

Now is the time to strengthen your brand!

You can get bread rolls on every corner. The same goes for snacks and sweet pastries, not to mention “coffee to go”. These are just more and more competitors for you. The key indicator “number of customers” is going to be even more important in the future. Ultimately, it is all about attracting more new customers into your store and maintaining the regulars. This is, of course, more easily said than done. Even the large supermarket chains are continuously growing with their in-house bakeries and everyone must have noticed by now the meticulous improvements being made to those outlets “attached” to supermarket checkout areas. Your own “brand” is therefore going to play a greater role than ever before. So what can be done to strengthen your own brand and thus differentiate yourself more from your competitors? This article will give you some answer to this question and some helpful tips.

Let’s get back to basics: When is a brand a brand? The popular fast-food restaurant chain “Nordsee” has stores nationwide and has been on the market in Germany for decades; it is without a doubt a brand with a core competency in both *fish snacks* and *lunchtime dishes*. “Starbucks” is likewise a brand - it is operational worldwide and stands primarily for *coffee*. Thanks to the internet and clever public relations, this brand was able to increase its recognition much faster than it was previously possible. In addition to national and international brands, there are also regional brands. For bakeries they are often characterised by the branch density and therefore being the “local store” for “baked goods”. Having a “brand” is particularly important if there are competitors in the immediate vicinity. It is what tips the scales from a consumer perspective in areas of high competition density. This does not mean, however, that

you do not have a chance as a “no name” - quite the contrary! **Strengthen your brand with your store’s external appearance:** Use outside labelling that indicates your products and is easily definable for consumers. “Bakery” sets the expectation for “bread and baked goods” and also “snacks” and “coffee to go”. International terms such as “Pain” (French) or “Cakes” are understood by most consumers and give an additional “trend impulse” for “new and exciting” products. **Important to note!** Consumer expectations for the range of products in a “bakery” is clearly defined! This means everything that has to do with bread, baked goods, snacks and coffee is feasible but no soups or hot dogs. Even the pickled herring rolls have little chance of success in a bakery in Germany as these are covered by the brands “Nordsee” or “Gosch”. The owner’s name, for example “Meyer’s”, does not give consumers any indication of the products sold. Field studies have shown that the expectation in such cases is rather for a bistro or a restaurant and not a bakery. So if the name is being used, the range of products should also be included, as in “Meyer’s Bread + Cakes”.



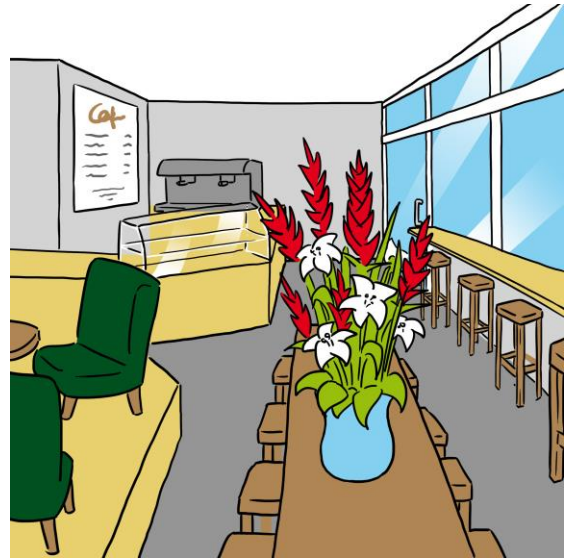
Outdoor Seating. “Parasols” stand for “gastronomy” or, in other words: “you can get something to eat and drink here”. In these times of changing consciousness, it is better to use “wooden tables” than those in metal as the former have a more positive image. Furthermore, metal tables

tend to dazzle in the sun heat up too quickly.

Use



“trendy table decorations”, for example small potted plants. With these you convey positive messages like “nature” and “back to the roots”. In contrast, “artificial flower arrangements” are out of fashion. **Company Logo** See if you can pep up your logo to make it appear more modern - without completely redesigning it. This can often be achieved by “subtle” graphical adjustments. **Strengthen your brand with the interior appearance:** Field studies have shown that a “feel-good atmosphere” is a key factor in strengthening your brand. Use positive colours that lift the mood and are connected to food. Make sure your seating is pleasant - heavy armchairs are out of favour. Chairs should also not be too heavy to move and should be comfortable and easy to clean. The easiest way to do this is to have “comfortable benches” along the walls of the seating area. Everyone has the reflex reaction to hold on to a table when standing up from it. Any topping over can be avoided by making sure the table have either four legs or a rounded foot.



Lighting. The topic of lighting can be summed up with *warm light and enough of it to be able to read*. Distinct seating areas for different target groups inspire customer loyalty and, in turn, strengthen your brand. For this reason, window boards and large communication tables are trending. Magazines and daily newspapers increase the customer length of stay and offer the potential for more spending. Background music and a comfortable temperature inside the store are essential. **Tips on music.** When choosing music, look for those tracks with as little bass as possible. Searches for terms like “lounge music” or “smooth” bring up plenty of matches online. Unless they somehow have an original connection to your brand, genres such as *heavy rock* or *heavy metal* should be left out...

Strengthen your brand through cleanliness. Toilets and cleanliness in general are far more important to customers in branding than one would “expect”. A dusty counter, sticky tables, dirty toilets and the inability to wash and dry one’s hands can ruin a previously positive brand. **Tip:** Make sure that the employees in charge keep a watchful eye open during their respective shifts.



Strengthen

your brand through your employees. Münster, Germany. The two employees in their mid-20s are sporting oversized earrings and their abundant tattoos are on show. They are representative of the current, colourful society. Laughter can be heard and the gestures of the employees convey a positive atmosphere. Even the replenishing of the food counters gives the impression of ease and joy in life. Gerrit and Saskia clearly enjoy their work. This authentic enjoyment and pleasure is proving popular with the customers. Those waiting in in the queue are politely told “I’ll be with you in just a moment” and they seem to take this message well. Field studies have proven that motivated and relaxed employees have a positive effect on customers, whose average spend in such stores is far higher than in those characterised by stress. Furthermore, the illness and fluctuation rates in reduced-stress level outlets are much lower. We can say that a “relaxed purchasing experience” has a real effect on positive brand development. **Qualification of employees.** Train your staff and make the awards visible for customers. This could be professional certifications or prizes for dedication in each month or year. Take part in competitions that award successful companies and highly-regarded employers. An example could be: *“this company was ranked as most popular employer in 2017”*. , employee prizes as well as other distinctions positively strengthen your

brand. Awards such as the “Golden Award for Small and Medium Businesses” or one for “sustainability” are just two further examples.



Strengthen your brand through customer contact. Make sure your customer communication is in tune with the spirit of the age. Simple phrases like “hello”, “what can I get you?” and eventually in Germany the informal “du” [you] are essential for a “growing” brand. Too formal greetings give the impression of an outdated brand. In the future, employees will be expected to make many more personal comments. A young employee could, for example, make the attentive observation “great purse”, using their social skills to build customer loyalty and ultimately increasing brand development. **Strengthen your brand through clothing.** Traditional clothing means traditional customers. In contrast, young, dynamic clothing targets “all audiences”, regardless of age. “Polo shirts” or “shirts” with, for example, bistro aprons cover the widest range and give the impression the brand is “growing”. **Strengthen your brand through teamwork.** The motto of one American chain is “teamwork - less me more we”. This chain has recognised that efficient teams increase job satisfaction and thus lay the foundation for a successful business. **Tips:** Organise regular team meetings that are focused on praise and motivation including, for example, concrete examples of how individual employee have helped their colleagues. Support team-building activities that also take place outside of

work. Increase your social competency by taking an active role as a problem solver. Build up trust by having regular, personal conversations, for example over a coffee. When fitting or renovating stores, create “spaces for movement” to ensure that processes and work flows can run smoothly. Design break rooms to be employee friendly. Reassess processes that have changed over the years and when doing so, make sure that these activities can realistically be completed. Suddenly you will have a positive “employer brand” and be flooded with job applicants. This type of differentiation from competition is called a “USP - Unique Selling Point”. A USP to be communicated would be, for example, that you are a popular employer.

Strengthen your brand through product expertise. The most common USPs are often perceived and communicated through special product features. This could be a particularly large number of raisins on your raisin buns or the especially creamy filling in your chocolate muffins. Reviews can also be included in this - “best cakes in town” is often seen overseas. Take a piece of paper and jot down the special features of the products you sell the most. In case you cannot find any special product features, it is advisable to seek professional advice. Describe and evaluate these characteristics in comparison to your competition. The characteristics you determine, which your competition does not have, are your first USPs. Note: From a consumer perspective, “hand-crafted production” is not a USP as this method of production is to be expected from “all bakers”. The same applies for a simple statement of “quality” - “all bakers” are expected to offer quality.

For stores located in foyer areas - convince customers with product presentation. As many surveys have shown, most customers are not aware of a bakery’s “brand” in the area in front of the checkouts. You attract the “attention” of customers primarily

through production presentation in the bread shelves and in the counters. When they are full, shelves and counters entice customers. In summary, the customers are interested in product availability, freshness and attractive offers.

Promotional plans. Plan your promotional strategies for the coming year and ensure they convey your significant USPs. The prevalence of these USPs will generate connections to the brand. Introduce innovations on a regular basis to stay “in trend”. Pay attention to stay within your core competencies (consumer expectations). This means sticking to the product groups “bread, rolls, cake, biscuits, snacks and hot drinks”. Extravagant desserts and ice-cream do not belong to this group as yet.

Strengthen your brand through advertisement boards. Only use boards in perfect condition. Broken or dirty boards give off negative messages. Place “appetising photos” on the poster to create a “desire” for the product. As a baker, you’re the expert for “delicious” breads and baked goods, snacks and coffee.

Use social networks for your brand. The fact that brands/companies like Starbucks are so successful is also due, in part, to the rapid communication possible over the internet. Use platforms such as Facebook, Instagram etc to not miss out on the zeitgeist. A planned, successive interplay between your USPs will place you in good stead for the future. Time to get started!

Author: Ludger Schlautmann is the director of GA-Trendagentur, who are primarily focused on researching consumer behaviour. In addition, Schlautmann guides companies in their implementation of trends.