



Is Your Business Image A Victim of Chaos?

By Diana L. Garren

Many CEO's I have worked with say that one day they woke up to realize that their company looks nothing like the original vision. The business may have changed as a response to:

- Government regulations or deregulation as with telephone industry.
- Innovation in the Market Place such as Google.
- Customer Driven Trends in the Market Place such as quitting smoking.

Companies must change to meet the demands of doing business by diversifying products as well as research and development of new technology. Small businesses may make alterations to their original vision based on suggestions from individual customers, employees, investors and friends. It is a great idea to invite communication from customers and employees by having a suggestion box. But you must do more to accurately assess your business image.

Suggestions from customers can provide great ideas. Many businesses find that involving employees in growing the business is critical to success as well. However, employees with values, which do not match your own, will create inconsistencies in your business image. Well meaning friends, family, and investors will likely be honest about the way they see the business. When you put it all together, your business image may be an entire quilt of ideas pieced together, which may work well, or not.

Keep in mind, your reputation is your company's most valuable asset. This is why a hodge podge of ideas may create inconsistencies (chaos) in your business. A professional business image does not just happen. It must be developed and maintained. Don't be surprised if you can't see your business image clearly. Because you are close to the day-to-day operations, as well as financially and emotionally attached. Without regular maintenance, it will be very difficult to know how your business is actually perceived.

Think about a time in life when many of your friends were giving advice about a personal relationship. Then, one day the light bulb went on and you were able to see what they saw. However, you cannot take all advice given, nor wait for complaints to pile up. Your feedback could actually become a lack of ideal customers. Make an assessment of your business image every quarter. Doing this will positively affect your bottom line, year after year.

You may draft customer surveys or ask a consultant to do so, but your assessment must be organized to prevent chaos in your business image strategy. Surveys from an outside company allow employees and customers the freedom to speak honestly.

It is only through their honesty that you will obtain the information you need. The point is to make sure that your business culture, and processes align with the business image you desire to project.

I hope you start a new tradition to make business image maintenance to be a part of your overall business strategy. This will ensure a consistency that will allow you to achieve and maintain credibility as you grow.

Diana L. Garren of Atlanta, GA is one of the leading business image experts in the United States. For more information, you may visit TruePerceptions.com. In future issues, Ms. Garren will help your business tackle the many facets of image maintenance.