

Clothes make the Brand.

I'm a good candidate to be on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.

I'm not the same dreamboat I was in my 20's and 30's. Now in my mid 50's, my chest has fallen down to my midsection, my thinning hair has no particular style and my wardrobe could use some updating. My desk is a mess and my office needs a paintjob.

Although I'm totally professional, experienced and very good at what I do, my presentation is a bit flawed. And it's hurting my brand.

This brutally self-deprecating confession results from polling the members a Mastermind Group I recently joined (a roundtable of business execs who get together to share best practices, offer each other support, etc.).

Because I know them only a short while, I asked some of my fellow group members about their initial impressions of my personal brand.

One of them offered, "there's a disconnect between what you say you offer (consultative help for mid-sized companies trying to distinguish themselves) and the initial experience I had."

A second said, "You impress me as a really nice guy -- laid back, soft spoken and casual. This would be okay for coaching individuals and small businesses, but I'd expect a consultant for my business to be more charismatic -- someone who projects an air of leadership and absolute confidence."

A third added, "I worked with an etiquette coach who trained me how to present and dress better. Maybe that would be a good idea for you too."

Their comments were somewhat unsettling -- but also enlightening.

**To understand why Guy buys,
try looking through Guy's eyes.**

Building a successful brand is all about creating positive perceptions among prospects and friends who'll recommend you to others.

This means that they perceive you in the way you want to be perceived.

If they don't -- and there's any short-circuiting between what you're saying or showing and what they're hearing or seeing -- then there's a credibility problem.

And when this happens, you either have to change the message or address the problem.

So how do you find out how your message is being received?

Ask for feedback.

By asking relative strangers -- as in my case -- you'll get more realistic answers. Strangers have no vested interest in sparing your feelings or currying your favor. They'll call it like they see it.

Taking the temperature of the marketplace every now and then lets you know where adjustments have to be made. In my case, it's in my personal package.

Remember the girl with the zits?

I recall a cartoon from *MAD Magazine* that I saw when I was a kid. The storyboard shows a guy whose mouth waters upon seeing a girl with an incredible body from a far distance at the beach.

In frame two, she's a bit closer and we see that she's wearing a skimpy bikini.

As she gets even closer, he gets crazier and crazier with lust until, in the last frame, he sees she has horrible oozing zits all over her face and she smiles at him with a drooling open mouth of missing and crooked teeth.

Admittedly, the cartoon is mean spirited and in poor taste.

But isn't there some truth in it?

We're attracted to promises that we think are extraordinary.

We get excited by them and get our hopes up.

But, if along the way, there's just one flaw that doesn't live up to the promise we've come to expect, the whole experience becomes regrettable and one we'll want to quickly forget.

**You can't judge a book by its cover --
except that everyone does.**

We're a visual species. The way we make sense of our world is by categorizing everything we see. "That's an apple. That's a rock. I like that. I don't like that. He's tall. She's pretty." etc.

While the expression, 'you can't judge a book by its cover' may be true, the fact is, that is exactly what most of us do.

If the cover isn't attractive, we won't even bother to consider the book (no matter how much value we would've derived).

And, unfortunate as it may be, we're also going to judge you and your business by the initial visual presentation you make.

As good as your product or service may be -- as much as it can help the people who need it -- if the cover you present isn't remarkably appealing, they probably won't even bother to listen to the rest of your story.

Change the outside and it can change the inside.

The good news is that visual perceptions are not impossible to fix.

Renovate an antique car and you've got a rare and valuable 'one of a kind' beauty. Call up Bob Villa or Norm Abrams and "This Old House" just increased its value.

Put a new cover on a classic and it can become a best seller all over again.

Tomorrow morning I'm going to get a haircut. I'm going to call up the painter and I'm going to buy a few new suits.



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