac laptops. I remember sitting down on an airplane with my first Macbook Pro and opening it up. People would see the light from the screen and look over my shoulders to see the device I was working on. That was something that told a story about me and my life. So, the irrational loyalty comes from when a product, or a brand, or a service... If we are talking about the people in this audience, an example would be when a person, or some branded content, helps to tell a story about the person who is using it, and that story is so important and so part and parcel to the human that's using it that they would feel like they would be cheating on that brand if they were using something else.

I think in the South by Southwest talk, I mentioned the story of Blue Bell Ice Cream, and I told everyone that Blue Bell tried to kill us. For those of you who live outside of Texas, Blue Bell is, sort of, a downhill legacy brand of ice cream sold down here in Texas. It's made down the road in Brenham, TX, and they had a Listeria outbreak in their factory, and it caused a lot of problems, made people sick, and I think it even killed people. So, I believe that the forces that be came in and shut down the plant, and Blue Bell had to go through, like, an entire operational reinvention.

Well, about a year later, they reemerged on the scene. Now, I'll remind you that this is a brand of ice cream that tried to freaking kill us. They reemerged on the scene, and at least at my local grocery store, there were people lined up out the door overnight to get their first gallon of Blue Bell Ice Cream, which by the way, they only brought back one flavor to start with, and it was vanilla, right? People were waiting in line, on red carpets, with velvet ropes to get into the grocery store to buy this ice cream that had tried to kill us. That's how fiercely loyal they were.

When you think about a brand that killed people, and people are still waiting in line to buy it, that is the very definition of irrational loyalty. People are going to buy it regardless because all of the rational, and sort of, cognizant decision making factors about buying something go out the window when you think about the story the particular brand tells about you, and that relationship, and that experience you have with using the brand.

Step 1 - Your Ideal Customer

Really, it's four basic steps, and this is where we get really tactical. The first step is to figure out who your ideal customer is. **The ideal customer is this, sort of, singular unicorn customer, and the reason why I say it's a unicorn is because this person probably doesn't exist in real life, or if you've ever experienced a relationship with this customer, it was maybe once or twice.** In my business career... I mean, I've been doing this for, I don't know, 26 years? And, I've been running a company on my own for 14.

Over that entire, quarter-of-a-century career, I've only met two of these unicorn customers. So, they don't really exist in life, however, they are so ideal in that these are the customers that if you only had, say, 20% of your customers exhibiting

these behaviors, they would be the most profitable customers for your business. It's a single unicorn customer who is the most profitable to service, the most fun, the one that you just delight in every engagement that you have with them. They are the ones that just excite you. They make you proud. They are the ones... Think about it. This is the perfect customer, the perfect audience, for what you're creating. This is the person that you think of.

So, this ideal customer is an archetype, and you know, you have to be able to close your eyes and look up into the top of your mind and picture who this person is. That really is the first thing, and you create the brand for the ideal customer because that gives you a north star. It gives you the direction to go and who you are creating the brand for. Once you know who that is, then you can judge other customers and other relationships based on how close they are, and how relevant they are, to that actual profile. That's Step 1.

I actually do this exercise with clients all the time, where I say, "Get out a piece of paper, and we're going to draw this customer." You know, if you draw this customer... Maybe this customer is an excellent listener, so draw them with giant ears. Maybe your ideal customer is a soccer mom who carries this huge bag, and the bag is full of everything that she would need for a day on the go, including all of her kids' meals and all of their schoolwork, plus her superhero cape, and things like that, right?

Draw who this ideal customer is so that you can actually get a legit picture of who it is. The idea is, you take that, you put it up on the wall, you look at it, and you say, "Yeah, that's my ideal customer, and this is who I am creating this brand for." The other part of that is the segmentation, which is a marketing tactic that's more of a "go to market" strategy. That's figuring out all of the different ways that people are going to use this and what stage in the buyer's journey do we need to say what thing. That's tactical, but what we are talking about right now is strategically creating the brand, so the first thing is that ideal customer archetype.

Step 2 - Brand Swagger

Once you know who that ideal customer is, then if all you do is go through and answer what I call the "Brand Swagger" questions, you're probably 99.44% of the way towards really defining your strategic brand. Now, just because there are only three questions, it doesn't mean they aren't difficult to answer. These questions are very difficult to answer, but there are only three of them. I told you that I was going to give you something super-tactical, and really practical, and everything.

The first question is... And, remember that I said at the beginning that your brand doesn't exist outside of your customer. Brand or be branded. You have a brand whether you like it or not. Take control of this brand by identifying who the brand is for, by developing that ideal customer archetype and then asking these questions about them.

So, the best brands in the world are the ones that can give their customers the feeling that they have had a toe curling, mind-blowing, orgasm. Right? A lot of us know what that feels like. If you haven't felt it in a long time, you can just go out and do it, just so that you can remind yourself what a great brand relationship feels like. What I mean... I'm being a little bit crass and a little bit graphic here, but the idea is that when you think about the greatest feelings that you have had in the world, and all of the memories, associations, and experiences that come up around that, this is really the power of branding.

It is about emotional connections and physical feelings, and the best brands in the world are those that develop those very strong emotional bonds with their customers. Where those emotional bonds come from (first) is what I call self-expressive benefits. So, the self-expressive benefits of the brand are the things that the brand says about you, as a human from using it, wearing it, driving it, eating it, sleeping it, reading it, listening to it, or whatever.

My iPhone and I, for example, have a deep emotional connection because of what it says about me. Right? I'm an iPhone person; I'm not an Android person. I drive a Ford F-150 truck, not a Mazda. You know something about me, and it's part of what it says about me to other people. More importantly, however, is how the use of a brand can elevate my self-concept to myself, right? So, it really is about elevating self-concept, and so, we call those the self-expressive benefits, and the first question is, "What does it say about your ideal customer that they use your brand?"

You have to really think about that, and it doesn't just say one thing. It probably says a long list of things, right? You know, I have a business. I run a brand consultancy. We do market research, and we do a lot of content. We work with companies big and small, all over the world, to help them have these really powerful brand connections. What it says about a client when they work with us, is that they aren't going to put up with a lot of BS. It also says that they are ready to hear really difficult information coming from their customers that maybe they didn't know. It says that they don't have time to screw around, and it says that they don't want to work with an order taker or someone that's just going to do something to maintain the status quo.

Ultimately, what it means when companies that work with my company is that they have everything at stake to have a big win with branding. So, that's what we mean by self-expressive benefits, and that's Question #1. Question #2 is the hardest question to answer, and it is the one that's most vexing to most organizations. It is the question for which millions and billions of dollars are spent every year on market research. This is an extremely important question because it's about differentiation. It's not enough to be different for the sake of being so. There's a lot of different shit out there all of the time, right? It's about being meaningfully different.

Meaningful differentiation is about singularity. The question that you ask about singularity is, "What is the singular thing that my brand brings to the table and no one else can imitate?" What is the one thing that you can bring to the table that no one else

can? There are a lot of competing products out there, and a lot of competing services, especially in the content business. Like, you can get information from anywhere, right?

A lot of people want to differentiate themselves based on, you know, “I have a better, longer resume.” Or, they want to differentiate themselves based on some particular employment experience that they have. Or, maybe they have a unique point of view, or something like that. It really is about digging in and figuring out what the singular, unique thing that you get from this brand that you can’t get anywhere else. So, differentiation isn’t differentiation if someone else can imitate it. What is the non-duplicatable thing that you bring to the table?

The combination of those self-expressive benefits, which was the first question, “What does it say about a person,” and then, “What is the singular thing that you get from using this brand,” (reading, eating, sleeping, driving, wearing this brand, or whatever the case may be)... Those are the first two questions.

How Do You Go About Answering These Questions?

This is where you have to go out and really talk to customers. You have to ask them, “What is the problem that you’re looking to solve, which you came to me for? What are all the other things that you’ve considered?” You know, “What else got into the consideration set, and at the end of the day, how did you make your decision?” Then understand, “Why did you pick me?” You also have to talk to lost customers, the people that ended up picking something else, and find out, “Why did you pick them?” That’s going to help you really, really narrow the field and find out what the unique thing is that you bring to the table that no one else does.

You have to keep peeling back the layers of the onion and asking the question “why” over and over... Why, why, why, why, why... There’s also what I call the “bullshit test,” that you have to put it through. It’s like, if you are going to put your stake in the ground and say, “This is the unique, singular thing about me that no one can get anywhere else and no one else can imitate,” you have to ask yourself the question, “Is that true? Is it really, really true?” Then, you have to go out and do your homework to see if someone else can imitate that.

Brand Values Pyramid

This is usually where I throw in the idea of the Brand Values Pyramid. As marketers, we love pyramids. Just think of Maslow, the social psychologist; he was a marketer too. He created these pyramids for us. But, the Brand Values Pyramid really speaks to this issue of singularity and differentiation. The stuff at the bottom of the pyramid... Pyramids are great because you have to fulfill the stuff at the bottom in order to build the foundation, and then you build up, build up, build up.

The stuff that we are looking for in branding is the stuff that's at the top of the pyramid. It's kind of like the stuff of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which is self-actualization, where you are your best self. You are your most creative, most engaged, most loving, most wonderful, most confident self. The same is true of brands. You're striving to get to the top of the pyramid.

So, I like to give the example of automobiles, for instance. If you were to look at two cars, let's say one is a Mercedes Benz ML350, which is a mid-sized luxury SUV, and the other is another mid-sized luxury SUV, the Audi Q5. The former is a little smaller than the first, but they are definitely competing brands that fall within the same category. As you walk through this, you know that a Mercedes is not an Audi, and an Audi is not a Mercedes, and neither one of those is a Mazda, correct?

Still, if you take the category of mid-sized SUV, and you peel back the layers of the onion, and you look under the hood, they have a lot of things that are similar. So, in order to be considered a mid-sized luxury SUV, what are the things that you need to have? Does it have power door locks and windows? Does it have anti-lock brakes? Visine on headlights? Leather seats? 12-point restraint system? All of these things, at one time, were options packages that we paid extra for. They come standard on the mid-sized luxury SUVs.

I am old enough to have purchased a car that did not have power door locks, power windows, and power steering. That was stuff that we paid extra for. As soon as one of the car manufacturers made that standard equipment, it no longer was a differentiator. That is the stuff in the middle of the pyramid. That stuff is not differentiating. That is the stuff that you have to have. Like, you have to bring it to the table. It may be a sales tool for you, but it's a bell and a whistle, or it's a bow and some lipstick. That's all it is. It's not a long-term, sustainable differentiator.

The stuff that is a long-term, sustainable differentiator, the singular stuff, is the stuff that's at the top of the Brand Values Pyramid, and the top of Maslow's pyramid, which are, "How does the driving of a Mercedes Benz ML350 (or an Audi Q5) align with the values and beliefs of the driver?" I might know this about you, like we might have met once at South by Southwest and you told me that you drove a Mercedes Benz ML350, and from that, I know that you value safety and you value style, and you value being able to feel in control of your driving experience.

You value having everything at your fingertips, and you value being able to roll up in front of the fanatic down the road and have people know that you have arrived. You are absolutely deserving of a luxury vehicle, right? These are all of the things that go into the singularity of the brand. To market yourself on the basis of power door locks, power windows, moonroof, visine on the headlamps, and leather seats, just means that you and I are driving the same car, right? So, that singularity is so, so, so important. You know, I always get up on my little soap box and say, "Today's options packages are tomorrow's standard equipment." Do not build a brand on options packages because those things are immitatable.

Can You Give Me Some Concrete Steps on How to Do This as a Content Creator?

Sure. Absolutely. I'll give an example, and one that's really near and dear to my heart. I wrote a book that's called *Branding is Sex*, and it's all, sort of, based on this metaphor of the best brands in the world are the ones that give people the feeling of getting laid. That is truly singular. I own the metaphor. I live it, I breath it, I eat it, and I sleep it. I speak about it, I write about it, and I weave it into everything that I do. The reason that it's differentiating is that it's an idea that's really easy to grasp, and it brings humanity into it and makes it very human. The process of branding is part art, but mostly science. I do a lot of quantitative research, and a lot of modeling, and a lot of predicting, and things like that, but I've simplified it.

This is how I've made the content products that I've produced singular to me. I am the brand dominatrix, right? It is a metaphor that I own all the way through. So, that's an example. I also work with tons of digital media companies, and that is content. These are companies that are, maybe, doing deep dives in creating content, communities, commerce, or whatever, but within these deep, deep passion areas. Really, where they differentiate, create singularity, and create things that are non-duplicatable is by having a very, very distinct point of view, where they bring the audience into the fold, and really understanding, "How am I making my audience a hero in his or her own story?"

The best content in the world is stuff that brings the audience into the story. And, brands are not about you. Brands are about them. So great content is content where you know your audience, and I think identifying and profiling your ideal customer, or creating that ideal customer archetype, is way more essential for people that are producing content products than it may be for someone who is making a plastic cup or something like that.

There's just so much that goes into the production of content. It's so personal, and it's so human. It so relies on storytelling, and it so relies on activating all of the important parts of the brain to give people "the feels". Whether it's business content, or personal content, or whatever, you still have to do that. I think that it's so, so, so important to have that distinctive point of view that isn't just, like, "This is Deb Gabor out there, spewing his BS because she likes to talk about it." There is an audience for it, and you need to be very clear about who it is for, and you are very, very clear about what they are going to get. What's your promise to them when it comes to what they are going to get after consuming your content.

Can You Tell Me More About Self-Expressive Benefits?

I think that's kind of the idea of brands, no matter what brands they are, but especially content. We could go into all of the social behaviors around sharing on social media and things like that, but on a very, very basic level, having something gives you bragging

rights, and bragging about it begets more bragging rights. It builds your self-concept. It becomes part of who you are.

If I tell people that I have been on the Real Fast Results podcast, they know something about me, but I have also elevated my own self-concept of being able to share that with another person. There's actual sort of scientific brain behavior behind those sharing activities, and like, how we connect and mirror, and how it activates the different parts of the brain. That's so essential, just knowing that there's some kind of physiological and neurological basis to that. This should help you understand and believe that this truly is important.

Step 3 - “How do you make your customer the hero in his or her own story?”

This is the getting laid question. So, Question #3 really is about, “How do you make your customer the hero in his or her own story?” Everyone is creating a story for their life, and they want to be the protagonist in that story. You want to have a story where, like, if you are listening to *The Devil Went Down to Georgia*, you want a story where the devil doesn't win, right? When you are creating this story of your own life, as a customer, you are making all of these choices about the things that you are consuming that are elevating your self-concept, and telling the outward story to you about other people, and they are connecting you to other people.

These are the characters of the story, here's the setting of the story, here are the props of the story, and all of that kind of stuff. You have to think specifically about your brand, which is the brand that you are creating for your ideal customer. What is the story that he/she is trying to tell about themselves? Then, how do you help to make them the hero? If you can't answer the question of how to make your ideal customer the hero, then you do not have a brand and you need to go back and start at “Go” and start from the beginning again.

Again, it is essential that your brand tells a story about the person that is using it, and it helps them win in the end. So, those are three very basic questions:

1. What does it say about a person if they use this?
2. What is the singular, indispensable thing that they can get from me and can't get anywhere else?

This is all very practical and very tactical. That is basically the process. There are lots of nuances for dialing in the brand personality, and the brand character, and the essence, and so forth, but the underpinnings of the brand come from being able to profile that ideal customer archetype and then answer those three questions. If you were to just do these things, you'd have far more clarity and focus, plus it helps you to identify what you

shouldn't do and who you don't do it for. It also helps you with competing priorities, and it just helps you to become more effective and more efficient at running your business.

How Do I Go About Making My Customers Heros in Their Own Stories?

I think the first part of that is delivering. Like, really knowing what is the promise. I love how this podcast opens up, asking what the promise is. You really need to know what the brand promise you are going to make is. What is, sort of, that indelible deal that you make with someone? And then, ultimately, you need to deliver on it. Anything that you say you're going to do, which is going to help to create an image and, kind of, build a relationship with someone, you have to deliver on all of those promises.

I think all of the time about brands that have broken their brand promises. I often use the example of the cable company. I guarantee that the cable company here in my area did not set out to have a relationship with its customers, and so those customers were like, "I hate those guys! They suck!" That's because they never delivered on their promises. Their brand promise was, "We're going to set an appointment with you within an 8-hour range, and we're either going to show up at 7:59 in the morning with an 8:00 appointment, or we're going to show up at 4:59 in the afternoon. You know, for the 5:00 deadline. We're not going to have the parts that we need, and we are going to track mud in and out of your house as we go and look at the drops outside." Right?

That's an example of a broken brand promise, and when that happens, it means that you are not delivering. It's when your image and your substance are not matching. The primary way that you can really ensure that you are keeping your promise is to know exactly what promise you are making and really knowing, operationally, what you need to put into place in order to substantiate any of those claims that you're making in the marketplace.

So, today, when I was asked what my promise was, I said, "Hey, in this 25 minutes or so, I'm going to give you four really tactical questions that you can answer, which will give you the strategic underpinning of the brand." I hope that I delivered on that. I went through all of them, explained them, and answered the questions. So I feel like I delivered on my promise.

I like to over-deliver, as a matter of fact. I love the idea of "shock and awe". I love blowing people away because they got so much more than they ever expected. Under-promising, and over delivering, and all of that kind of stuff, I think that's really great. This may be controversial, but I love the approach of making a promise to someone, and being very upfront, like, "This is who this is for, and this is my promise to you," and then really delivering on that.

Anytime I've ever gotten a negative critique of, say, my book, it has been when the person reading it wasn't my target audience. I am very clear in the introduction and

forward to my book of who it is for. Like, if you are a disenfranchised marketer, or if you are someone in an emerging company and you believe very strongly that you have a brand problem that needs to be fixed and you need help selling that to the rest of your team, or if you are someone who is just starting out... I am very clear that this is not a book for performance marketers, and this is not a book for digital marketers. This is not a book for people who are just beginning a career. It is for executives and independent-minded, independently spirited, entrepreneurial-focused thinkers.

Any type of negative feedback that I have gotten, it's been like, "This is not for digital marketers," or "This is not for performance marketers," or "This is not for very quantitative people." And, I'm like, "Yeah, I've said very clearly who this is for, and I'm okay with you not being that." So, I like the idea of telling people this is who this is for, and like, being very clear about who the ideal customer is. I also like to celebrate the customer and say, "You're awesome. You're great, and I'm going to put a little velvet rope around this because you are the best, and you have very, very high expectations, and you deserve the best of what's coming for you." You know, making them feel good about that, and then delivering on that promise too.

Connecting with Deb

I would love it if people would just email me directly. I'm Deb@solmarketing.com. You can find me on Twitter. I'm @Deb_sol on Twitter. Also, go check out BrandingisSex.com. You can link back to my company's page from there, and you'll find a bunch of different places where you can buy my book. In fact, you can go there and download a free chapter to try it before you buy. You can also communicate with me through that website, or at SOLMarketing.com.

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