



What is Your Category?

by Brett Hutchinson

You have heard that famous Vince Lombardi story haven't you? It's the one where the famous NFL coach explains the game of football to a bunch of seasoned NFL players. Coach Lombardi begins by saying, "This is a football," and then proceeds to tell the team how the game of football is played in painfully simple terms.

Successful branding—branding that can create an emotional connection to your audience—begins by understanding, in the simplest of terms, exactly who you are and exactly what game you are in. It's called your category.

So who are you? Tell me about the game.

1. What industry or professional discipline do your products and services come from?
2. What market do you serve?
3. How do you provide that product or service?
4. And as a point of differentiation, what do you do that few can do quite like you?

For a non-profit, this may not be obvious at first glance. Non-profits don't usually think in terms of markets or industry (or football), but they should. Here is an example of how a non-profit can use a simple understanding of their category as a filter to help them pick a better name and make better business decisions.

Name: Helping Hands, Inc.

Industry/professional discipline: Medical

Market: Friends and family of terminally ill with responsibility to care for dying friend or relative at home.

Product or service: Home hospice care

Differentiation: Fee waived based on income, all insurances accepted, complete in home hospice care

The name Helping Hands is weak because it could apply to any number of service organizations. It could be a maid or cleaning service. It could be a



hypoallergenic hand cream. On its own, it doesn't go far enough in creating a connection that I, a potential client, can understand.

A better name would be **Helping Hands Hospice**. This name connects me to all aspects of the category:

The profession: 'Hospice' connects me to the medical.

The market: All three words together connect me to the idea of helping people care for those who are dying.

The service: Hospice is clearly not a maid service, although they might just help me do the dishes in a pinch.

The differentiation strategy: 'Helping hands' refers to participating but not doing everything, filling in where needed.

One of the principles of category is that you can only be a leader in one well-defined category. To accommodate more than one category you need to have another business entity to manage it. The risk of crossing categories is that you dilute your operations and the value of your service goes down in both categories.

In this case, Helping Hands Hospice should think long and hard about adding rental oxygen tanks to their services or providing medical equipment of any kind. *Medical product rental service* is not in their category, even though there is a relationship to the market, and the service is completely different. It would be better to have referral relationships with those companies that have the best valued medical product rental services. However, it's quite a different thing for Helping Hands Hospice to consider adding counseling to their in-home services. It fits the category in all aspects; profession, market, service, differentiation. Given that other hospice agencies may only care for physical needs, this may also give Helping Hands Hospice a competitive edge.

The biggest challenge to defining category is that the people who are in the category often fight with the sensation that this is obvious and try to make it more than it is. Don't. Keep it simple.

For cause marketing purposes, category becomes invaluable. Your perfect partner might actually be the medical supply company Med-rents. Being able to reassure a potential partner that you are not going to infringe on their market may close the deal for you.



“ ... and a percentage of every medical equipment rental goes to Helping Hands Hospice—helping you when the person you love needs you most.”

Now you are in the game, big time. Thanks Coach.