

# kick it up a notch!

want to get noticed? here are ideas, tips & wisdom to help connect you with clients in strategic and powerful ways! • issue 5 • oct 2010

## Why Saving Money on Branding Can Cost You

By Maria Ross, Founder and Chief Strategist, Red Slice LLC

**We've all seen it – and maybe done it.** We spend money on lawyers or accountants to build our business the right way, but when it comes to something like a logo or a website, we think, “Hey, my neighbor’s teenage niece knows how to use Illustrator! Maybe she can do my logo for free.” Or, “I just need to get a simple website up. Let me just slap together a DIY template and get the page up and running.”

While these are steps you may need to take initially to get your business off the ground and money coming in the door, skimping on a well-thought-out and intentional branding long-term can cost you way more in sales later on.

Branding does not have to be some big expensive effort that only companies like Apple or Nike can afford. If you run a small business, you need to spend time thinking about and conveying your brand as well – at whatever budget you have to spend. Brand is more than just your logo or website – it’s your essence, your core. It’s the experience people have with you, the impression you leave in their minds. **So you need to really think about what you want that impression to be and ensure that you communicate it consistently in three important ways: visually, verbally and experientially.**

And while brand is more than the visual identity, your logo, the look and feel of your website, and design presence is still a key part of it. **Buyers make decisions subconsciously and need to be attracted to your look and feel** first before they will learn enough to buy from you. Just like dating, your appearance does not define who you are but it does factor in to initial first impressions.

Hiring unqualified people or designers who don’t ask you anything about your value proposition, differentiators, or target audience is not the way to save money. I talk to many people that threw away money because their brand strategy was not baked yet. Good design is a skill: it’s a skill that involves taking a message and communicating it visually, not just creating a pretty picture.

And guess what? That brand strategy will do more than just inform your visual identity. It will serve as a compass for other marketing investments: partners, advertising, events. Basically **any decision your company makes will be a smarter one if you start with the brand strategy first and use it as a compass.** This helps you avoid throwing away money on what I call “random acts of marketing” and ensures that you only invest in activities that move your business forward.

If you need to save money, the best thing entrepreneurs can do is to first sit down and create a clear, strong brand strategy before any marketing, design or development takes place. This entails defining who you are, what you represent, what feelings you want to evoke, what value you provide, how you price things, who your ideal audience is, and how to best reach them. This requires sitting down and answering some key questions. People that don’t do this first and launch into creating a website or investing in marketing programs are just throwing their money away. When you have no destination, every road looks like it leads somewhere.

Know thy audience and thy brand strategy and you will know the best design options, communication vehicles and marketing tactics in which to invest. Translation: **only pay for things that will move you forward and give you a return on your investment.** Saving \$1000 and then ultimately losing \$10,000 in sales opportunities because you didn’t connect with your target customer does not seem like a good investment strategy to me.

Strategy. Design. Implementation. **Results.**

*Kick It Up A Notch* is brought to you by Karla Chin and Kristen Schuerlein. They are the owners of Design Duo Inc, a creative studio that works with passionate business owners and independent professionals committed to increasing their visibility to improve the bottom line.



### ABOUT MARIA ROSS

Maria has over 16 years experience in branding and marketing everything from technology to tomatoes. Red Slice ([www.red-slice.com](http://www.red-slice.com)), her branding, marketing and communications consultancy, helps businesses engage, inform and delight their customers. She has worked with such brands as Discovery Networks, Monster.com, Business Objects and Monsoon Car Audio. With both B2B and B2C marketing experience across branding, advertising, events, messaging, lead generation campaigns, PR and website strategy, she orchestrates all the pieces you need to get results and boost your business.

Maria is the author of *Branding Basics for Small Business: How to Create an Irresistible Brand on Any Budget* (2010, Norlights Press), which is available at [www.red-slice.com/branding-basics-book](http://www.red-slice.com/branding-basics-book).

From time to time we like to shine the light on people who are really good at what they do. Maria is one of those people. **Enjoy!**



**Create a compass for your business by asking yourself some questions:**

- Define who you are
- What do you represent?
- What value do you provide?
- Who is your ideal audience?
- What is the best way to reach them?