

# UPDATE Practice Module 004

**This module covers:**

- Your pharmacy as a brand and why it is important
- The branding cycle
- Factors to consider when developing a branding strategy
- The brand experience and how to deliver it

**April**

**Clinical: Travel month**

● Staying safe on holiday	April 4
● Motion sickness	April 11*
● Travel vaccinations	April 18

**Practice: How to build a pharmacy brand** April 25

*\*Online only for Update Plus subscribers*

# Build a pharmacy brand

Gavin Birchall

Whether you are aware of it or not, your pharmacy is already a brand. The people who know your pharmacy have a gut feeling about it. That gut feeling is the brand.

Every aspect of your pharmacy contributes to the gut feeling people have, every day. This includes your premises, your pharmacy interior, the way you interact with patients, your services and products and your visual communications (including digital communication).

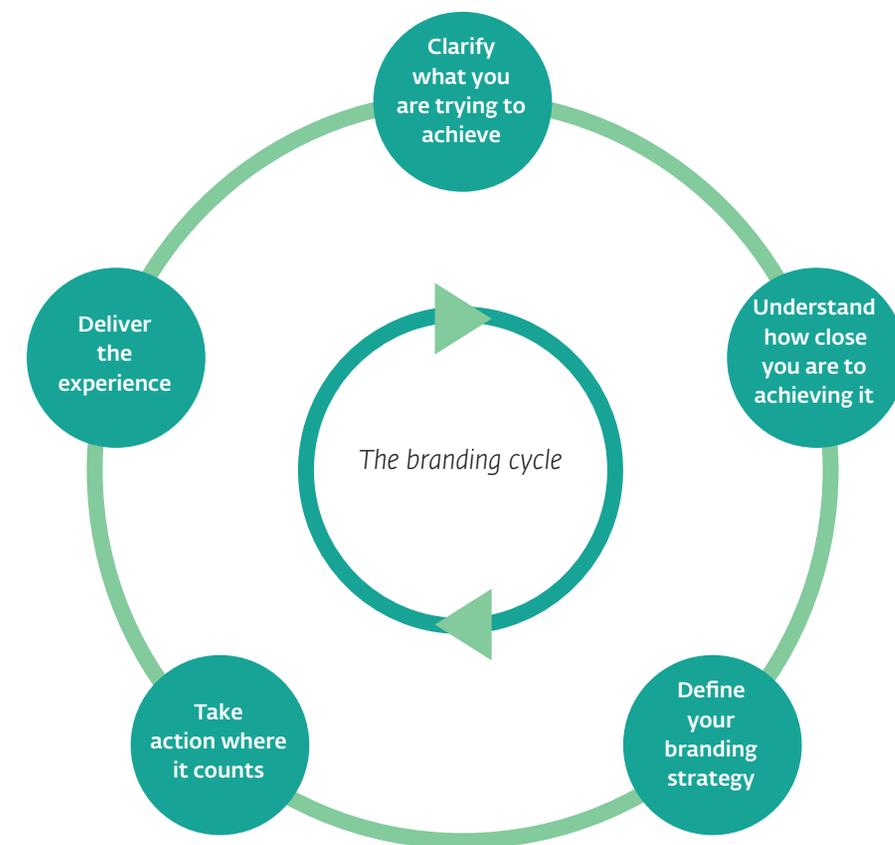
If enough people have the same, positive feeling about your pharmacy, then you have a strong brand. The brand exists in the hearts and minds of those people. It is the people who create and own your brand, not you.<sup>1</sup>

Do not ask yourself how you can turn your pharmacy into a brand, but how you can improve the feeling that people have about it, and get the brand that already exists working for you. You may wonder where to begin and the remainder of this article provides some of the answers.

## Why does your pharmacy need a strong brand?

The pressure is mounting on the pharmacy sector. We see ever-decreasing gross margins as remuneration is squeezed and a shift in the focus of activity from dispensing to care, all while overheads are growing to manage spiralling workloads. We are all working harder to stay in the same place. It is clear that turning a good profit by providing good pharmaceutical care is not an easy way to make a living.

Considering how your pharmacy is perceived as a brand can help. All of the most successful companies in the world have very strong brands<sup>2</sup> - this is not a coincidence. How did Apple create the desire in peoples' minds to own its products? It built a superlative brand experience. How has Google become the third wealthiest company on the planet in just 16



years? It does what it promises to do very well, so well that its name has become a verb. That is a powerful brand in people's minds. While these are global corporations, the benefits of focusing on the brand experience can help your business to be more successful, too.

The value and usefulness of a strong brand lies in its ability to influence the purchasing behaviour of your existing customers and potential customers.<sup>3</sup> It gives people a reason to use your pharmacy rather than your competitor and encourages their loyalty. If you invest in your brand consistently, it can provide you with

a sustainable competitive advantage.

The services that you offer are very similar, if not identical, to those of your competitors. In all industries, competition has increased while technology and mass production have practically eliminated the differences that once existed between the products and services offered.<sup>4</sup> If you manage to secure an advantage it will be short-lived and the market will catch up. Creating a distinctive brand experience can help you grow market share, command a premium for your services and ultimately grow your long-term profits.

## How to create your own brand

If your brand exists in the minds (and guts) of your customers, then how can you influence it? There are key steps to take and, if you follow them, you can have a powerful impact on how people feel about your pharmacy. So where do you start?

### 1. Clarify what you are trying to achieve

Start by answering the following questions:

- Who are you?
- Who needs to know?
- How will they find out?
- Why should they care?<sup>25</sup>

This might require some soul-searching to fully crystallise what your business is all about. You may have already written down in concise terms what is it that you and your pharmacy aim to achieve and how you want to achieve it. If not, it is a good idea to invest the time in doing so.

Try to collect your thoughts in the simplest possible terms. Define the messages that will help you express your aspirations to your customers. It is not as easy as it sounds.

You should aim to identify your unique selling proposition (USP). What is it about your pharmacy that differentiates you from your competitors? What would you like your unique brand experience to be? Ask yourself honestly if there is a tangible reason why customers and prospects should choose your pharmacy rather than the next one along the street. If you cannot think of an answer, then you may need to consider what you offer and how to create a point of difference.

Define what will create that gut feeling in the people you aim to reach. Is there something specific that your local population needs or will relate to? Is there something about them that you know, that others do not?

If you believe that pharmacies can and should become high street health centres then make sure that this is reflected in your thoughts. If you think that pharmacies should become spokes to a dispensing factory's hub then include that. Just make sure that whatever you end up with is your own and something that you truly believe in. It is very difficult to deliver a brand experience that you are not committed to.

Some people call this a vision. Some a mission statement. What you call it does not matter, but think hard. This is the most important element of your work on improving your pharmacy brand.

### 2. Understand how close you are to achieving your goal

Disciplined research is key to exploring the brand experience that you currently create. Try to see it through your customers' eyes or, better still, through your customers' senses.

- **Check how your pharmacy looks** Really look at it. Is it professional? Does it give the

impression that you want it to give? Will patients trust you to provide the latest clinical service if the retail area is full of bargain basement offers? How does it smell? Is it too hot or too cold? Do not stop at what you can see. Experience is defined through all the senses.

- **Check your current visual identity**

Is it fit for purpose? Does it communicate what your brand is all about? Review your marketing materials. What messages do they carry? Look at every sign, every sticker and every window display.

- **Check your efficiency** What is the average waiting time for prescriptions? Is it the same when you are not in the pharmacy? How long does your driver spend on each delivery? Is that good or bad?

- **Speak to your employees, customers and suppliers** Talk to them about experiences they have when they come into contact with your pharmacy. You may want to use a survey to give you more information to work with.

- **Consider everything** Make sure you leave no stone unturned. When you have a clear understanding, you can compare it with your ideas about what you want your brand to be. Identify the differences and you are ready to progress to the next step.

### 3. Put it together and define your strategy

Use your imagination. What can you do to bridge the gap between the experience that you are currently delivering and the one you want to deliver? How can you position your pharmacy to improve the brand experience?

There are four main factors<sup>6</sup> that you can work on when you are developing your branding strategy:

- **Environment** How can you adjust your environment to provide the sensory experience and visual messages to create your brand experience? You may want to move premises or perhaps a decorative refresh is enough. You might be surprised at how far a modest budget can go when used carefully.

- **Products and services** How can you adjust the range of both products and services to create your brand experience? You may want to introduce new innovative services. Perhaps there are some that you should stop doing? Are any of your products or services sending the wrong message?

- **Behaviour** This is your most powerful branding and marketing tool. How will your team need to behave to provide the brand experience that you want to offer? You may need a quantum leap in attitude or perhaps a small adjustment will do. You will need their help to improve your brand experience and they will need your help in understanding how to do that. Go on the journey together.

- **Communication** How can you amend or refresh your visual identity to amplify your brand experience? How can you express ▶

Branding can be done as a one-off and, once created, does not require regular review.



# True or false?

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your unique selling proposition across everything that you do? All of your materials should be consistent and carry the same messages. Do you need a new name? Does your website need redeveloping? Can you use social media?

#### 4. Take action where it counts

Implementing your strategy involves seizing all opportunities to express to every person who comes into your branch why there is no other pharmacy quite like yours.

These points of contact are known as brand touchpoints (see *Brand touchpoints*, right). The experience that people have when they engage with you at a brand touchpoint will contribute to their overall feeling about your pharmacy: the sum of all the experiences they have will create that gut feeling. It will create the brand.

Think in detail about how to consistently create your brand experience at each brand touchpoint. Rebel against anything that worsens your brand experience and take immediate action to put it right.

#### 5. Deliver a consistent and authentic brand experience

Protect the investment you have made in your brand. Consistency is key in maintaining customers' trust and loyalty. People are very good at spotting where there are contradictions in brand messages and it breeds confusion and distrust. Devote time on an ongoing basis to managing your brand experience and it will pay dividends.

Customers may forgive you once or even twice for a lack of consistency, but they will not forgive you for a lack of authenticity. Make sure that you deliver on your promises and do not make any promises that you cannot deliver on. Failure to deliver on a promise will quickly lose you customer trust and loyalty that you will have to work very hard to get back.

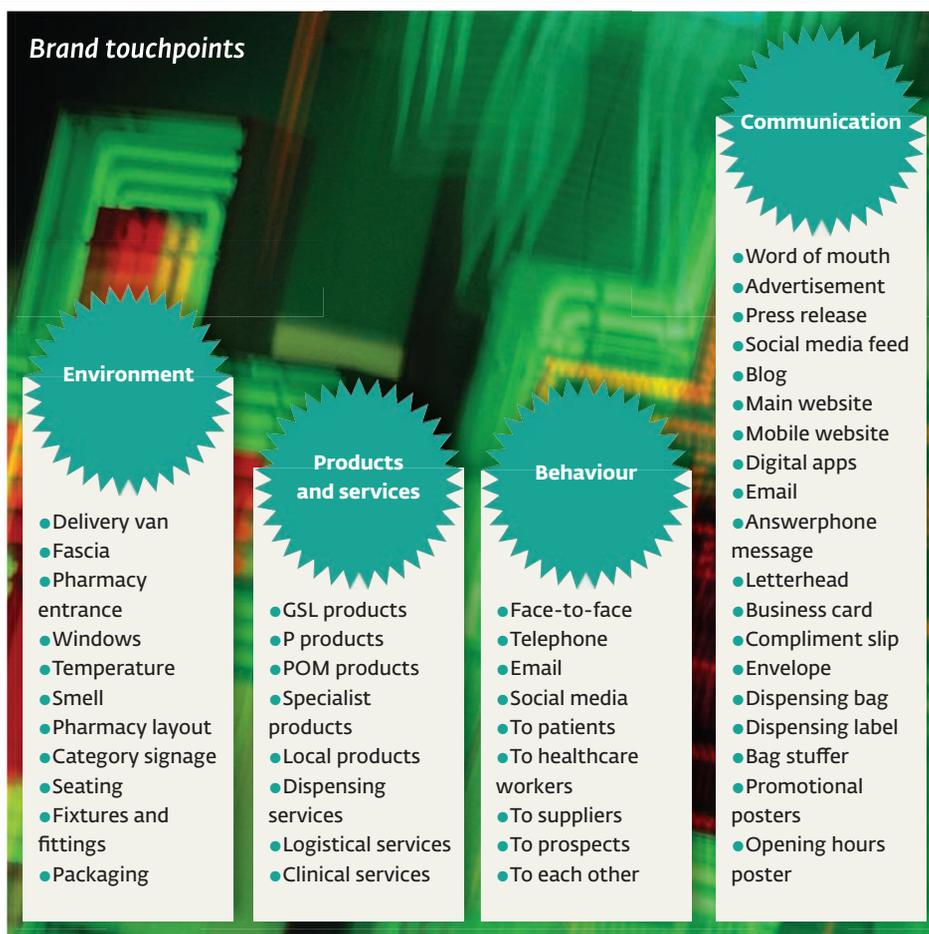
Branding is not a discrete event. It is an ongoing, cyclical process that should be part of your regular business planning.

The world outside your four walls is constantly changing and the brand experience that you provide will need to change alongside it to provide you with that sustainable competitive advantage.

#### What else can you do?

This module should have given you a good idea of what is involved in the branding process. However, in some ways it is more complicated than the accounting and legal aspects of your business because it involves logic and creativity.

It can be tempting to adopt a do-it-yourself approach. If you feel confident, then follow the process and you will benefit. If you would like the support of an expert, then seek the advice of a branding professional. Consider the following when choosing who to work with:



- Their past experience of helping people to develop their brands. Check that they share your view of branding. Have they done the type of work you are looking for at the right level?
- Their understanding of the pharmacy and healthcare sector. Do they have any prior knowledge of the pharmacy profession and the specific challenges you face?
- Their commitment to you. Your business is a priority to you and so it should be for your branding professional.

#### Further reading

- Milkman, D: Brand thinking and other noble pursuits. New York: Allworth Press (2013).
- Olins, W. Brand New: The shape of brands to come. London: Thames and Hudson (2014).
- Sharp, B. How brands grow: What marketers don't know. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2010).

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2. The Telegraph. The world's biggest companies. [www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/)

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4. Johnson M. Problem Solved. 2nd Ed. London: Phaidon, 2012.
5. Wheeler A. Designing Brand Identity: An essential guide for the whole branding team. 4th Edition. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2012.
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### 5 minute test

■ Sign up to take the 5 Minute Test and get your answers marked online: [chemistanddruggist.co.uk/update-plus](http://chemistanddruggist.co.uk/update-plus)

## Take the 5 Minute Test

1. Only the dispensing and services parts of a pharmacy business contribute to its branding.  
**True/false?**

2. The value and usefulness of a strong brand lies in its ability to influence the purchasing behaviour of the customers.  
**True/false?**

3. A strong brand gives people a reason to use your pharmacy rather than a competitor.  
**True/false?**

4. When developing a strong brand for your pharmacy, it is important to identify the unique selling proposition.  
**True/false?**

5. Branding does not require much research.  
**True/false?**

6. It is important to be committed to and believe in the brand experience you are trying to deliver.  
**True/false?**

7. Brand touchpoints are the points of contact that a person has when they come into the pharmacy.  
**True/false?**

8. Environment, products and services, communication and accessibility comprise the brand touchpoints.  
**True/false?**

9. Consistency is key to maintaining customers' trust and loyalty.  
**True/false?**

10. Branding can be done as a one-off and, once a brand is created, it does not require regular review.  
**True/false?**

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## Tips for your CPD entry on building a pharmacy brand

**Reflect** Why should you think of your pharmacy business as a brand? What is the branding cycle? What factors need to be considered when developing a branding strategy?

**Plan** This article discusses the branding of pharmacy businesses. It includes information about why branding is important, how to create your own pharmacy brand and the factors that need to be considered when developing brand strategy.

**Act** Read the Update article and the suggested next steps (below and right), then take the 5 Minute Test (above). Update Plus subscribers can then access answers and a pre-filled CPD logsheet at [chemistanddruggist.co.uk/mycpd](http://chemistanddruggist.co.uk/mycpd).

Research further advice and tips on brand building to find approaches and steps that appeal to you. There's lots of it out there but try Forbes, *The Guardian* Small Business

Network, Harvard Business Review and Business Insider.

Ask customers what they think about your pharmacy and the 'gut feeling' it gives them.

Discuss your pharmacy's brand with your team. What messages and experiences are they trying to give your customers? Are their answers consistent?

Consider what the responses to the above two action points tells you about whether you need to work on your pharmacy's brand.

**Evaluate** Do you know how a pharmacy brand can be created? Could you put together a branding strategy for your pharmacy?

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