

How to Build a Brand That Truly Connects

If your brand doesn't resonate on a deep level with your target audience, then pouring time and energy into aesthetics and clever messaging is a waste of resources.

Real brand power is based on your brand's identity: knowing who you are as a company, and how your ideal customer experiences life in relation to your offering.

Search Engine Journal's Editor-in-Chief Katie Morton sits down with Mordy Oberstein, founder of Unify Brand Marketing, to go deeper on how to build a brand with a solid foundation.

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Start With Brand Identity

Katie Morton: Hello, everybody. It is I, Katie Morton, Editor-in-Chief of Search Engine Journal, and I'm here today with Mordy Oberstein, who is the founder of Unify Brand Marketing.

So, Mordy, what are we going to talk about today?

Mordy Oberstein: Hi there, everybody. Last time we spoke about what brand marketing is fundamentally and how to approach it. Today, I'm gonna talk about how to actually develop a brand and run through that process.

We're gonna try to be jargon-free about what brand development actually looks like and what the stages are, and how they should all flow one into the other.

Katie: That sounds great. OK, so what's the first concept?

Brand Therapy: Don't Fear a Niche

Mordy: OK, this is where I think brands get really messed up. If you feel like you've lost traction, like you don't have direction or you're all over the place – whatever it is – most problems come down to this issue, which is... (I'm not going to say the jargon word) but it comes down to: **Who are you?**

And this is where you're doing therapy for your brand. You're trying to figure out who you are in a real, deep way. Kind of what we talked about last time – about building some meaning for yourself. You need to think about: Who are you? Where do you want to be? How do you want to be seen? How are you seen? How do you want to be seen going forward?

This is the part where it gets a little bit scary. I'm going to ask you: What scares you? Because this is where brands kind of feel like, "Maybe we're going to pigeonhole ourselves." But you're not.

I'm not going to use the identity word – wait, I said identity – used jargon. Darn it!

This is where you kind of feel like maybe we're going to pigeonhole ourselves if we have too much of a pigeonhole kind of audience. Don't. It's scary, but you have to do it.

This is where brands get off the rails. You have to understand who you are in a real way, because **who you are rolls right into who you're for.**

Know Your Core Audience

Mordy: If I was dating my wife back in the day and my wife didn't like sports at all, I'd be like, "Oh, my wife's not for me. I'm a sports nut," which is not true. That's not how dating actually works.

Knowing who you are rolls right into: Who are you for?

Once you know who you are, the next step is: Who's actually interested in you? **Who's your core audience?** And this is a direct outcome of who you are, which is why it's important.

The next stage in brand development – once you know who you are and who you're for (that doesn't mean you have to be only for them, but they're your core) – is what problems does that audience have?

And by problems, I don't mean USPs (which I know is a jargon word, but I'm going to use it so we know what we're talking about). I'm not talking about pain points.

I'm talking about: **What's going on in their lives as it generally relates to your product or service?**

Let me give you an example: Minivans. Why do I always use minivans? If I was making minivans, I would want to know: What's the context? What's the life situation of the parent or guardian driving and schlepping these kids around? What's happening in their lives around the product?

It's not a pain point. It's not a USP. It's what's happening in the life of your audience, as it relates to generally speaking about the product/service, whatever you do.

Now that you know that, the next step in brand development is: **How do you fit those needs?**

This is where your "USP stuff" kind of comes in. And by the way, everything here should align from who you are to your audience, to what their problems are, to how do you fit those needs (because you know who you are now, obviously)?

Build From The Ground Up, Messaging

Comes Last

Mordy: Because of who you are, how do you now solve those problems that your audience or people or consumers are dealing with in their lives? Now, once you know that, stage five would be, how do you actually communicate that? Or rather, what's important about that to communicate?

We now know who we are. We now know who we're for. We now know what the problems and the life situation is of the people we're for. And we know how we solve and deal with those situations with who we are as a product, as a service, as an offering.

What's important to tell the audience about who we are and how we solve their problems?

Don't try to refine it here. Don't try to have it snappy and snippy. Nothing catchy. No taglines. Just what's important conceptually as a framework to communicate to your audience.

What's conceptually important – what should the audience understand?

And the last step is to refine that. It's not going to come in one shot. It'll take multiple iterations to do it. It's not going to be perfect, and you'll never be 100% happy with it. It's better that it's honest and genuine than it is perfect.

If we want to zoom out and use the jargon, we just ran through:

- Creating brand identity.
- Using identity to define the target audience.
- Understanding the audience's life context.
- Positioning the offering.
- Developing key messaging.
- And then refining the message.

Katie: I like it.

Mordy: No jargon, I almost got through it!

SaaS Doesn't Have To Mean Utility

Katie: I think it speaks to our audience to use a little bit of jargon in there. And speaking of that, I'm sure a lot of people you talk to and a lot of people in the Search Engine Journal universe are SaaS, software as a service.

I like the minivan example because it's easy to wrap your head around. It's an obvious life circumstance. You just say that word 'minivan' and it's giving you a picture of being married with a bunch of kids, driving them around. You say one word, and it paints this whole picture. With SaaS, it's so different.

And what would it be like, as a thought exercise to go through this, if you invent a software that's a rabbit food feeding timer?

Mordy: Okay. A set that feeds your rabbit on a timer.

Katie: Something that's life-oriented, right? Like, think about our universe, which is really kind of abstract, right? In terms of people's day-to-day. And they're really using software, probably in a professional sense, and probably not in their home life for the most part, let's say like a marketing software or, you know, ads like PPC.

Mordy: I consult for a marketing software, so I'm not going to use a marketing software because I'm biased. Let's say I use like a video editor tool – does that work?

Katie: Yeah, that works.

Mordy: All right, cool.

Brand Identity is the Foundation

Mordy: First of all, the most important thing is where I think brands get everything wrong. It's not like one stage, and you go from stage one, which is brand identity to messaging refinement, which is, what, stage six?

Don't think of it as a line. I did one, and now I go to the next one, then I go to the next one. Think of it like you're stacking a building. You're building a building.

The foundation is a brand identity, and then you build the next floor, the next floor, the next – and the top floor, the roof is the refinement that everybody can see from the helicopter.

But they're not—if you imagine they're in a helicopter looking down on this roof – they can't see all of the other layers, but you can. And you have to start with brand identity.

And this – particularly for a SaaS tool – because SaaS, it's really easy to get stuck in being a utility. “We're just a utility.”

The problem with being a utility is that there's no actual connection. And as soon as somebody else finds another utility that's better, cheaper, or whatever, they'll move. There's no loyalty, which is literally what I did... I used another tool. I found it a little bit cumbersome. The pricing wasn't super clear, so I moved to this one.

Now, I don't love this one, by the way. If something else came along, I would totally move to the other one.

There's no identity. I don't know what separates CapCut from the other one I was using.

I don't use Camtasia anymore only because I have an old license. I don't want to pay for a new one. So if I'm going to

pay for a new one, I find it a little bit cumbersome.

I have no actual loyalty to any of these platforms because I don't know who they are and what makes them different.

You know why I don't know who they are and what makes them different? Because they don't know who they are.

A Connection With Your Audience Gains Customer Loyalty

Katie: If they worked on **connecting with you as a brand and developed that emotional bond, you'd be more likely to stick with them**, even if something better came out, a better feature.

Mordy: Because it'd be more for me. Right. They have to ask themselves – and I can't do this for them – I don't even know anything about it other than the tool. Someone recommended it to me and I use it.

They have to figure out: Why are you doing this? Why do you want to do this outside of making money? Why do you find this meaningful?

“Oh, because...” Let's just say, “Because we help. Because we are into the idea of being able to do X, Y, and Z.”

Oh, okay, CapCut. Let's just say their big thing is (because I use this part of their tool, so I like it—they automatically remove my background and put a new one):

“We're all about people who don't have a professional setup feeling like they have a professional setup.”

That's just really important because we see the value in that. “We want to democratize video content,” etc. That would be an actual brand identity.

So now I know who I'm for. I'm not for a professional. I'm a big brand, I have a whole studio, I'm Coca-Cola, I have a whole in-house studio on site. [I'm not for them.] I'm for this audience.

Now, what are their problems, and what's going on with them, and what's happening with them?

Now it's kind of easier to see.

"I really want to create professional-level content, but I don't have the skills to do it." I'm also not an idiot, either. So I kind of know what it's supposed to look like. I kind of know what it's supposed to be. I don't have the time. I don't have the technical know-how. I don't want to pay anybody to do it.

These are my problems. How do you come in and solve that?

Katie: So it's like the entire market proposition is tied into that.

Mordy: But they only realize to talk to me about my problems, and how they solve my problems, once they figure out who they were first.

But everybody skips that step. Everyone goes right to the roof—because that's the only thing you can see.

Katie: That's fascinating, Mordy. Brick by brick – you've got to stack it up before you get to the helicopter view.

Mordy: Gotcha. It'll all come crumbling down at a certain point. The messaging won't work. It'll all fall apart. That sounds really doomsday-ish.

Katie: It does. But I do think that I will be checking out CapCut's branding – to see what are they doing over there?

All I know is their little logo that I see frequently at the

end of some of my favorite creators.

Mordy: So that's good branding. It's not great branding, but better than nothing.

Katie: Exactly. Better than nothing.

Wrapping Up: Shout Brand From The Rooftops

Well, Mordy, this has been very enlightening, and I want to thank you for coming on and sharing with me today.

What's next?

Mordy: I was going to shout "brand!" from the rooftops. That was so like a dad joke.

Next time, we're going to dive deeper into Stage One, which is building brand identity, and what that actually looks like, and how you do it.

Katie: That'd be fantastic. All right, everybody, thanks for joining us. And check us out: searchenginejournal.com.

Mordy, what's your website?...

Mordy: Oh, I should know this – good branding! unifybrandmarketing.com.

Katie: Awesome. All right. See you next time, everybody.

Katie & Mordy: Bye!

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