



The Laso Corporation  
*Bringing People Together*

*Laso eLetter*

February 2008: Vol. 8 - Issue 2

**Dear Laurie,**

Is your IT department a brand? Better yet, can your brand link to the corporate brand? I say yes, and that's why this month's newsletter focuses on branding and marketing IT.



As part of a CEO organization called Vistage, I had the pleasure of attending a talk by local author and marketing consultant, Steve Yastrow. Steve shared many of the excellent ideas from his book, *Brand Harmony*.

Branding seems to be the big buzz out there. Believe it or not, I am not only seeing it as a topic for seminars but also hearing about it at Super Bowl parties. People are branding everything these days, even themselves. This started me thinking about discussing branding with you, my clients, and I thought it would make sense to talk about branding an IT department, though the ideas discussed here could just as easily apply to HR or accounting.

Vickie Austin continues her book reviews extraordinaire with a review of Steve's latest book called, *We: The Ideal Customer Relationship*.

#### In This Issue

[A message from Laurie](#)

[About Us](#)

[The Value of Your IT Project](#)

[What's Your Brand?](#)

[Logos and Taglines](#)

[Between Me and Thee - A Book Review](#)

[Women in Business Seminar](#)

#### What's Your Brand?

The In's and Out's of Marketing an IT Department

**Should marketing stay in the marketing department?**

"I have enough to do managing IT," you might answer.

You're never too busy to pay attention to marketing, or more specifically, branding, says Steve Yastrow, a marketing and branding consultant and author of *Brand Harmony: Achieving Dynamic Results by Orchestrating Your Customer's Total Experience* (Tom Peters Company Press, 2003).

**"Everything is marketing,"** asserts Steve. Why? "As far as a customer is concerned, any interaction with a product is a 'marketing' interaction. Advertising, brochures, direct mail and other sales pitches have no special privilege when it comes to helping customers form opinions about a product." In IT you really have two customers: internal customers like the accounting department, and external customers, like those who use your company's website.

"A brand," explains Yastrow, "is not simply the message a marketer intends to send to a customer. A brand is the message the customer

She did an amazing job of distilling the info in the book into a clear summary as well as helping us understand the role of the Ideal Customer Relationship in all our business interactions. AND . . . Vickie did this with very little time since I dropped off the book to her as she was packing for a little R & R in Phoenix, saying, "I need this last week." Great job, Vickie!

Finally, in Tech Corner I did an interview myself with Jim MacLennan. I had seen some of Jim's blogs on LinkedIn and thought that the idea of measuring value of IT projects would work nicely with the concept of branding an IT department.

I hope you find this issue worthwhile for either yourself or the IT folks in your lives. We'd welcome your thoughts and comments on what branding has done for you in your company.

**Sincerely,**  
[Laurie Swanson](#)  
The Laso Corporation

perceives about the product."

What do your IT customers perceive about your IT product?

"Brand Harmony requires you to see the beauty and importance of even the simplest and most mundane points of contact with your customers."

### **The ingredients of Brand Harmony**

"If," as Yastrow says, "the raw ingredients used in the creation of Brand Harmony are the experiences customers have with products," then the IT department is in a unique position to contribute to a profitable corporate brand identity. According to Yastrow, creating brand harmony requires a focus on execution, a getting-things-done mentality that fits perfectly with the business technology mission.

Brand harmony makes front-line marketers out of people who answer the phones in tech support, proofreaders who check product manuals, software engineers who fix glitches in the order tracking system, or web designers who troubleshoot navigation breakdowns.

Senior IT executives should make it their business to understand what Yastrow calls a company's "brand essence" --an organization's DNA -- and then help their team grasp that essence and visualize how their day-to-day responsibilities continually shape it. Ask your people: What do we do as a company? What do we stand for? Why is it important? How does our work here in IT reflect the overall company brand?

An IT department filled with people who believe in their company's brand and know how to reinforce it at every point of customer interaction, will go a long way toward improving profitability.

### **Build a bold brand for IT**

As you nurture an IT work environment that contributes to brand harmony, you can also build a bold brand for your department within your company. Building this "brand within a brand" will raise your profile beyond the unsung hero status afflicting many IT departments.

In an article on corporate department branding for the October 2007 issue of *Forward Magazine*, author Samar Enayeh urges department executives to "think, talk, and reason as your target market does. . . in terms of bottom line and profitability. . . when you make plans for your department, they should be directed at achieving overall business goals as well as [your department] goals."

Steve Yastrow's *Brand Harmony* offers a practical model for taking this mindset and making it work on a daily basis. He suggests two

#### Candidates Of The Month

\*Candidate #44332

**SAP Functional SD Analyst**-Her boss said that he has worked with a lot of SD functional people in his career, and she is the Best. 8 years of SAP SD, pricing, sales order, billing with integration to MM, FI, and taxes. Strong in the distribution, retail and manufacturing sector. Master's Degree.

\*Candidate #28306

**SAP IT Manager** with strong financial and sales and distribution systems experience. Considers himself to be a great mentor to his team, has supervised offshore developers, excellent experience running successful, large projects. He has experience within supply chain, healthcare and retail industries.

\*Candidate #811

### AS/400 Programmer/ Analyst-

This is someone that Laso has worked with for many years. He has 15+ years of AS/400. RPG400 and Java experience supporting logistics, transportation, edi, bar coding, labeling, warehousing, order entry and invoicing applications. He also worked with Websphere Development Studio and has managed small projects from start to finish.

### About Laso

Laso has been in business for over 12 years and Laurie Swanson have been recruiting now for almost 20 years!

**Laso is committed to being your experts in helping you build your Information Technology teams with the best people available.**

These could be people who are experts at implementing or integrating ERP packages like SAP, Oracle, JD Edwards, Data Warehousing technologists, AS/400 and certified e-commerce and web developers (Microsoft and Java), Enterprise and Solution Architects, Business Analysts, and Project Managers.

Laso has also grown along with our clients to incorporate our stellar search skills in the sourcing and placement of Management and Executive Professionals in Information Technology, Operations, Finance and Human Resources along with providing additional business consulting services as needed.

### What's it Worth? How to measure the value of your IT project

questions as a starting point for companies to ask themselves that IT departments and even individuals can readily adapt for branding:

- How do we define success for our product?
- What customer actions will help us reach that success?

Others might consider the question:

- What orchestrated set of interactions on our part are most likely to encourage customers to think positively about our department and our products?
- How do we want our customers to feel about their experience with our department and the products we develop for them?

The answers to these questions, found through research, observation, customer interviews, and extensive brainstorming, will help provide an accurate picture of your department's desired brand perception and how you can build it through customer interactions.

### A way of life

Whether it's external or internal, brand harmony is not a one-time project. It's a way of life for everyone in business. As Yastrow makes clear, "Creating Brand Harmony isn't a task you can check off a list. It's a way of doing business that starts today and continues forever.

### The History of...Logos and Taglines

*This series, which focuses on the history of a specific industry or local company, will be included in the next several newsletters. This month we are looking at the history of logos and taglines.*

### They go back farther than you'd think.

IBM's horizontal stripes suggest swift business solutions. Hefty's clean, solid letters mirror the strength and convenience of its household plastic bags. The phrase, "Advancing Wellness," reflects Hospira's mission as a pharmaceutical and medication delivery company.

Logos and taglines are two of the most visible tools of branding: one symbol, one phrase, that distill a company's brand identity. They work together as a memorable communication to customers, employees, vendors, shareholders and the general public.

IBM's website archives lead visitors from the ornate, rococo letters forming the logo of "Big Blue's" predecessor, International Time



While searching through some of my information in

LinkedIn, I came across a blog by Jim MacLennan, Executive Director of Information Technology for a global manufacturer in the Chicago area. I called Jim, and he kindly agreed to meet me for lunch and let me pick his brain about how an IT department assigns, measures, and then ties back to the bottom line the value of their projects.

Jim shared with me a straightforward approach to something that could get very complicated. To measure IT value, you need to:

**1. Align IT projects to business strategies.** This is not always a black and white equation, says Jim. Some companies may communicate executive-level strategies and goals, and how a department can further those is plain, while in other organizations the link to corporate goals may not be as clear. But however you can, make sure that every project your team undertakes is tied to a business initiative. These initiatives are best related to revenue growth, productivity, cost reduction, compliance, product development, and business continuity.

**2. Track the relative amount of spending for your IT projects** against these company objectives. You can find information on IT spending from research groups like Gartner or by

Recording Company, to the 1972 IBM redesign that has remained essentially the same through today. But beyond the history of individual companies, how did logos and taglines make their start?

The Greeks were among the first in recorded history to use single letter monograms; archeologists have unearthed early Greek coins bearing the monograms of rulers. The single letter designs evolved into marks of two or more intertwined letters. In the thirteenth century, merchants began using the designs as trademarks to distinguish one trade from another, such as goldsmiths from stone masons.

Print advertising began in the seventeenth century with newspaper classifieds that simply described products and listed prices. But the technological advances of the late nineteenth century introduced illustrations and color into advertising, and logos and simple taglines became part of advertising's more artistic style. Thomas Barratt, sometimes called the father of modern advertising, used elegant typography and fine art illustrations to promote the quality and purity of Pears Soap.

The 1950's postwar prosperity brought logos and taglines to the forefront of modern marketing. More brand names created a greater need for businesses to set themselves apart from their competition, and companies began to invest in professionally designed logos and taglines.

Now, logos are far more than the letters of an ancient monogram -- they are vital graphic elements whose color, texture, size and shape support the essence of a brand. Taglines are created to ensure synergy with the logo, and their visual font and styling follow the logo design as well.

Each logo and tagline, no matter how well designed or written, is only as good as the delivery of its implied promise. Take a moment to consider what your corporate logo and tagline offer, and commit to what you and your colleagues can do each day to make that offer reality.

**Between Me and Thee: Why "We" Makes an Ideal Customer Relationship - A Book Review**

a simple Q & A with folks you know within the industry (for example, an IT budget of 1.5% of revenue is typical for manufacturing firms). Or, it may make more sense to look at line items more directly impacted by IT such as Cost of Goods Sold or SG&A versus revenue.

**3. Determine if your IT department is working on the right projects well.** According to Jim, this can be a fundamental challenge for measuring IT's value. IT is often seen as "going well" when it prevents bad things from happening. Success is absence of disaster versus gain on the bottom line. So how do you determine if IT is taking on the right tasks the right way? Some ideas might be:

- Use metrics to show costs savings, time savings, etc.
- Ask the business side: This works especially well when someone in IT is also very strong with the business side, like a corporate relationship manager or a strong project leader.

The idea of measuring IT project value is tied directly to our article in this issue on branding an IT department. The more you tie your projects into the overall company brand, the more IT value is apparent to all levels within an organization.

*Jim MacLennan is Executive Director of IT at a large manufacturing company in the Chicago area. His blog*

To base a marketing "how-to" book on the principles of famous philosopher Martin Buber takes chutzpah. For an author to blend business advice with the philosophy of a theologian may seem paradoxical-even heretical. Yet the deep commitment to people that Buber espoused in his work gleams like a reflection in the mirror when Steve Yastrow shares his own philosophy of customer service in his latest book *We: The Ideal Customer Relationship*.

Mr. Yastrow, a Chicago-based marketing consultant whose clients include Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, Cold Stone Creameries and The Tom Peters Company, follows his previous book *Brand Harmony* with this treatise on building customer relationships. He invites the reader to answer the question, "When thinking of their relationship with you, ... how many of your customers think 'we' and how many of your customers think 'us and them'?" What follows is a process for coming over to the customer's side of the table.

The concept of the book was born, Mr. Yastrow tells us, in a parking lot at Chicago's Midway Airport. He was just about to turn off his car when he heard the phrase, "Focus on engagement, not experience." He'd been listening to an audiotape discussion of Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, a landmark work written in 1927. He rewound the tape and listened again. Suddenly, he says, his world shifted.

That set the framework for *We* and the book begins with the importance of encounters, the building blocks of any relationship. Mr. Yastrow demonstrates the difference between a transaction and an encounter: an encounter is collaborative rather than a mere trading of goods or services. A valued encounter can be broken down into three elements: engagement in the moment, conversation and uniqueness.

The books written about being engaged in the moment are too numerous to mention and I'm surprised Mr. Yastrow doesn't reference here the world of Eastern thought. That glazed look, the jittery knee or a tapping finger, that darting glance someone makes over your shoulder as if to see who else might be in the room-all of these are instances of someone not being present. But to be present is easier said than done.

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A Laso Poll

Tell us about your experiences with branding. [Click here](#)

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I applaud Mr. Yastrow when, alluding to conversation as the second element of an encounter, he encourages the demise of the "thirty-second commercial," the practiced sound-byte, a rapid spewing of what you do, what you're all about and how someone can help you. Outside of the context of listening, we agree, it's just noise.

The author's insight into uniqueness, the third element of an encounter, is startling. He shares that chimpanzees and humans share 98 percent of our genetic material-and we share 99.5 percent of our DNA with other humans. That leaves the last one-half of one percent in order to be unique. If this science is to be believed, then we have a scant decimal point of a percentage to determine what makes us-and more importantly, our clients-different. We yearn to be identified, and acknowledged, as unique.

Mr. Yastrow admits that getting an entire organization to build relationships over time is a feat. Yet it's a process that can be woven into an organization's fabric, often using technology as a tool (witness the success of companies like Netflix and Amazon). *We: The Ideal Customer Relationship* offers insights on how to take this philosophy from ideal to actionable tactics, and he has the case studies to support them.

I couldn't help but think of how Mr. Yastrow's premise mirrors not only Dr. Buber's text but also the Prayer of St. Francis: "O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand ...." If we could only listen to each other the way we want to be listened to, the world-and our businesses-would flourish and prosper in a way that would be unrecognizable. Mr. Yastrow has given us a book to help us do just that.

*Vickie Austin is a business and career coach and is founder of [CHOICES Worldwide](#) based in Wheaton, with offices in Chicago and Phoenix. She can be reached at [vaustin@choicesworldwide.com](mailto:vaustin@choicesworldwide.com).*

WOMEN IN BUSINESS SEMINAR

## Creating the Good Old Girls' Network

The Women in Business committee of the Wheaton Chamber of Commerce is thrilled to invite you to a half-day professional development seminar entitled:

### **"Creating the Good Old Girls' Network: Leveraging Your Success in the Business World"**

**11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday, March 7, 2008  
Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites, 150 S. Gary Avenue, Carol Stream,  
IL**



Featuring "Work and the Female/Male Deal" by keynote speaker  
Linda McCabe,  
Former owner of a scrap metal business that she took from \$36,000  
to \$1 million in sales.

This half-day session includes a luncheon, keynote address, and  
your choice of 2 out of 3 breakout sessions, including:

- "The Art of Diplomacy: Selling Your Ideas So They Can Hear You" with Kris Coryell, Ph.D., consultant and former lobbyist for Pfizer, Inc.
- "Negotiating Your Way to the Top" with Georgia Dudley, president and founder, Empowering Women Network (EWN)
- "Moving Past Gender: Tips for Playing in the Boys' Fort" with Jan Summers, VP of quality and Lean Six Sigma, Life Fitness

#### **Also includes:**

- Chocolate and Coffee Bar (an absolute MUST for women in business) and presentation by Jennifer Wilken, Edward Jones representative, sharing from the American Association of University Women (AAUW) study of the wage gap
- Panel discussion, "Creating the Good Old Girls' Network Through Your Golden Rolodex" with Vickie Austin, business

and career coach and founder of CHOICES Worldwide

- Sponsor displays
- Door prizes and gifts for each attendee

Cost for the event: \$79 for Wheaton Chamber members, \$90 for non-members.

To register, call 630-668-6464 or visit the Chamber's Web site at [www.ewheaton.com](http://www.ewheaton.com) and click on "Events."

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