



A Solid Foundation for Success

By Diana L. Garren

To develop and maintain a consistent business image the first and most important task is to prepare a solid business foundation. Now I have never been invited to look at the foundation of anyone's new home. Instead, I am invited to the house warming, when all of the construction has been completed. Yet, everyone knows how important the foundation is to the structure of the house. Think about it, once the land was acquired, the builder's first project was to lay the foundation. It is the same with your business. Like a builder: the "land" you are building on is the idea. To implement the idea, you lay a foundation to 1) define the path the company will follow 2) support the company and 3) maintain its reputation. In a nutshell, a stable foundation

creates the market's desire to want to do business with you.

Let's look at five components of the Foundation of your business image:

- **Vision** – This is what the company is striving for, articulated as a written long-term objective of the company.
- **Purpose**– This is why the company exists.
- **Mission**– This summarizes the essence of your organization, and is a guiding set of ideas articulated, understood, and supported by the organization's stakeholders, board, staff, and clients.
- **Business Values** –These are the guiding principles your company functions under which all members hold in common and practice. Possible values include honesty, loyalty, and dependability. This component is the single key to success for many profitable companies.
- **Core Value** – Not to be confused with the business values/principles, the core value is what you are known for. It is the central product or service the company provides. It is the marketing message. Whenever anyone speaks of your company this will be what comes to mind.

Your foundation gives your company direction and stability. Without the foundation, there's no consistent business image. A foundation should be established before the business plan is written and the company doors are opened. Unfortunately, many folks with good business ideas move forward without the groundwork in place. They just figure writing down values and plans is just formal stuff they can get to later, after they buy supplies and get some customers. Time and again, lack of foundation creates inconsistencies that undermine the credibility of the business.

The good news is that unlike a house, it's never too late to go back and build the business foundation. Most organizational charts show the CEO on the top. It's more accurate to the way businesses function that the CEO is at the bottom, because good leadership supports the entire organization. A company can only operate as it is structured and lead. If you are not attracting the ideal customer, or customers are confused about what you do, or unhappy with your service...the right thing to do is go back and look at your foundation. Just don't put it off. For every bad experience a consumer has with your company, they will tell a minimum of 26 other people.

In practical terms, the foundation supports every day decision making. For instance, you want to hire on values first and skill set second. You can always sharpen someone's skills, but it's difficult to teach values. If a candidate's values do not align with that of your business, you are inviting inconsistencies into your business. When policies and procedures align with your business values/principles, all you do will be consistent. You'll also have a yardstick to measure whether your marketing sends a consistent message and look. Remember, you only have one

opportunity to make an outstanding first impression. A solid foundation will create outstanding customer service and satisfaction, inspiring your customers to refer you to others.

Someday, if I'm ever invited out to see "just" the pouring of concrete for a new home, I'll have no doubt about two things. First, I know that homeowner will put a great deal of care and attention into the structure. Secondly, I know they will become a benefit to the neighborhood. In the same way, a business, which prepares a solid foundation, will also enjoy consistency, credibility, and longevity.

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 building and maintenance.

