

Five Keys to Building a Powerful Asset Management Brand

Simply put, investment brands are different—from their products and services to their diverse audiences—and operate by a different set of brand rules. Let's look at a few unique challenges that these brands face.

How do you brand thinking, advice, and insight—all intangibles?

With consumer goods or manufacturing for example, customers can experience a product—they can taste it, wear it, or take it for a drive. With an intangible based brand like asset management, the proposition rests largely on the thinking, insight and expertise of the manager. Therefore, it is important to identify and cultivate a brand positioning that conveys value and captures the essence of those intangibles.

Developing an investment management brand takes not only an understanding of the complexities of the industry but also the knowledge and expertise of brand building.

How do you build an authentic brand experience when your audience is layered—sometimes its B2C, sometimes its B2B, sometimes it's both?

Investment management brands are neither consumer brands nor B2B brands, they're different. Their primary audiences are a mix of professional buyers—financial advisors, sub-advisory clients, plan sponsors, consultants—and individual investors with very different needs and expectations. On one hand they must be perceived as offering deep insight and information while on the other they need to instill a sense of trust and confidence with end investors. Adding to the challenge, is that all of this needs to be conveyed through a complex distribution system. Deep knowledge of the markets and investment products, and a solid understanding of the nuances of various distribution channels are key to mapping out relevant propositions and communications.

How do you build an investment brand when what investors are expecting is that their assets will grow and outperform?

Clients are ultimately expecting that assets will grow based on the management's 'intangible expertise and insight'. However, unless they have yet benefited from that expertise, what they are being asked to believe is based on past performance and information. The problem is that the future is uncertain, there are no guarantees, and history doesn't always repeat itself. Therefore, clients need reasons other than history to believe that a firm will deliver. It ultimately comes down to trust.

Crafting a brand of reliability, openness and confidence are keys to gaining that trust—we offer five keys on how to do this below.

1. Identify a core, unifying brand positioning.
One that embodies the purpose of the brand and the ultimate benefits to all that it engages. Get to the essence of the firm, who it is, what it believes, how it's better or different than others and tell a credible, compelling story.

2. Understand what each target audience needs to hear to engage.
Spend time developing a messaging strategy that communicates effectively to each audience, builds brand equity and communicates the distinct benefits of each strategy or product.

3. Tell a meaningful and differentiated story.
For years, asset management firms stayed in a very narrow range of brand building with lackluster messages focused largely on people, process and performance. Tell a true and compelling “story” with clarity and differentiation.

4. Be consistent in all communications and behaviors.
Set the messaging strategy and ensure it is followed. Absent a strategy the brand storytelling is often told from the perspective of the teller and may be inconsistent or narrow—ultimately diluting brand awareness and appreciation.

5. Invest in building the brand.
For a time, with good performance and generally content investors many firms believed that was enough for its brand reputation. But the game has changed and now clients are looking for reasons to believe beyond performance. Hence investing in building a powerful, differentiated asset management brand is clearly an imperative.

In closing,

Building a strong and enduring brand in the investment management business is both an art and a science. The pursuit involves two essential pieces; understanding the true and authentic identity of a firm to create powerful differentiation and having a deep understanding of key audiences to unlock what they need to hear to engage. From this foundation, strong brands can grow.