

# The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding: How to Build a Product or Service into a World-Class Brand

by Al Ries and Laura Ries

According to the father-daughter team of Al and Laura Ries, a brand name is a name (a Proper Noun in fact) in the mind of the consumer that conveys a single proposition about a particular product or service. The power in a brand name lies in its ability to positively influence purchasing behavior. In an increasingly cluttered information society, a powerful brand image can act as a guidepost for the consumer in making a purchase decision.

“What is accelerating this trend is the decline of selling. As a profession and as a function, selling is slowly sinking like the Titanic. Today, most products and services are bought, not sold. And branding greatly facilitates this process. Branding “pre-sells” the product or service to the user. Branding is simply an efficient way to sell things.”

A successful branding program, therefore, should differentiate your product or service from all the similar products or services out there.

“A successful branding program is based on the concept of singularity. It creates in the mind of the prospect the perception that there is no product on the market quite like your product.

Can a successful brand appeal to everybody? No. The same concept of singularity makes certain that no one brand can possibly have a universal appeal.”

In this book, the authors discuss ‘laws’ of branding that they have found to hold true across innumerable product and service offerings. Continuing the theme that Ries has championed in previous books they maintain that a major problem for companies is the temptation to extend a successful brand into other, sometimes only peripherally related, areas. (Two actual examples mentioned in the book are Harley-Davidson wine coolers and Heinz all-purpose cleaning vinegar.) Such brand extensions only serve to confuse the consumer and dilute the single message strength of the core brand.

Their twenty-two ‘laws’ of branding are:

1. The law of expansion - The power of a brand is inversely proportional to its scope “Marketers constantly run branding programs that are in conflict with how people want to perceive their brands. Customers want brands that are narrow in scope and are distinguishable by a single word, the shorter the better.”
2. The law of contraction - A brand becomes stronger when you narrow its focus
3. The law of publicity - The birth of a brand is achieved with publicity, not advertising - Ries and Ries maintain that advertising is best used to maintain a brand, but that it is very difficult and expensive to launch a new brand through advertising alone - the best way, they say, is to be first in a new product or service category, and reap the attendant publicity
4. The law of advertising - Once born, a brand needs advertising to stay healthy
5. The law of the word - A brand should strive to own a word in the mind of the consumer - “If you want to build a brand, you must focus your branding efforts on owning a word in the prospect’s mind. A word that nobody else owns.” Examples they give include: Mercedes = prestige; Volvo = safety; Kleenex = tissue; Xerox = copier; FedEx = overnight.
6. The law of credentials - The crucial ingredient in the success of any brand is its claim to authenticity and the best claim to authenticity is being the leading product or service in your category, because consumers assume that if it is a leading seller, it must be good: “Never

forget leadership. No matter how small the market, don't get duped into simply selling the benefits of the category. There are also the long-term benefits of leadership. Because once you get on top, it's hard to lose your spot. A widely publicized study of twenty-five leading brands in twenty-five different product categories in the year 1923 showed that twenty of the same twenty-five brands are still the leaders in their categories today. In seventy-five years, only five brands lost their leadership."

7. The law of quality - Quality is important, but brands are not built by quality alone. In fact, as the authors point out, most people have no idea as to the "real" quality of a product or service. Is a Rolex really better at keeping time than a Timex? How do you know?
8. The law of the category - A leading brand should promote the product or service category, not the brand - This may seem counter-intuitive, but the authors argue here that the best way for the brand leader to build sales is to promote the category, not their specific brand. This is a more effective way to build up overall market awareness and interest, and the brand leader will naturally benefit to a greater degree than other competitors, by virtue of their larger market share. (And when the overall size of the market is built up, then the leader is in a good position to increase market share still further.)
9. The law of the name - In the long run, a brand is nothing more than a name
10. The law of extensions - The easiest way to destroy a brand is to put its name on everything
11. The law of fellowship - In order to build the category, a brand should welcome other brands - see rule #8
12. The law of the generic - One of the fastest routes to failure is giving a brand a generic name - Generic names (i.e. names that describe the product or service category, such as "Wine Coolerz"), do not strongly position the product or service within the category, and are thus liable to confuse potential customers.
13. The law of the company - Brands are brands. Companies are companies. There is a difference. "The issue of how to use a company name is at the same time both simple and complicated. Simple, because the laws are so clear-cut. Complicated, because most companies do not follow the simple laws of branding and end up with a system that defies logic and results in endless brand versus company debates. Brand names should almost always take precedence over company names. Consumers buy brands, they don't buy companies. So when a company name is used alone as a brand name (GE, Coca Cola, IBM, Xerox, Intel), customers see these names as brands."
14. The law of subbrands - What branding builds, subbranding (i.e. brand extensions) can destroy. The name 'Chevrolet' used to stand for something. Now, what is it? A large, small, cheap, expensive car or truck.
15. The law of siblings - There is a time and a place to launch a second brand. "The key to a family approach is to make each sibling a unique individual brand with its own identity. Resist the urge to give the brands a family look or identity. You want to make each brand a different and distinct as possible."
16. The law of shape - A brand's logotype should be designed to fit the eye. Both eyes. The authors argue here that the ideal shape for a logotype or brand symbol is two and a quarter units wide and one unit high.
17. The law of color - A brand should use a color that is the opposite of its major competitor's.
18. The law of borders - There are no barriers to global branding. A brand should know no borders.

19. The law of consistency - A brand is not built overnight. Success is measured in decades, not years.
20. The law of change - Brands can be changed, but only infrequently and very carefully.
21. The law of mortality - No brand will live forever. Euthanasia is often the best solution.
22. The law of singularity - The most important aspect of a brand is its single-mindedness.