

Brand matters for bio

A well-managed brand can help to attract the people, dollars, and partners that make good science possible—and profitable

By Roger Sametz

Biotechnology companies exist in a very competitive landscape. They compete for funding, researchers, staff, and partners. They vie for participants at events, respect from peers within academia and industry, and media buzz. Increasingly, they compete in clinical environments for the attention of physicians, patients, and clinical trial participants. And although the quality of a group's science, innovation, and products will always be most important, how your organization's brand is developed, communicated, and managed can make competing easier and more successful—or not.

Your brand matters

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large retail focus, can add value to what many biotechnology companies have to sell beyond a product—ideas and possibilities. Whether you're



pitching new concepts and approaches not easily understood outside your walls, or are farther along and looking to commercialize a therapy or tool with good data behind it, a brand image that inspires confidence and

trust is a competitive advantage. A strong brand makes your company's values, capabilities, promises, and meaning clear. It helps attract and sustain interest; it builds and nurtures relationships.

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Attending to your company's brand can help you hold onto the value of positive buzz—and help you to better navigate through less-than-positive press—because your brand provides context. If all that is known about you is one product or initiative and its fortunes founder, that *is* your story. If there is broader knowledge about what you do, your value, the affiliations and backgrounds of key management, and other accomplishments, then any negative story has a cushion—and reporters and analysts have more to reference.

Analogously, if a key product or initiative gets good press—and you've been putting energy into building

your brand beyond that product—then the positive coverage will bolster your brand image and have a value that outlasts the news.

Start early

Developing and communicating your vision and corporate promise to different constituents—early on—helps you to engage groups whose interest and support are critical, if not today, then soon.

Though you may be focusing on the investment community now, the interest and support of physicians, researchers, patient advocacy groups, press, and possible partners will be important later on. Targeting all your communications efforts on investors—and communicating with only a narrow, tactical agenda—will likely leave you ill-prepared to move forward. Evolving your brand early on will help you better connect with different constituents as you grow and mature. When you're ready (and

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need) to engage new communities, the conversation can start at square 3 (and not square -2) because your main messages and brand meaning are out there ahead of you.

Leadership needs to understand that brand-focused communications matter, that they're a strategic investment. Connecting to constituents whose interest and enthusiasm are critical to your success is not cake icing, it's the cake.

A recognizable brand shortens the time needed to recruit talent, raise funds, or hook up with the right partner—because what an organization does and stands for—and its position in the landscape—is known. A well-managed brand creates “pull.” And if what you stand for resonates, people will want to work with you, partner with you, fund your efforts.

Don't I have a brand? Your company has a name, and it may have a logo, but neither is necessarily a brand. Similarly, you may have a product or two, and they may have logos and names (often several), but they might also not be brands.

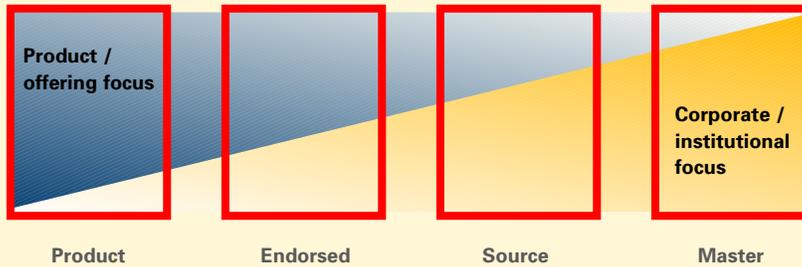
A *brand* is a recognized set of promises and expectations that lives in the hearts and minds of your constituents. Brands are built by consistently pairing your name with the attributes, positioning, promise—and behavior—by which you want to be known and understood. *Brands are learned.* Your brand can be defined in the boardroom, but you don't actually *have* a brand until the constituencies you're trying to engage understand it. Every interaction and communication—print, digital, environmental, interpersonal—is an opportunity to advance that

understanding. In time, your logo or logotype becomes a short-hand symbol for who you are and what you *mean*.

Getting from here to there

Most innovators and executives in biotech enterprises don't spend a lot of time thinking about building and communicating their brand; their interests and skills lie elsewhere. Gene expression, protein folding, and RNAi may be lunchroom chatter; creating a portable message structure and a recognizable visual and verbal voice for the company probably aren't. And even if a few people within an organization have the time and inclination to manage and implement brand-building communications (perhaps in collaboration with outside consultants), they often lack a C-level champion. So that's the first step in brand-building: within your leadership, someone has to understand that brand-focused communications matter, that they're a strategic investment, that connecting to the constituents whose interest and enthusiasm are critical to your success is not cake icing, it's the cake.

Branding strategies



Branding-building can be done at different levels—from a product focus along a continuum to an organizational or corporate focus. A single strategy can be embraced or strategies can be combined. There are advantages and disadvantages to each. A quick trip down a grocery store aisle provides diagrammatic examples.

Product branding

All resources and equity are vested in a product. By design, the parent brand is veiled. Marketers often use



this strategy to gain additional shelf space in a consumer environment: a company can have multiple offerings in the same space with differing attributes or can try something new that might not be in sync with what the corporate brand stands for. And although the consumer, by intent, doesn't know the parent brand, investors and industry experts will. Consumers are looking for Tylenol, Aleve, or Advil; investors and analysts know Johnson & Johnson, Bayer, and Wyeth. The cost of entering a market is high (everything has to be done from the ground up), but the risk to the parent company—if the product is unsuccessful or has

negative press—is the lowest of the four strategies, although this safety net is increasingly less reliable as the many forms of digital communications proliferate.

Endorsed branding

The parent company “brings you” or “presents” the product brand. Your loyalty is to Oreos or Fig



Newtons, but the Nabisco triangle is an imprimatur that adds value and helps you make a decision. Every successful product or venture adds to the “halo” of the parent brand. Like product brands, the visual and verbal expression of endorsed brands is specific to the product, not mapped to any higher-level corporate branding system. Many prescription brands use this strategy.

Source branding

In this scenario, both the corporate and product brands are promoted and invested in equally. Although you would never go to the store hankering for a Nabisco-branded cookie, you do go looking for a Pepperidge Farm cookie as often as you look for a Milano or Lido. This strategy encourages cross-selling—

try a Brussels. Product brand presentation is clearly within a shared visual system. Entry cost is lower



than with product- or endorsed-branding strategies. It's easier to extend your offerings, but the potential for collateral damage is greater.

Master branding

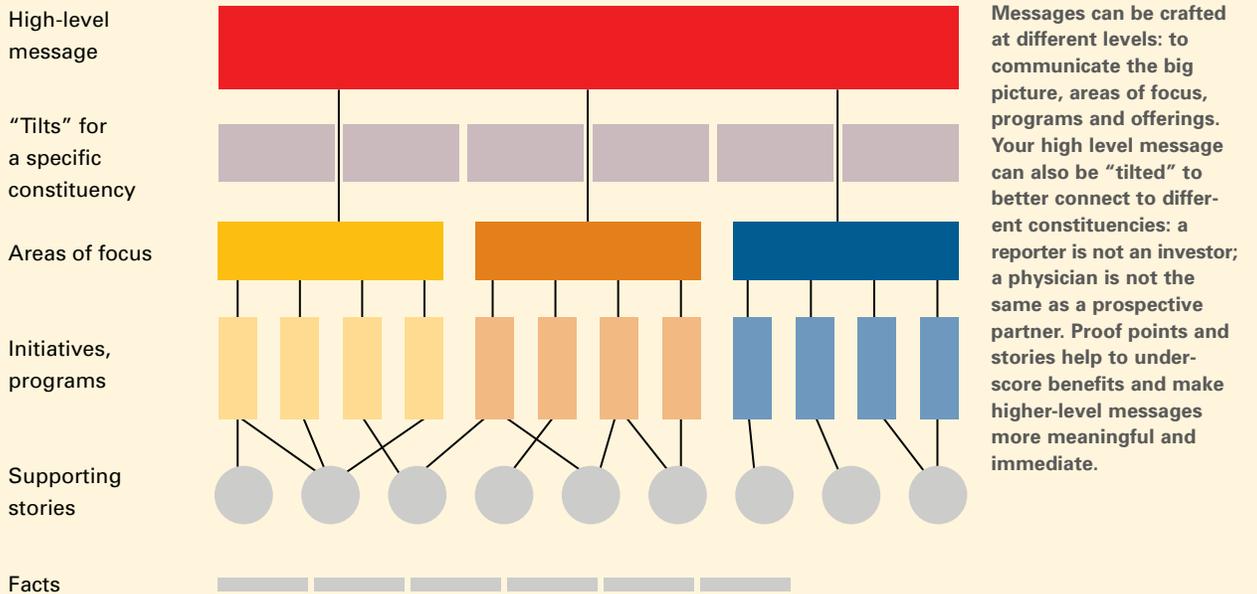
All brand equity is vested at the corporate level. In place of proprietary names (Oreos, Milanos) are



generic category names: coffee cake, danish, strudel. Brand expression is informed by a corporate system, so adding or subtracting a product is relatively inexpensive (and perhaps unnoticed). On the other hand, all offerings are vulnerable if there is a problem with any one.



Building a message system



Sometimes what’s needed is a ground-up brand-building process—for start-up or merged endeavors, or for organizations who are neither known nor understood (often from not attending to their brand). Sometimes what’s needed is repositioning and rebranding—for organizations not perceived as they wish to be, or for those whose current brand image does not positively influence their constituents. Either way, brand-building is a process, not an event. It takes active management and investment.

Although the needs and culture of every company necessarily shape a slightly different process, broad phases are in common.

Know your constituents. Which constituencies’ awareness and comprehension of your company are critical to your success—now and down the road? What are their expectations and needs? What do they value? How does that align with your vision and what you’re promising? Is there a connection? Relevance? Understanding that your constituencies are not a monolithic group will help you to talk to each in a way that is meaningful.

Stake out a position in the competitive landscape. What is your desired positioning? Do you seek to own market- or mind-share in new therapies for a particular disease area, a new technology for therapy delivery, or for diagnostic or discovery tools? If you’re working in multiple areas, try to group initiatives into a few areas of focus. Otherwise you’ll be perceived as diffuse.

Clarify your vision for the future. Your vision needs to be somewhere between the overly-general “improving human health worldwide” and “enabling a new kind of gene knock-out”—between huge and tiny. Your vision should include an explicit benefit and have some shelf-life even if how you

organize yourselves and your offerings to fulfill the vision necessarily change. Your company’s brand has to project why your organization has value—above and beyond specific products or initiatives. This is a necessary step: you can’t be clear externally until you’re clear internally.

Evolve a branding framework. Branding can be done at different levels. Although here, we’re focused on how to build brand meaning and recognition at the corporate level, brand-building can be done at the product level or shared between company and offering. (See *Branding strategies*.) Each strategy offers advantages and disadvantages.

Years ago, it was common for an early-stage company to closely connect its corporate name with its first offering. That strategy relegated future offerings to secondary status and often impeded growth if the first offering’s success declined or if what it stood for drew too narrow a circle around the enterprise.

Case in point: a major contract research organization wanted to offer technologies it had developed to a wider market. Because the company's brand was well known—and because the company wanted to sell to organizations with whom it often competed, the new offerings had to be distanced from the company. The solution was to set up a new company with a name, brand, positioning, and communications targeted at the specific needs of its new prospects. This new brand—and brand strategy—helped build the organization into a market leader in its space.

Develop a portable message structure. What will move desired constituencies to understand who you are, value what you're doing, and act in your favor? Develop messages at different levels: the big picture, specific messages for different focus areas and initiatives—all supported by compelling proof points or stories.

Often, even the overall message needs to be “tilted” by constituency. That is, you will want to express your value and values somewhat differently to a prospective research hire than you will to an investor or a reporter. Your messages should also help manage expectations: if you're working to develop a new drug delivery technology, you're not going to be identifying a host of small-molecule targets each week. Let constituents know what you're about—and what you're not about. Messages are “portable” if leadership, staff, investors, and partners are all able to internalize them, be comfortable with them, and draw on them to advance different dialogues.

Collect and promulgate stories. Stories substantiate, prove, and often humanize your science. They can be based on quantitative or qualitative data, but they should bring benefits to the fore—translate the science. Stories encourage constituents to share in realizing your vision and help nonscientists to understand it.

Evolve visual and verbal brand building blocks. A logo (symbol) or logotype (distinctive typographic treatment) alone is not enough to unify communications across media or to build a recognizable voice for your organization. That requires a more robust system. Informed by your vision, desired positioning, areas of focus, and attributes, develop creative, consistent approaches to the use

of language, imagery, type, color, and design to connect all your communication initiatives. A Web site is not a brochure, and a PowerPoint presentation is not an invitation to a seminar, but if all those communications are built on the same underpinnings, you'll build recognition and meaning in your company quickly, and at a relatively low cost.

Researchers you're looking to hire and some potential partners and investors understand “hard” science; they will want to know how you've folded a protein and which one. Business journalists, industry analysts, and some investors are looking for “chewy science”—information that is more focused on how your science could translate into advances, therapies, dollars. A third group, including non-industry-savvy investors and civic officials, can only digest “soft science”—information heavily tilted toward the (possible) benefits of your work and its economic benefits for the community. For all your constituencies, but especially for the “soft” and “chewy” groups, it's important that every “what” you communicate is paired with a “so what.”

For all your constituencies, but especially for those who can only digest “chewy” or “soft” science, it's important that every “what” you communicate is paired with a “so what.”

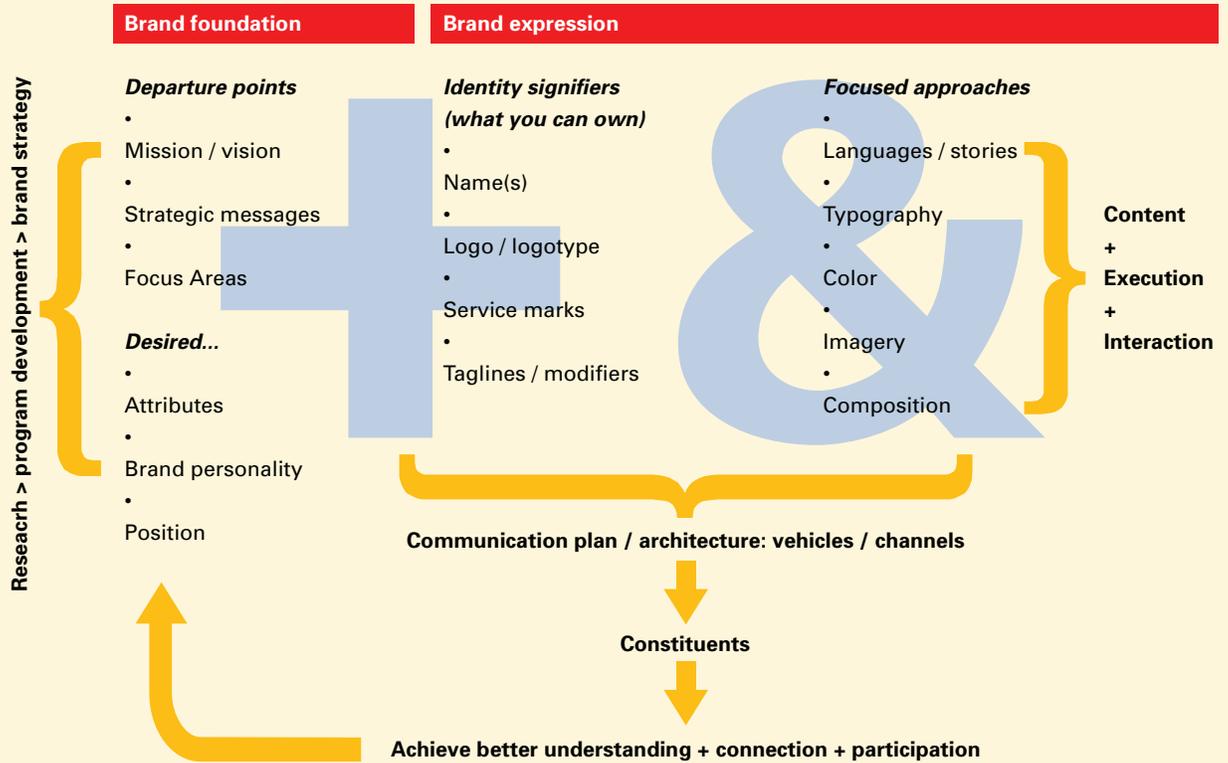
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Having a system in place gives people the shared thinking to create communications that will reinforce each other—and helps ensure that every communication will not only do its specific, tactical job well but also work to build the image and meaning of your brand. (See *Building and expressing your brand*.)

Take advantage of the images your laboratories are generating. They can help make abstract concepts understood. *Showing* how a drug interacts with a diseased cell, *looking* at the blood supply to a cancer site being cut off, or *demonstrating* how a neuron fires in response to a stimulus can be very compelling. Use such images to pull people in and build comprehension of your company and science. Your images can be graphically arresting, whether they are photographic or diagrammatic. You can use them to tell both “hard” and “soft” stories, and they're already yours.

When thinking about brand building blocks, remember to communicate in the language of your constituents. They have different appetites for, and varying abilities to digest, science.

Building and expressing your brand



Over time, if you consistently express across all communications what you want your brand to mean—through shared approaches to the use of language, color, type, and imagery—all communications will work in concert to increase visibility and understanding, and move people closer to your organization.

Your communications need to meet people where they are and then move them closer to your organization—building awareness, comprehension, participation, and, ultimately, advocacy.

Evolve a modular, integrated architecture of communications. Your goal is to create as few pieces as possible and be able to combine and leverage them to create customized packages that can be targeted to different audiences. That is, a single overview piece might be paired with increasingly specific (and decreasingly costly) templated pieces (such as

fact sheets, bios, trial updates) to make packets tuned to different constituents—investors, patient advocacy groups, press. E-newsletters can direct people to your Web site.

And remember that different groups have different information needs: those who know you (and what you're about) need different information

than do people who have low awareness (and even lower comprehension) of your enterprise. Communications need to engage people at their level of understanding and then move them along a continuum:

- awareness
- ↓
- comprehension
- ↓
- conviction
- ↓
- participation
- ↓
- loyalty
- ↓
- advocacy.

When mapping, writing, and designing your Web site, think about the different constituents you're trying to engage and make sure there is a "tour" that makes sense for each group.

Build a corps of ambassadors.

It takes more than the efforts of those whose business cards include "communications" or "investor relations" to get your story out and build a brand. Identify those people within your organization who can be good ambassadors—board members, scientists, staff. Scientists, in particular, can often be the best ambassadors, but first they have to understand that communications matter and that talking to non-scientists requires a shift in content and expression. In addition, how they sign a paper and identify themselves at conferences, are critical to advancing and sustaining the company—and their work in it.

Get your story out. Chart what different constituents need to know, when, and in what media to make decisions in your favor. Determine the best channels to reach each group. Leverage and connect print, digital, personal, and environmental communication.

Media relations may also be an important focus. A compelling paragraph at the end of a press release is important. An inexpensive trade-show display can point to your Web site for more data and stories. Remember that an e-mail blast may be great for one group and perceived as spam by another. And just because your competitor has a slick brochure doesn't mean it's the best channel to reach your constituents.

Develop your Web site for everyone and every "One."

A prospective researcher, investor, physician, and partner may well benefit from the same overview of your organization, but then their interests will probably diverge. When mapping, writing, and designing your website, think about the different constituents you're trying to engage and make sure there is a "tour" that makes sense for each group. Similarly, e-newsletters can either be targeted by constituency or structured to help each group to see what's relevant to them—with detail delivered on your Web site.

Live your brand; behavior counts.

Reinforce all that you want people to think about your company through your behavior. It's hard to be perceived as compassionate and caring if the

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tone of your communications is arrogant. People won't believe you're innovative if your Web site is slow and difficult to navigate. It's hard to reinforce your commitment to investors if you don't consistently communicate. On the other hand, supporting a fellowship at a university in a field you've staked out as yours, or helping to educate the general populace around a specific disease, sends a very positive message.

Develop metrics. Results of successful brand-building can be measured in different dimensions:

immediate	↔	long-term
tangible	↔	intangible
external	↔	internal
organizational	↔	departmental

That is, although some results are easily counted in the short term—products sold, dollars invested, or a licensing fee—it is harder to know if your brand message is gaining currency or if your brand value is helping to lower the risk that others associate with your venture. Often, especially for early-stage companies, it's useful to look to "proxies" that can be counted: amount of press coverage, visits to your Web site, applicants for job postings, and participation on conference calls. Positioning your company or a product for acquisition plays out over a longer timeframe than does communicating to attract participants to an event. Communicating to build internal awareness ultimately delivers results externally.

Building awareness, comprehension, and participation across diverse constituencies is critical if biotechnology companies are to advance—and translate—their science to improve lives and communities.

Bench → **bedside** → **bench**. Brand-building and communicating are not static enterprises. Much like science, you map out what should be a productive approach, pursue it, see what works and what doesn't, and refine the approach. Strategy, once formulated, is informed by practice. You're communicating to make a difference. Although you may decide that you need a new Web site or an overview written for a patient advocacy group, brand-building is not about making new "things." It's about informing and influencing people to think—and act—in your favor. Your brand is an asset to be actively managed.

Communication counts

Years ago, having a really good idea was a significant leg-up toward success. With increasing costs and complexity—and intensifying competition for people, partners, and resources—having a good idea is no longer enough. Building awareness, comprehension, and participation across diverse constituencies is critical if biotechnology companies are to advance—and translate—their science to improve lives and communities. And although better communication won't lead to better outcomes in the laboratory, it will help attract and engage the people, partners, and funding that make good science possible.



Roger Sametz is president of Sametz Blackstone Associates.

About Sametz Blackstone Associates

Sametz Blackstone Associates, founded in 1979, is a Boston-based, brand-focused strategic communications practice that helps leading academic, cultural, corporate, professional service, and government organizations to better navigate change.

The firm has years of experience helping both start-ups and centenarians to articulate their vision and value, and to build and nurture relationships with groups critical to an organization's success. Through strategic consulting and message development; the creation and production of integrated print, digital, environmental, communications; supporting and improving internal and interpersonal communications; and by transferring knowledge and tools to clients so that they can fully own their communications systems and engage their organizations, Sametz Blackstone helps clients to realize both their strategic and tactical goals. The firm collaborates to help organizations build or re-energize brands, promote products and services, recruit and retain the best and the brightest, raise philanthropic dollars, build membership and participation, strengthen their competitive position—and add value to the enterprise over the short and long term.

Located in Boston's historic South End in a 150-year-old brownstone, Sametz Blackstone works with clients around the corner and around the world.

Sametz Blackstone Associates

Compelling communications—integrating brand-focused strategy, design, and technology to help evolving organizations navigate change

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