

Think Small: Positioning a Company or Brand for Growth

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Google the phrase “think big, act small,” or most any combination of those words, and you’ll see quotes and references which span decades into the past, with opinions fluctuating depending on the time in which they were written. I recall when “think big, act big” was the rallying cry. With current slogans containing phrases like “buy local,” “farm to table,” “hand crafted,” “purely simple,” or anything of the sort, it seems as though “small” and “simple” are currently in vogue for positioning a company or brand.

There are several reasons why giant global enterprises are doing their best to convince their consumer bases that they are “small.” Boyden, the executive search firm I work for, positions itself as a “global boutique.” Small has a lot of positive connotations with which large firms wish to be associated. Small is personal. Small is meticulous. Small is local. A small company is made up of actual people with smiles and personality as opposed to a group of faceless bureaucrats making decisions in a dimly lit board room. It’s my belief that dealing with a small company in today’s day and age makes people more comfortable and provides them with a little less buyer’s guilt, even if it’s something they don’t actively consider.

There was a while where the general feeling of the time was “the bigger the better.” A large company meant a successful company which implied that they were doing something right and providing a product or service people wanted. Supply and demand and all that. But it seems at a certain point the bubble burst, and the tables turned on the view of large businesses. This was possibly a result of the barrage of news stories in the early 2000s about mom ‘n’ pop businesses being priced out of the market by massive retailers along with the general fear that the homogenization of goods and services could end in an Orwellian nightmare society.

You hear about those types of stories less and less these days, maybe because people got bored of hearing about it. Or maybe because people realized there was nothing to be done about it and just accepted the inevitable. Or maybe it’s because large companies everywhere wizened up to the shift in societal perception of large business entities, and since then have done

everything in their power—including positioning a company or brand—to convince the public they are in reality much smaller than they may seem.

Regardless, the change toward positioning a company or brand for growth by thinking small is abundantly clear when you look at the branding choices large corporations are making. Whether it's the choice in the copy they use in their ads by using words like "boutique" or "local" or "hand crafted" or just the clear attempt to give their customer-facing materials a more "down-home" feel, it's as if their little old Auntie May worked them up in InDesign between knitting sessions.

This is certainly something to keep in mind when dealing with your customers since the core of their thinking is absolutely true: businesses (and brands) perceived as small and local make people more comfortable in their buying decisions and therefore more likely to buy at a higher frequency. So take it from the big guys: Think big, act small.