Brand Research: The 4 Metrics Marketers Need to Know

Your brand is more than just a name, logo, or tagline; it's what sets you apart from the competition. And in order to stand out in today's crowded marketplace, you have to recognize that what sets you apart is one of your most valuable assets.

Positive or negative attitudes about your brand determine your brand value. Knowing how your brand is perceived lets you stay aligned with business objectives and company values. This insight helps you know when to course correct, take advantage of momentum, or connect spikes in brand health with marketing activity.

To effectively keep tabs on your brand, you need a well-crafted brand tracking research program. And even though the issues that require customized tracking research for each brand may be different, there are some core measurements that every brand should be monitoring to stay on top of their game.

1. Awareness

Do IT pros know your brand?

Awareness is the most critical brand metric companies should be tracking–it's widely considered the bellwether for marketing impact! A good brand tracking study measures awareness on both an unaided basis ("When you think of PC security software, which brands come to mind?") and an aided basis ("Which of the following PC security providers are you aware of?").

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Aided awareness is a totally valid measure of brand health, but many marketers set their sights on unaided awareness so they can be "top of mind" in the market. Being top of mind is a major competitive advantage, since your brand is more likely to pop into the head of an IT pro when they start thinking about making a purchase.

But there's a caveat: It can be extremely challenging for smaller brands to break through the clutter and beat out major players to become top of mind. What's this mean? Set realistic expectations if you're running a survey on unaided awareness. Remember that it takes time to build top of mind awareness through repeated exposure and consistent delivery of a good product.

2. Familiarity & Usage

Do IT pros understand your brand?

It's not enough to just have brand recognition—it's important to have brand knowledge too. Once you've established that an IT pro knows who you are, you should ask them how much they know about you: Have they just heard of your brand? How much do they know about what you do? Are they using your products?

Numerous studies over the last 50 years have demonstrated that brand familiarity can (and usually does) drive brand selection. That's because a familiar brand can be like your favorite pair of jeans: they're comfortable, always seem to fit perfectly, and make you feel confident.

The more an IT pro knows about your brand, the more relevant you become for their future purchases—building familiarity is essential for initial purchase consideration, and ultimately current usage can drive re-purchase and renewals going forward.

3. Brand Perceptions

What do IT pros think of your brand?

We all know a brand is about more than just a name. Your brand's image changes over time as IT pros interact with your company through purchases, conversations, and marketing. Which means this image is formed by tangible benefits (e.g. price, product features, service offerings) and emotional responses (trust, customer service experience) to create a complex perception.

Since some perceptions are more effective than others at promoting further engagement, an effective measurement of your brand perception (and use of that insight!) requires:

1. Understanding how important various brand characteristics are to IT pros
2. Measuring how closely your brand is aligned with these desired characteristics
3. Monitoring how closely your competitors' brands are aligned with these characteristics
4. Tailoring marketing efforts to drive alignment with the characteristics you want to own.

Of course, positive associations (and experiences!) can influence an IT pro. So be sure to ask about the good characteristics alongside the bad. And since you can't be all things to all people, brand tracking research can help you prioritize which attributes matter the most and which ones you can reasonably own (or steal from the competition).

4. Recommendation

How loyal are IT pros to your brand?

The ultimate win for a company is when they create a brand advocate who evangelizes their brand to other IT pros. Purchase decisions can be influenced by factors beyond your control (budget, timing, etc.), but recommendations can be freely given by IT pros. Because of this, many companies view recommendation as the ultimate measure of brand health.

A popular method for understanding recommendation is the Net Promoter Score (NPS®), a loyalty metric developed by Fred Reichheld. There are pros and cons to NPS that marketers have debated since its debut, but many companies have standardized on NPS since it's easy to understand, track, and compare to competitors.

Regardless of whether you dissect your brand's recommendation scores with NPS or just read them at face value, this metric can clue you in to just how much loyalty and engagement you are driving in the market.

Bonus Brand Tracking Tips

Frequency: In general, brand tracking should be conducted annually, but this decision largely hinges on how frequently your product is purchased, how much marketing activity you have going on, how competitive your industry is, and how stable your brand is.

Depth: We've outlined what we believe to be the most critical brand metrics to include in a brand study, but there are plenty more you may want to measure (purchase consideration, message recall, etc.). To keep data quality up and research costs down, we recommend carefully focusing your brand tracker to measure only the metrics that will impact your brand and marketing strategy. Aim for no more than 15 questions that can return rich feedback without exhausting your respondents.

Consistency: Once you design your brand tracking measures, stick with them. Even minor changes to a brand survey can impact your ability to reliably compare results year over year and leave you asking yourself, "Are these data shifts due to market changes or because we messed with the question?" So take the time to nail the design up front to ensure it will survive the test of time.

To sum it all up...

Brand measurement systems come in all shapes and sizes and run the gamut of budget ranges. *But brand tracking doesn't have to be complicated.*

Even just these four metrics can inform your positioning strategies and guide your marketing efforts in powerful ways. Ultimately, these metrics will help you cultivate brand loyalty with IT pros, and help your company stay upright while riding the waves of the ever-fluctuating marketplace.

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