

10 Common Image Mistakes

(Let's Avoid Them!)

Corporate Image – it's simply how your company is perceived. You want a favorable perception, and this is usually created by your marketing efforts, media exposure, consumer experiences and other factors.

It's said that you have about 10 seconds to make a good (or bad) impression. Your image matters, so here are a few "pitfalls" you can avoid to make those seconds count and to help keep your customers coming in and coming back!



Image Mistake #1: Forgetting Image is Intentional and Important.

Why manage your company's image? Because the perception consumers have of your company affects your bottom line. To stay in business, you need profit from sales. Those sales come from consumers who base their confidence and purchasing decisions largely on your image (their perception of you).

Your products or services are not going to sell themselves. You're going to have to market them well. And the smaller your company – the more you will have to market yourself, too. If you think your image is not relevant because you offer quality services or products, you are handing sales to your competition!

Miss the Pit Fall: Pay careful attention to your marketing decisions. Create a campaign that effectively communicates with your target audience. Promote yourself and your business professionally and politely. Update your wardrobe, web site, and print items as needed. Remember you are the face of your business – smile!



Image Mistake #2: Using Too, Too Many Words.

The saying is true... "Less is more." When it comes to developing your image and using effective marketing, too many words will cause customers to tune you out. They are inundated with marketing messages each day and they're as busy as you are. They need to know the basics:

- What you offer
- Why it's valuable to them
- Why to buy from you.

Demonstrate value and keep your messages brief. Save lengthy passages and details for optional reading. If they want to learn more, they will take the time to read more.

Miss the Pit Fall: Separate your history/about us/mission/vision from your marketing campaigns. Use fewer words whenever possible. Know the vocabulary, style and needs of your target market. Keep it short and make it memorable!



Image Mistake #3: Image Flip-Flop.

Many businesses make the mistake of creating a "new and innovative" look for everything. This can actually result in poor brand recognition. It is fine to tailor your look for a particular campaign or product, but make sure that your logo is consistent and that the consumer can quickly and easily tell who you are. If your company is new, you will have to work harder to establish a presence in the market. You have to endeavor to earn that recognizable status. For example, you can instantly recognize McDonald's products or the Coke's bottle because they have spent time and money establishing their look and reputation. While it might change in color or placement, there will always be arches or a bottle!

Miss the Pit Fall: Develop an icon or look that represents your company effectively on all products, services, and marketing mediums. Make sure it communicates the value you offer or complements your sales strategy. Use the company logo or look on everything. Consistency is going to translate into durability – you want your name and "brand" to be in sight regularly.

10 Common Image Mistakes

(Let's Avoid Them!)



Image Mistake #4: Forgetting Your Target Market. (Aim!)

Don't fall victim to the misconception that you can effectively market your image to **everyone**. You will need to have an understanding of your target market's demographics, and aim your efforts and plans toward them. Generally, trying to appeal to everyone means you stand out to no one. And from place to place, industry to industry, across ages and genders... there are differences in style, tone, and terminology that really matter.

Words change over time and certainly over geography! Make sure you know what you're saying!

Miss the Pit Fall: Do some market research. Know who comprises most of your customer base. Consider geography, age, gender, financial status... they all affect what image and what marketing will be effective. Make sure your image and your marketing campaigns are tailored to what you need... sales from the target market.



Image Mistake #5: Over-Use of Metaphors or Symbolism.

Small businesses and organizations are often tempted to try and encapsulate their entire history or symbolically represent the meaning of who they are in a logo or campaign. Often this results in a busy design that is unclear to the consumer, difficult to print at various scales, and fails to become the iconic representation they need. Here the rule applies again... "Less is more." Take a look at some of the larger, more successful companies or organizations in your field. How have they branded themselves? Don't copy – not ever – but you can learn from another's success and emulate a good model.

Miss the Pit Fall: Select one or two things that you want to visually represent. Do some research. Take a design you are considering and shrink it down small enough for the top of a business card or the stem of a pen. Does it still work? Get objective opinions... Sometimes we're so close to the project or the company, we can't "step back" and see it the way the public will. Keep it clean and iconic. A collage is easily forgotten – an icon is more easily remembered.



Image Mistake #6: Forgetting YOU are the Face of the Business.

It's so easy to do... without thinking, we pop in a piece of gum, sit back, cross our arms and *POOF* we just magically went from "Inviting Professional" to "Preoccupied Person." It's true. Everything you do in your office, at a meeting, in the storefront... it all communicates VOLUMES to your current and potential customers. Pay attention to your attire, your posture, your smile, spit out the gum and look people in the eye... they will remember you for it! Remember those few seconds for a good impression? Don't get caught picking lunch out of your teeth!

Miss the Pit Fall: Don't chew gum! Do use breath mints. Dress appropriately for your profession and the setting. SMILE! Stand to meet a new person. Greet those around you. Make eye contact. Shake hands. Ask for another person's card and give out your business cards when asked. Don't cross your arms! You will communicate "I'm available and you're important to me."



Image Mistake #7: Not Planning for Visual Scanning.

You work tirelessly composing the text for your web page or newsletter –I t goes out and you wait... Well, they may not come at all. Upwards of 65% of reading material sent out will not be read but will be scanned? (About 15-20% will be read, hopefully – the rest hits "File 13.") Set up your design and text in a format that can be easily scanned – especially top to bottom. Use sections, titles, subtitles, images... Many "scanners" will stop and read if they catch a title, image or line that is interesting or relevant to them. Plan for the scan and get more reads!

Miss the Pit Fall: Make your design flow easily left to right and top to bottom. Use images and titles/phrases carefully – make your information a list or set. Provide details or info in small sections after main points or services. Get professional help with planning and objective input before finals are sent out.

10 Common Image Mistakes

(Let's Avoid Them!)



Image Mistake #8: Lack of Cross-Media Thinking.

If you only market on the internet, newspaper or phone book... you're reaching only a slice of your market. Design a plan for your company that makes the best use you can of your budget in cross-media efforts. Passive advertising may be essential, but aggressive advertising may yield better long term results. But be careful that your money goes into options that will work for your industry and target market. Research is vital here... see what others (who are successful) are doing with their advertising dollars. Don't put all your eggs in one basket!

Miss the Pit Fall: Evaluate your budget and build a plan to include multiple advertising mediums. Research which mediums are most relevant for your industry... Door hangers may work better for you than mailers. Magazine ads may yield higher returns than newspaper ads. Your customers may watch channel X more than channel N. Find out what's working for others in your field. Make sure your image is easily recognized and understood in all your marketing efforts. Maintain some level of conformity across all mediums.



Image Mistake #9: Making Changes Because You're Bored.

Ok, you're tired of seeing your logo or design every day... that doesn't necessarily mean it's time to toss it. If it is working, it will probably keep working. Sometimes business owners feel the need to replace an icon that has several years of work and marketing money invested into its exposure and recognition. Before you get out the axe, you may want to do a little checking. If your sales are climbing, and your name and image are gaining in recognition and popularity, you may cancel those positive trends by abandoning your current concept or design.

It may be better to "refresh it" instead of replace it. Give it a new twist, a fresh color or slightly different application, but don't throw the baby out with the bath water! Why change a company's logo, look or campaign? If there are measurable negative trends in sales/profits, or you have a negative image that needs changing, or a serious "redefining" is needed in the market to compensate for a stale market share and stiff competition.

Miss the Pit Fall: If it's working... be careful about "fixing" it. Try a variation or a new twist instead of a completely new look. Get input from your customer base prior to redesigning or launching a new campaign. Check the numbers... Make your decision based on results, not just opinions or feelings.



Image Mistake #10: Not Following-Up on Leads.

Although it costs less to follow up on leads than to generate them, many companies deeply hurt their image by not completing the follow up. You can spend a large part of your budget looking good and getting your name and products out to consumers, but if you don't follow up after they express interest... you're losing your marketing budget and your sales.

If it takes a company over a week to answer my email, call me or provide me information... I've probably already made another call. Business is about relationships built through interactions that demonstrate value, trust and service. Even if it takes a bit longer to get the details, if a company lets me know they're working on it, I usually will wait for their information before I make a purchasing decision.

Miss the Pit Fall: Take the time to be personal. Follow up leads with phone calls and obtain permission to call them back or email them more information. Develop a follow-up plan and keep records of follow up activities. Create a list or database to manage follow up calls and designate a staff person to oversee the activities. Respect privacy!