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Keep your brand shiny

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When my kids were small, I used to tell them that, above all else throughout life, they should build and protect their good reputation. It's not an original idea. Shakespeare wrote in Othello, "I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself." He didn't invent the concept. And he did build a fine, lasting reputation.

In business, too, it's important to build and maintain a good reputation. It's your brand. It's why people ask for a Coke or choose Dunkin Donuts coffee. No surprises. No deviation from the quality one expects. The ultimate goal is to make your brand synonymous with whatever you make or do (Xerox this, Scotch tape that, Google me).

Just as important as maintaining the quality of your products or services is to keep reminding people how good your products or services are. Yes, it sounds self-serving when an advertising rep, ad agency or PR consultant makes this suggestion. But a relatively small investment can pay off big later on.

When things are going well and business is good, regular promotion keeps your brand in people's minds, can increase sales to current customers, and helps attract new ones. I like a multi-tiered approach: news releases, email, direct mail, ads, social media, etc. Some of your target audience will see your message once. Others might see it 5 times. Nice.

When things don't go so well - if there's a recall of your product or a lawsuit or an environmental hazard, or one of 100 other things you don't anticipate - having a 'shiny brand,' a good image, a historically good reputation -- can mean the difference between a passing squall and a devastating, lasting storm.

For 50 years, Toyota built top-rated vehicles and spent tens of millions of dollar annually reminding us how great they are ("Ask somebody who owns one.") Now, whether their problems are traced to floor mats, brakes or something electrical, it's predicted sales could drop 20% this year. That's a big hit. But although the shine has faded, buyers will return in a short time - thanks to the company's prior history and appealing message, hammered home to every American in every media.

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