

## **“Once we have branded, what do we get?”**

By Alan Brew

For a professional service firm such as Singer, Lewak, Greenbaum & Goldstein, this is an important question to ask.

While many branding firms and “gurus” extol the virtues and benefits of branding, not all approaches are the same and not all outcomes are equally as effective.

From our perspective, too many branding programs amount to the tail wagging the dog. Branding cannot a proxy for business strategy; it must be driven by business strategy. To succeed, we believe branding efforts must be deeply integrated into the foundational business strategies that arise out of client, competitor and market research and implemented through embedded processes and protocols. It is a belief that has helped many of our clients to grow and take leadership positions in their industries over our thirteen years in business.

Therefore, to answer your question more precisely, we would like to rephrase it as, “Once we have branded with RiechesBaird, what do we get?”

At RiechesBaird, branding is something we do after we have figured out exactly what it is we are trying to brand.

Brand development should be one of five linked strategic pillars, each playing a sequential role in a firm’s ability to compete effectively. Those pillars are strategy, differentiation, positioning, brand development and marketing and sales communications.

### **1. Strategy**

Corporate goals and strategic objectives are where branding begins. The goals of a branding program should align with the firm’s overall business strategy. Leaders should first answer the critical questions: What are we in business to do? What services do we provide? Where, along a continuum of value, do we provide significant benefits to our clients? What kind of clients do we need to acquire and focus on? What is our firm’s “end-game” or strategic goal?

### **2. Differentiation**

Robust differentiation strategies are the foundation of real competitive advantage. Yet, based on our research, most firms are seriously grappling with the concept of becoming—and staying—uniquely valuable to their clients. Prior to developing their positioning and branding approaches, companies should be able to understand the ways in which they are uniquely valuable today. That requires a firm to deliver value in a way that no other firm in their market segment can offer, something that no other firm does or has. And they must be able to look ahead to the future to determine what they will do to become matchless and “uncopyable.”



### 3. Positioning

Many people confuse positioning with branding and differentiation. Positioning is a separate marketing principle; it relates to a firm's placement on the client's mental map, in the context of all that client's known alternatives. Far too few companies investigate their market positions from their clients' points of view. That is vital information for any branding effort. Do your firm's strategic objectives anticipate the clients' future perspectives and needs? And is there some attractive, as yet unoccupied, position you could seize tomorrow?

### 4. Brand development

Branding is more about fulfilling an intangible emotional promise to the client than about a logo or color scheme. Professional services firms should be able to clearly articulate their covenant with the client—the promise that all of their business practices, services and messages (indeed, everything the firm says and does) will conform to client expectations as evoked by brand communications.

### 5. Marketing and sales communications

This piece of marketing strategy is the most familiar for many professional services firms. But many haven't really aligned their firms' resources to effectively communicate branding promises through carefully chosen images and messages. CMOs at professional services firms should consider which words and images most successfully convey all of the strategies articulated above.

So to answer your question specifically, here are seven hard deliverables you can expect after branding with RiechesBaird:

1. A clarified and agreed-on strategy and reasons for growth and consensus on how you will get there
2. A clear understanding of how you bring value to clients
3. A sharper focus on the market and what kind of clients you should be targeting and where you need concentrate your marketing resources
4. A consistently articulated point of relevance and distinction that will create preference for your firm among your identified client base, graduate recruits and potential new partners
5. Greater understanding internally of what you stand for, how you are different and where you are going
6. A context for managing growth—as you open new offices in new markets, you will have a way of looking, behaving and communicating that will ensure a completely aligned brand experience and delivery on your promise
7. More effective and consistent sales and marketing materials that are rooted in your value proposition



## **RiechesBaird: What we bring to SLGG**

- Business-driven approach to brand development
- A well-established and proven process
- Category experience
- Resources and capabilities to deliver
- Responsiveness—we are local
- Seasoned, senior professionals with a track record