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Is Your Brand In Adolescence?

It happens to the savviest business owners and brand champions. One day you wake up and that little darling brand that you have nurtured since birth or early brand-hood has grown into an entity you barely recognize.

The brand that you knew and loved and that bore the markings of your careful stewardship has suddenly developed a mind of its own and is performing erratically. When did this happen? How could this happen? Why is it happening to me?

It could be that you have a Brand in Adolescence on your hands. If you are wondering if your brand has become the new teenager in your life, ask yourself the following questions to see if your brand is exhibiting the classic symptoms of Brand Adolescence.

- 1. Has your brand's growth stalled?** Though you have been feeding the brand (i.e. marketing it) as usual, performance stagnates, falters or becomes inconsistent. Something has changed, and you can't put your finger on what it is.
- 2. Is your brand acting rebellious?** Marketing efforts that worked in the past are suddenly ineffective. Every new marketing decision feels riskier than in the past, as you have no idea how the brand and its constituency will react.
- 3. Is your brand between 13 and 25 years old?** Yes, 25. Adolescence can last far longer than we'd all like to admit!
- 4. Has your brand rebuffed your attempts to influence it?** In the hope of boosting the brand, you changed the logo or updated the website design. Unfortunately, this effort didn't affect performance and you knew it was not getting to the core of the problem.
- 5. Have conversations with your brand become strained?** In marketing communications, you are not sure what to say. You are at a loss for words or fear a less than effective message. Each brand communication is now internally scrutinized and debated excessively. Even once decided, it feels like throwing at a dartboard.
- 6. Has your brand become moody?** Emotional and performance swings can feel like a rollercoaster ride. One week it seems the brand has regained its mojo. The next week it fizzles or tanks. The brand is winded from the ride, and often so are you.
- 7. Does your brand balk at you?** You feel like you are walking on eggshells. You hesitate to adjust even those remaining marketing efforts that are working for fear they may turn on you without warning.
- 8. Has your brand been sidelined from the in-crowd?** Customers who used to buy your brand regularly buy less frequently or have moved on to the new brand on the block. They departed without saying a word to you about anything your brand might have done wrong or anything they wish the brand would do.
- 9. Is your brand trying to find itself?** Once confident of what it did well, your brand seems to be searching for its identity. If this isn't working, let's try something new! You get tempted to try several things at once – offering new products or services, changing those you offer now, or creating a marketing blitz – to see what might work now. You occasionally wonder if your brand needs a shrink.

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Marketing help for Brands in Adolescence*

**Brands that stall after their initial success*



10. Does your brand oversleep? In watching competitors or talking to customers, you realize that your brand has been missing out on opportunities. Opportunities to upgrade, to offer something new, to partner with a complementary brand. You feel like you are often trying to help the brand play catch up.

Like the challenge of parenting teenagers, the struggle to get through the day-to-day operations of any business makes it easy to get mired in the details and to forget to step back and take a strategic look at your brand. This is especially true if you've been shepherding the brand for a long time. Blips have undoubtedly occurred before, and they'll occur again.

Sometimes brands have to go beyond blips to get your attention to the bigger stuff. Just like teenagers who suddenly behave in unpredictable ways and experiment with new experiences. Don't sweat it. But do heed the call now and give your adolescent brand the attention it needs if more than a couple of the symptoms above strike home for you.

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Evelyn J. Starr is Founder and Chief Marketer of E. Starr Associates, a Boston-area marketing consultancy that helps clients increase sales by showing them how to spend their marketing dollars most wisely. We specialize in working with Brands in Adolescence, brands that have stalled after success in their initial years.