

A Home Care Provider's Guide to Brand Development



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I remember watching Field of Dreams when I was a teenager. At the very end of the movie, after the faith-filled protagonist illogically built a baseball field in the middle of his crop, the camera zooms out to show cars lining up for miles and miles to watch. I remember walking out of that movie with a profound sense of awe, thinking, "Wouldn't it be great to build something that people lined up for like that, seems pretty easy!"

That's a lot like the journey of an entrepreneur, isn't it? We take a dream, even if it seems risky and our friends and family might tell us it's crazy, and we pour our passion and resources into building something from the ground up. But what is it that gets people to line up for miles? What does it take to capture the attention of your target customer? The answer lies in how you're perceived in the market, or how strong your brand is.

How Strong is Your Brand?

Having spent a decade helping small businesses (my own included) build their marketing platform and image, I've come to realize the importance of brand

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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development. I've seen so many owners who don't put enough emphasis on branding, and it hurts their business even if they deliver an amazing service. Although my company is a scheduling software, I've been in the home care industry many years and talked with hundreds of owners worldwide. The agencies who deliver a great home care experience and consistently work on their brand image are the ones who out-pace their competitors. You may have the best home care agency in your state, but how are your prospects going to know about you if your agency isn't noticeable?

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Robin Robins, a prominent marketing consultant in the IT consulting industry, made a statement in a keynote address that has always stuck with me: Marketing is everything you do before the sale. I love that. I would define branding the same way. Your brand is more than just your logo, website design theme, email aesthetics, etc. The strength of your brand is determined by how your company and your product are perceived in the market. Yes, your company's optics play a big part in that perception, but it's so much more than that. All buyers have individualized criteria they base their decisions on, and each buyer weighs those criteria differently. Improving your brand's market awareness is the same as managing the unseen connection you make with prospects before they choose to listen to your pitch.

So what is the main way to build your home care agency's brand? Unfortunately, there's no silver bullet. There is no fast or easy way to build a memorable, strong brand that drives buyers into your sales funnel. It is the result of consistent, tenacious, and multi-pronged marketing strategies applied over time. There are, however, a few activities that pack a bigger punch than others, and I will attempt to highlight them below. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but simply a guide to help those who are looking to improve their brand.

How to Build a Strong Brand

- 1. Online Presence.** In this digital age, the vast majority of your home care prospects (typically the adult child searching for care for their parent) are searching online for a Home Care option.
- 2. Logo and Website.** Aesthetics are important and either convey a current, professional look or an outdated, irrelevant message to prospects. You may have control over this (independent) or not (franchise).
- 3. Post your story** or an "About Us" page on your website. People want to know why you got into the business, and they will begin to associate you with an extension of their family if you highlight yours.
- 4. Social Media Presence.** This is a must. It's free, and it's an extension of your

website. Side note: Companies like Home Care Interact can manage your social media sites for you.

5. Sales and Marketing Training.

Coach your team to exude your values well and to be Brand Ambassadors.

6. Client Testimonials.

Prospects want to know you take care of your clients, so prominently display the praises you've received on your website and other marketing materials. Case studies are even better, especially if you can produce a video of the testimonial(s).

7. Consistent Marketing Messaging.

Use a CRM or an email marketing tool that helps you build aesthetically-pleasing emails (Bonus: Choose one that records opens/ clicks).

8. Engage Your Current Clients.

Frequently communicate with clients and responsible parties to keep them informed of events, company news, new hires, etc. Ask for referrals periodically and with sensitivity (you don't want to make them uncomfortable).

9. Community Involvement.

Be where your prospects are. Be active in non-profit work in your area of expertise.

10. Let Your Culture be an Ambassador of Your Brand.

Build and

maintain a company culture that maintains a strong, consistent message, from marketing, to sales, to care giving, to billing. Focus on what sets you apart. For example, at AxisCare our competitive advantage is the flexibility of our software. We're also flexible with our employees, allowing them to work from home, dress casual, etc. We do custom work for clients and listen to/implement their suggestions. We even have different pricing models to accommodate different agency models. Find what makes you unique in your market, and let your culture and your brand set the tone!

11. Provide Educational Resources to Your Market.

You want to be seen as the trusted source for home care information. Examples include article writing, speaking engagements, white papers, and being a member of the HCAOA. This is a great organization, and they have printed materials you can purchase and hand out that are very informative and professional.

12. Honorable Mentions

- Answer the phone in a friendly, professional and consistent way.
- Make sure your printed literature has a consistent look and branding message (business cards, brochures, leave behind swag, etc.)
- Have a professional and informative on-hold phone message.
- Online ads, lead generation sources, search engine marketing, and other digital marketing avenues need to be reviewed

monthly or quarterly to ensure brand consistency and effectiveness.

Franchises are Not Exempt

Franchisees have a brand (and many times a website, printed materials, etc) to use from the start of their agency, however many of these action items still apply. It's worth noting franchisees are sometimes given some leeway with their website and many times are allowed some creative control with their marketing elements. But as we all know, every agency is different, even within the same franchise network. Promote to your community what you excel in and use visual elements like stock images and professional profile photos to portray your competitive advantage(s).

Branding Only Magnifies the Truth (Good or Bad)

It would be nice if completing the list above guaranteed people to line up for your service (like in Field of Dreams), but we all know it's not that formulaic. Building your brand is simply one piece of overall success. If your house is not in order (bad service, not taking care of your caregivers, out of compliance, etc), you can spend all the time and money on branding you want to, but you won't have the results you're seeking. However, if you are passionate about home care, pursue excellence in all aspects of your agency, and take great care of your clients and caregivers, spending the time to build and maintain your brand will reap big rewards. ■