

What Makes Your Brand, and How do You Protect it?

Instant recognition. Lasting beauty. Value for the money spent. These are the basic qualities a strong wallcovering brand should evoke when a customer sees or thinks of it. And as we all know, a poor brand can do just the opposite. As a designer, wallpaper retailer, or contractor, a combination of the products you work with and the service you provide reflect your own brand as a vendor. Building and cultivating a strong brand can protect you from losing business to local and online competitors.

You have likely heard people say that to succeed in business, “It is critical to protect your brand.” But what exactly is “your brand?”

At its most basic level, your brand isn’t a name, logo, or tag line; it’s *your promise* to your customers. Your brand conveys what people can expect when they come to you for wallcoverings. (Your name, logo and tag line are part of your *brand identity*, and are meant to instantly evoke the quality of products and services that you offer.) The concepts behind what make your brand “good” or “bad” can be elusive, because they are entirely based on the perception of your customers. These perceptions can change dramatically from one day to the next. But don’t panic - while you can’t entirely dictate what people think of your business, you do have control over certain factors.

An obvious way to protect your brand is to deal in high-quality and high-value wallcovering products. If someone buys wallpaper that turns out to be poorly designed or does not hold up to age and use, they’ll not only steer clear from that specific wallpaper brand, they’ll think poorly of you for having sold it to them. This is not to say that you must stock only top-tier brands at the highest prices. In fact, there are many great wallcovering brands with a sweet spot in the low- to mid-price range. Having a good mix of high-end and mid-level lines will help you convey high value and quality for the prices consumers pay.

The service you provide before, during, and after a sale reflects directly on your brand as a retailer or designer. It’s important to take the time to learn what people are looking for before giving any design advice. Make sure your customers know you’re as interested in their satisfaction as they are. They’ll remember that level of service.

Another critical step in protecting your brand is to continue your relationship with customers beyond the point of sale. Reaching out after a few months lets people know that you care about their satisfaction with what they bought. It also gives you a chance to collect feedback regarding specific brands and designs. If you start to notice a consistently negative response to a specific wallcovering brand or style, you’ll know to stop carrying it. Finally, periodic touch points with customers over time will help them think of you when they think of wallcoverings. More importantly, this will convey that you are not just a retailer, but a partner in making their home or business a beautiful place to be. This, ultimately, is at the essence of what makes your brand a strong one.



For more advice on maximizing the value of your wallcoverings supply chain, visit the Wallcoverings Association Web site, at <http://www.wallcoverings.org>, where you'll find even more resources. For quick ideas on how to sell more wallpaper, check out the WA retailer Web page, at <http://retailercentral.wallcoverings.org/>. We also recommend you subscribe to *On A Roll – Highlights of Wallcoverings' Latest and Greatest Consumer Press*. It's free to subscribe (email info@wallcoverings.org) and allows you to see the latest media trends and stories that your customers are viewing today.

WA's column in the July 2010 Paint & Decorating Retailer Magazine
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