

3 Ways to Distinguish Your Brand's Verbal Identity

Is your company full-service with a deep bench of experience in multiple areas and industries? Do you take a client-focused approach that provides creative solutions to help your corporate clients achieve their business goals? Do your professionals value responsiveness and embrace diversity?



Jaffe Staff

If you answered yes to these questions, congratulations: You may be one of the great many companies that regurgitate uninspired key messages. It's not that these points are bad or wrong. Your firm probably does embody these attributes, but the way professional service companies express these messages has become commoditized. In some cases, the terms lack any real meaning, like "client-focused," which sounds great in principle, but once you give it some thought, you have to ask yourself: What business *isn't* client-focused?

The point is that how you write about your company matters. While less obvious than your [visual identity](#), a quality verbal identity subtly differentiates you from your competitors and clearly expresses your company's brand. All too often, marketers and publicists get stuck using the same jargon over and over again, which results in downplaying their firm's competitive highlights.

For professional services companies to fight the perception of commodification, marketers must start injecting creativity into the language they use to describe a firm, its professionals and its services.

Allow Yourself to Brainstorm

The manner in which most marketers describe a company's services or consultants' skill sets has become so commonplace that the instinct is to replicate familiar jargon and turns of phrase. While we often are told that thinking in a vacuum is bad strategy, this is one area where *not* giving much consideration to established descriptions can be a significant benefit.

To come up with original language to describe your company and its services, I recommend a completely open, non-critical brainstorming session. Give yourself permission to clear your mind and think beyond the context of standard professional services marketing copy and reliable, but tired, modifiers. By allowing yourself to think creatively, you might come up with a concept that you would not have otherwise stumbled upon. And although its initial iteration might not be perfect, you and your team can at least start with a fresh concept and manipulate it to fit the ethos of your firm.

Stop Following the Leader

Following in other companies' footsteps is wholly understandable. Many professionals are risk-averse, and mimicking a concept that has already been executed by another company makes it feel as if the idea has been vetted. The truth is, however, that imitation is not a successful strategy because it fails to distinguish [what makes your firm unique](#).

Professional services marketers must work to convince their managements and other key marketing stakeholders that taking calculated risks in marketing and branding is a necessity of the business. Comfortable and safe do not make strong leaders; they make loyal followers, if anything. If your firm wants to hone its own identity in a competitive marketplace, stop copying other companies and start setting the standard for the rest of the industry.

Give Your Professional Services Firm a Persona

An exercise that can help you better understand your firm and its verbal identity is imbuing your company with a persona. Just as you define your target audiences by creating personas for each audience segment, you can run the same exercise for your firm. A good way to get the ball rolling is to ask yourself: If my company were a person, how would I describe this individual? What would this individual wear, eat or drive? Where would this individual live? What would it do for fun?

While the exercise may seem silly, it's a common practice among organizations outside the professional services space. It is often how companies create or redefine their mascots. The responses you develop can help illuminate a lot about your firm that straightforward thinking might not produce. For example, a persona that enjoys golfing would have a significantly different verbal identity from a persona that enjoys video games.

Align Corporate Identity and Language

Mastering the relationship between identity and language is critical to fully and clearly expressing your unique brand. Of course, before you can explore the relationship between language and branding, you first need a solid grasp on your company's brand. Once you have that, you just have to find the right words, as well as the right tone, to express it.

Have questions about establishing your firm's verbal identity? Contact Terry M. Isner at tisner@jaffepr.com.