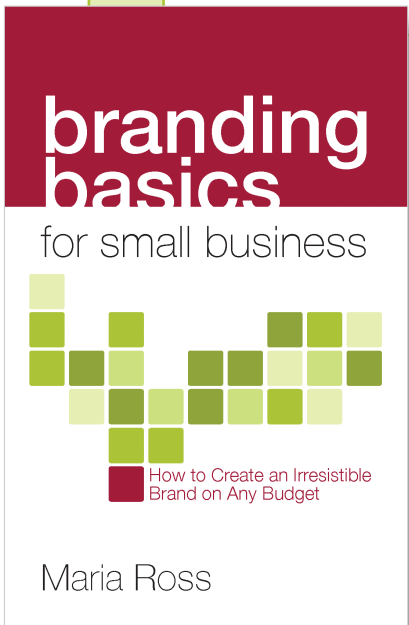


# Branding Basics for Small Business:

## How to Create an Irresistible Brand on Any Budget



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“**Maria Ross** makes it clear that **branding** isn’t just for big companies, rich companies, or consumer companies.

**It’s for your company.**

In a **single readable volume**, she shows you how to

**separate yourself from the pack and win.”**

— Marty Neumeier, Director of Transformation, Liquid Agency and author of *The Brand Gap* and *Zag*

# “Don’t launch without it!”

— Beth Schoenfeldt, Co-Founder, Collective-E

## about the book

Small businesses, start-ups and even non-profits enviously watch the big guys like Apple, Nike and Harley Davidson create loyal evangelists and attract repeat customers. They seem to be able to easily create new offerings that people clamor to buy and support. **What is it that they do that delights these tribes of loyal followers? And what can time and resource-strapped organizations learn from them? The secret is starting with a strong brand strategy.** Brand is more than just a pretty logo: it is your core promise, personality and reason for being. It’s your reputation and ultimately lives in your customers’ minds: they have the final say on your brand, not you. But you can influence this “mindshare” by intentionally communicating your brand promise not just visually through sharp design but verbally and experientially as well. And guess what? **Branding effectively and connecting with customers is not about how much money you have to spend, but about how clearly, consistently and relevantly you can communicate that message in everything you do.** It is about walking your talk and being authentic.

**Branding Basics for Small Business** is a fresh, practical guide to creating an irresistible brand on any budget. In Part 1, we demystify terms so you can make sense of the marketing maze and choose the right activities, consultants and agencies to grow your business. We also clarify what brand is and why it matters to your bottom line. In Part 2, we walk you step-by-step through a foolproof process for crafting a strong brand strategy on your own. This strategy serves as a compass for investing wisely and saves you time, money and headaches on marketing. And in Part 3, we show you how to apply the brand strategy tactically to every customer touchpoint so you can clearly and consistently influence your brand perception. This practical, sassy and entertaining easy-to-read guide uses real-life examples and branding tips from small businesses that have created innovative brands. **The book shows how organizations of any size and with any budget can create a winning brand to attract, delight and connect with their audiences for maximum success.**

## the audience

**Entrepreneurs, small business owners, independent agents and non-profit executives** who often wear many hats and deal with limited budget, time and resources. Their ranks include those who sell products or services to either consumers or businesses, or non-profits who need to generate awareness and attract more donors. **Marketing professionals** will also benefit from a refresher on brand strategy for their own organizations that must adapt to competition and changing customer needs.

**Branding Basics for Small Business** is a practical primer that will appeal to those who want to:

- Clearly and consistently **attract the right audience** at the right time with the right message
- Make **smarter and more effective** marketing—and business—**decisions** quickly and easily
- **Share the vision** more effectively with partners and employees—and guide them towards which partners and employees are the right fit
- **Craft company messaging and positioning** that connects with their desired customers
- **Save time and money** with designers, writers and contractors
- **Inspire customer loyalty** that generates buzz for your organization
- Break away from the pack to **grow revenue and market share.**



## about the author

Maria Ross' mission with Red Slice, her branding and marketing consultancy, is to help clients engage, inform and delight their audience. A born storyteller, she has over 16 years of experience advising organizations on how to tell the right story to the right people at the right time. Early in her career, Maria was a management consultant with Accenture, advising Fortune 1000 companies on communication and training initiatives. Maria has crafted winning strategies for Discovery Networks, Monster.com, Business Objects and Microsoft as well as Silicon Valley start-ups. Her experience spans both the client and agency sides, giving her a unique vantage point. Now, she builds brands, crafts messaging, and coaches on marketing strategy for solopreneurs, start-ups and even large enterprise clients. In addition, Maria volunteers her brand expertise pro-bono to non-profits via Taproot Foundation and is a sought-after speaker for conferences and workshops. In her free time, Maria is an actress and a published food and wine writer. Her unique creative talents combined with her business savvy enable her to approach branding and marketing in an innovative way. Maria earned a B.S in Marketing, with a minor in Spanish from Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, Bloomington.

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## praise for *branding basics*

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"As someone who has worked with thousands of small businesses, I have seen a lack of a clear, focused brand strategy cause people to waste time, energy, money and flounder in the marketplace. Never fear, Maria breaks down branding so that anyone with a business, or who is thinking of launching a business, can understand why an investment in branding is make or break for creating a thriving business. Don't launch without it!

—Beth Schoenfeldt, Co-Founder, Collective-E

"In today's social economy, every business is a brand, regardless of size. And when Ross states that every new hire is a brand ambassador, she proves unequivocally that she 'gets it'. The question small business owners must ask is if they want to be the ones controlling that brand or the ones left to salvage it. In this book, you'll learn how to nail down your brand before you spend valuable resources on marketing and people that simply don't fit your company's core values. You'll learn how to attract the right people by bleeding who you are from inside the organization out to draw in only the most qualified leads. If your brand is the mindshare that you hold with your audience, then it's up to you to tell your story from every customer touchpoint. Your brand is more than just a logo. It's everything you are and the ticket to positive ROI.

—Lisa Barone, Chief Branding Officer, Outspoken Media

"Such a wide and clear scope on what makes successful brands so...successful. Great coverage. And great inspiration to be true to your values and think big."

—Danielle LaPorte, creator of WhiteHotTruth.com, lead author of *Style Statement: Live By Your Own Design*

## Highlights from *Branding Basics for Small Business*

### Maria Ross On What Brand Means to Your Business:

“In a way, good branding is an art form, and like any art it has the power to inspire, delight, anger, provoke, motivate, and entertain.”

“Brand is... your company’s reputation, personality, and reason for being – all rolled into one package. Brand communication is like a three-legged stool: it is expressed not only visually (in your logo, design, or colors), but verbally (in the words you use or copy you write), and experientially as well. An ad may tell me your company is fun, convenient, and easy to do business with, but if your clerks don’t smile at me or your online checkout process is akin to taking a college entrance exam, then I’m going to doubt those brand promises.”

“Brand clarity attracts customers and brand consistency makes them stick around.”

### Maria Ross On Making Smarter Marketing Investments:

“If you’re guided by a strong Brand Strategy, you will ultimately spend less money by doing the right things, rather than wasting money on the wrong things.”

“If you don’t have a grounded Brand Strategy, you’re all over the place, grasping at whatever new trend or opportunity is in front of you on any given day. I call this ‘performing random acts of marketing.’”

“If you don’t know who and where your buyers are, you’ll spend time and money on the wrong things and end up poking your eye out with a sharp stick in frustration because nothing will work.”

### Maria Ross On Branding “Inside and Out:”

“PR can’t just come along and make you thinner, prettier, or more popular if the fundamentals aren’t in place – if the brand promise isn’t met. Many CEOs think they can operate poorly, slap a coat of public relations over everything, and their reputation will be magically transformed.”

“Your mission and vision create the framework and inspiration your organization and its employees need to be successful. An old Japanese proverb eloquently states the important symbiotic relationship between vision and action: Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.”

“If you can’t delight and inspire your employees, you won’t be able to delight and inspire customers.”

“If brand as we’ve defined it is indeed the sum total of all the customers’ experiences, ads they’ve seen, messages they’ve heard, even colors or designs that have subconsciously influenced their perception, then branding is everyone’s responsibility in the organization.”

“Thinking through every touchpoint the customer has with you is a great way to find those tiny moments that can make you ‘buzz-worthy.’ Companies that live their brand inside and out do this well.”

### Maria Ross On Social Media:

“Social media is not a brand or marketing strategy. It is part of your marketing strategy —which in turn is rooted in a strong Brand Strategy.”

“In these days of social media, people can now expose brand identity crises to millions of people with the click of a mouse. Even the smallest misalignment can undo what months and years of brand marketing have promised.”

### Maria Ross On Customers:

“Brand is the “mind share” you get from customers. You’ll be in a much more powerful place for long-term success if you can capture the mind share that leads to the wallet share, rather than propping up short-term results with random gimmicks, discounts, or specials that don’t invite ongoing loyalty.”

“If your brand is so clear and concise it gets their attention, then you’re on your way. Then the brand provides the “air cover” necessary to make all your other marketing activities effective.”

“Think about your ideal customer, not your average customer. “Average” will dilute your answer too much, leading to generic, vanilla communication that won’t appeal to anyone. When you try to be everything to everyone, you end up being ‘nothing to nobody’”

### Maria Ross On Small Business Opportunity:

“Being small means you’re close to your customers and all decisions stem from you. Being nimble and having a small employee count can help you embrace that strength and build your brand right from the start.”

“You might be small, but you can think big. Use brand as the opportunity to create a mission-driven organization that adds something to the world and to the lives of those you touch: customers, employees, partners and even the community at large.”

# Small Businesses Today: Research Highlights

## The Role of Small Businesses in the Economic Recovery

“Small businesses create most of the nation’s new jobs, employ about half of the nation’s private sector workforce, and provide half of the nation’s (nonfarm) GDP. In today’s economy, they are the engine of job creation.”

“Innovation and entrepreneurship will be crucial to the nation’s economic revival and competitiveness in a global marketplace. A 2008 update by Zoltan Acs, William Parsons, and Spencer Tracy to David Birch’s seminal research of the 1980s and 1990s on “gazelles,” or fast-growing, high-impact firms, found that these firms account for almost all of the growth in private sector employment and revenue in the economy.”

“Research continues to show that small businesses and entrepreneurs will play important roles in the economy’s eventual recovery, through their flexibility and ability to create innovative solutions, new industries, and jobs.”

“Another survey showed that, while entrepreneurs are cautious, many believe managing their business through the recession has made them better business owners. Many small business owners are awaiting signs that the economy is improving, while they look for ways to streamline their firms’ operations, paying closer attention to their balance sheets. Looking forward, small businesses will be a large part of moving the economy ahead as entrepreneurs continue to spur new innovation and create employment.”

(Source: “The Small Business Economy: A Report to the President”, United States Small Business Administration, 2009)

## Small Business Impact on the Economy

The estimated 29.6 million small businesses in the United States:

- Employ just over half of the country’s private sector workforce
- Hire 40 percent of high tech workers, such as scientists, engineers and computer workers
- Include 52 percent home-based businesses and two percent franchises
- Represent 97.3 percent of all the exporters of goods
- Represent 99.7 percent of all employer firms
- Generate a majority of the innovations that come from United States companies

(Source: U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, September 2009 as cited by [http://www.score.org/small\\_biz\\_stats.html](http://www.score.org/small_biz_stats.html))

## Small Business Survival Rates

Small Business Openings & Closings in 2008:

- There were 627,200 new businesses, 595,600 business closures and 43,546 bankruptcies.
- Seven out of 10 new employer firms survive at least two years, and about half survive five years.
- Findings do not differ greatly across industry sectors.

(Sources: U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, September 2009 *Survival and Longevity in the Business Employment Dynamics Database, Monthly Labor Review, May 2005. Redefining Business Success: Distinguishing Between Closure and Failure, Small Business Economics, August 2003; cited on [http://www.score.org/small\\_biz\\_stats.html](http://www.score.org/small_biz_stats.html).)*