

# WHO TOOK MY SOCKS!!

SIMPLE  
GUIDE ON  
HOW TO  
BUILD  
BRAND  
REPUTATION

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# WHO TOOK MY SOCKS!!

It was a Tuesday morning when John stumbled out of bed, bleary-eyed and half-awake. The sun streamed through the curtains, casting a warm glow across his cluttered bedroom. He shuffled to the dresser, opened the top drawer, and reached for his socks—a simple routine he had done a thousand times before. But today was different.

His hand fumbled through the drawer, encountering an unexpected emptiness. John blinked, rubbing his eyes to clear the fog of sleep. Where there should have been neatly folded pairs of socks, there was a haphazard pile of mismatched singles. A sinking feeling crept into his gut as he pulled out one lone blue sock, then a black one, followed by a grey one with a frayed edge. But no matches.

"What the...?" he muttered, rummaging deeper into the drawer. The more he searched, the more bewildered he became. It wasn't just a few missing pairs—almost all his socks had vanished. He found one sock from his favourite set, the one with tiny red polka dots, but the other was gone. The striped pair he wore for good luck? Only one remained. Even the Christmas-themed ones his aunt sent him last year had been halved.

John sat on the edge of his bed, trying to make sense of the bizarre situation. He hadn't done laundry in a week, so they couldn't be in the hamper. And he lived alone, so no one else could have taken them. Had he been sleepwalking? Had he thrown them away without realizing it? Or was this some kind of twisted prank?

He scoured the apartment, checking under the bed, behind the dresser, even inside the couch cushions. Nothing. The socks were simply gone. All that was left were lonely singles, mocking him with their incomplete pairs.

Panic began to set in. Socks didn't just disappear. Something was seriously wrong. John's mind raced through possibilities, each more absurd than the last. Was his apartment haunted? Was there a sock-stealing gremlin living in the walls? He knew it sounded crazy, but there was no logical explanation for the vanishing socks.

He slumped onto the bed, staring at the pile of mismatched socks. Where had they all gone? As he pondered, fragments of memories began to surface, memories that had been buried under the weight of routine.

## WHO TOOK MY SOCKS!!

He remembered a day last week, coming home late after a gruelling day at work. Too exhausted to care, he'd kicked off his shoes and flung his socks into a random corner of the living room, promising himself he'd pick them up later. Of course, he never did. Then there was that one time at the office when he peeled off his sweaty socks after a long meeting, stuffing them into his bag, but when he got home, they were gone. Maybe he'd left them in the conference room or dropped them somewhere along the way. Who knew?

There were countless other instances too, like the morning he tossed a pair into the laundry basket, only to find one had slipped behind the hamper. Or the night he stayed at a friend's place, where he'd casually tossed his socks aside, never thinking to check if they made it back into his bag. Even when the housekeeper brings his attention to the missing pairs, he would brush off her warning like it was nothing.

It hit him then, a slow dawning realization—he hadn't been paying attention. He had been careless, too sure of the abundance he thought he had. He'd always had enough socks, more than enough, so he'd never thought twice about where they ended up. Until now.

John stared at the lone socks scattered across his bed, the remnants of his thoughtlessness. It wasn't a mystery at all, no grand conspiracy or mischievous thief. It was just him, neglecting the small things, letting them slip through the cracks, one careless act at a time.

He sighed, a mixture of frustration and self-reproach bubbling up inside him. The truth was simple: he hadn't lost his socks—they had lost him.

As he dressed for the day, John resolved to pay more attention, not just to his socks, but to the little things he took for granted. Life has a funny way of reminding you to appreciate what you have, even something as mundane as a pair of socks.

With that, he slipped on two mismatched socks, laughed at the fitting reminder of his newfound lesson, and headed out the door, determined to do better.

He stood up, shaking his head. It was time to buy some traps—and maybe some new socks.



# BUILDING A REPUTATION

Building and maintaining a solid brand reputation requires a passionate commitment to an organization's brand promise. It means you must consistently live up to what or who you say you are: no buts or ifs. As you seen from the story in the introduction,

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*the minute you begin compromising on the values you hold dear (or claim to hold dearly), that is the very moment your brand goes off the cliff.*

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Except you are a monopoly offering a product or service without a substitute, your brand survival will be determined by how well and long you live up to its promise.

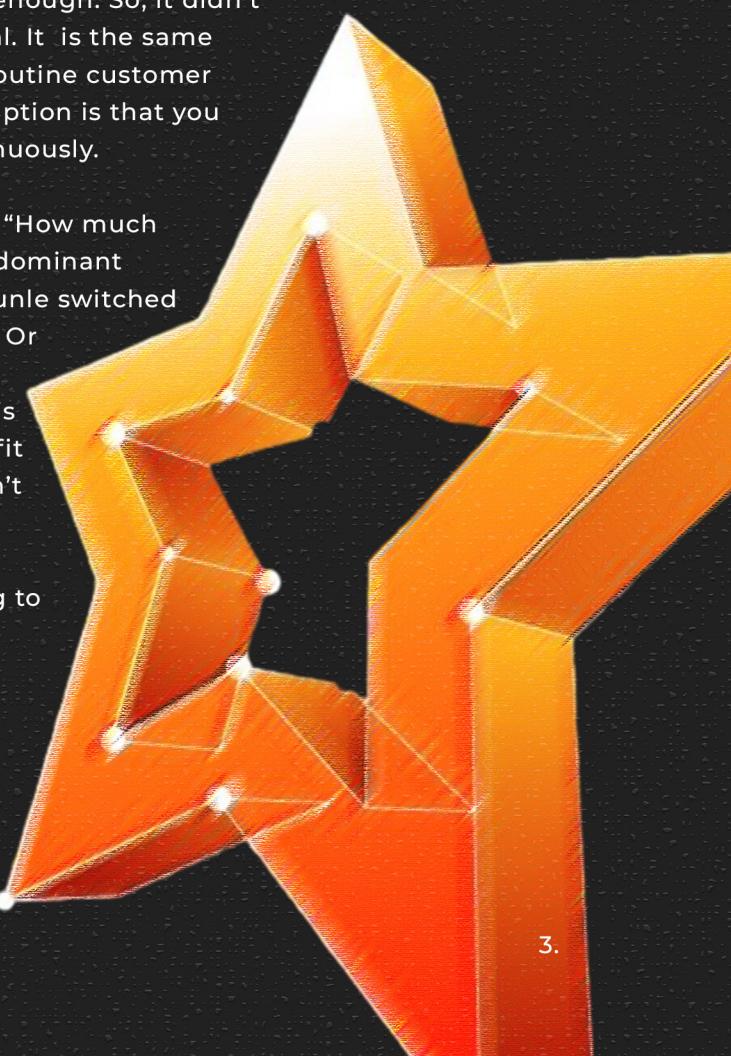
## THE ARROGANCE OF SUCCESS

When brands become prominent and successful, there is a tendency to become arrogant and carefree. Customer obsession becomes customer irritation, saying sorry almost becomes a taboo and solving basic customer complaints becomes a chore. Charles Handy, the famous management thinker, aptly describes this phenomenon as an elephant too big to dance. Such brands are so consumed by their success that they become blind to the most important thing to their business – the customer.

It's like the missing socks in the story. John was unbothered about the first pair of disappeared socks because he was confident he had more than enough. So, it didn't matter much that he couldn't find one out of several. It is the same attitude that the Arrogance of success cultivates. Routine customer complaints become an irritation because the assumption is that you have enough customer base to turn in profits continuously.

"We don't have time for troublesome customers" or "How much is your business worth to us anyway," becomes the dominant thinking in such organizations. No one cares that Kunle switched brands last week because of poor customer service. Or that Michael, a long-time customer, stopped doing business because it now takes too long to receive his orders. These don't matter because you made a profit last week in the same way that a missing pair doesn't matter. After all, you have enough to wear to work.

Until Monday morning, you realize you have nothing to wear to work.





# NOT TOO BIG TO FAIL

The illusion of success is that failure is impossible. How can a brand with a million customers fail because one angry person walked away?

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*Businesses don't fail because an angry customer walks away; they fail when they do not live up to their promise.*

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So, if that customer walked away because the brand failed on its promise, the failure of the brand will become inevitable if that pattern persists. If the Roman empire fell, your business would not be too big to fail. Consider the story of Mr. Biggs,

Nigeria's first fast food chain and restaurant franchise. Launched in 1986, Mr Biggs was designed to cater to a broader audience, offering a wider variety of menu items at affordable prices. Writing for Rivest Newsletter, Yemi offers a brilliant analysis of how the once dominant fast-food giant was soon left standing on spaghetti legs.

*The early years of Mr Biggs were characterised by remarkable success. UAC, recognising the growing demand for quick-service restaurants in Nigeria, embarked on an ambitious expansion plan. By the late 1990s, Mr Biggs had established a network of restaurants across major cities, offering a familiar and consistent dining experience to a wide customer base.*

*However, the company's rapid growth soon revealed underlying challenges. UAC adopted a franchise model to accelerate expansion, granting licenses to independent operators to open and manage Mr Biggs's restaurants. While it initially fuelled growth, this model also sowed the seeds of decline. Quality control became a significant issue as some franchisees prioritised profits over maintaining the brand's standards. Inconsistent food preparation, varying levels of customer service, and a lack of adherence to company policies tarnished the Mr Biggs brand image.*

*These measures, while intended to protect the company's bottom line, further eroded the value proposition that had made Mr Biggs so popular in the first place.*

*In addition to internal challenges, Mr Biggs faced growing competition from new entrants into the Nigerian fast-food market. Local chains like Tantalizers and Sweet Sensation emerged, offering various menu items and innovative marketing strategies. These competitors, unburdened by the legacy of a large corporate structure, were more agile and responsive to changing consumer preferences. They capitalised on the growing demand for healthier food options and local flavours, while Mr Biggs remained primarily focused on its traditional Western-style menu.*

## NOT TOO BIG TO FAIL

*As a result, quality control continued to deteriorate, and the brand's reputation suffered.*

*The combination of internal and external pressures created a perfect storm that Mr Biggs was ill-equipped to weather. The chain's decline, while gradual, was relentless. By the mid-2000s, Mr Biggs had lost its position as the undisputed leader of the Nigerian fast-food market. It was no longer the go-to destination for families seeking a quick and affordable meal. The brand had become synonymous with inconsistency, poor quality, and a lack of innovation.*

Mr Biggs forgot what made it the darling of the middle class. It thought it could get away with cutting corners and failing on its promises because its management assumed it was too big to fail. Until it did.

## THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

The parable of the lost sheep is about a shepherd with 100 sheep, out of which one went missing. Once the shepherd realized one had gone missing, he left the 99 others that were safe and went in search of the lost sheep. When he found the lost sheep, he rejoiced over it more than the 99 that never went astray.

Although this parable is a religious teaching on the power of repentance and forgiveness, it is equally an essential lesson for brand reputation. The humility and commitment of the shepherd in pursuit of a lost sheep when he had 99 others is the kind that guarantees long-term growth and success for any brand. Every brand, individual or organization that seeks to achieve generational success must think like this shepherd.

When you fail to fulfil a brand promise, make it up to that customer. Even more importantly, commit never to condone a repeat of such error. You may never be able to appease every aggrieved customer, but you can always live up to your promise and protect your brand reputation. And the truth is, most customers are reasonable. When a brand genuinely seeks another opportunity to live up to its promise, customers are happy to give second chances.



## BUILDING A BRAND REPUTATION

A brand reputation is how people perceive and think about a brand based on their experiences, interactions, and overall presence. It reflects the trust, respect, and credibility that a brand earns over time.

The process of building a reputation begins with providing well-considered answers to the following questions:

- Who are we?
- What do we stand for?
- What are our values?
- What do we want to be in the mind of the customer?
- What do we want to be in the mind of the community?
- What or who do we want to be identified with?
- What should we be remembered for?

## UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF REPUTATION

In one of my seminars on reputation management, I projected three sets of items on the screen, asking the participants to pick their preferences without showing any brand names. The first item was two pairs of shoes, one made in Italy and the other in Ireland. The second was two bottles of wine; one was made in France, and the other was in Singapore. The third was two vehicles, one produced in Germany and the other in China.

Unanimously, the audience picked the Italian shoe, the French wine, and the German car. There was no mention of brand names or value propositions, yet the audience unanimously agreed on a preference. Is it that the Irish are incapable of making high-quality shoes? Or are the Singaporeans unable to make good wines? They both can, but they do not have a reputation for delivering those products.

## UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF REPUTATION

A strong brand reputation creates enormous market opportunities for individuals and organizations. When people can think of a problem, and you instantly pop up as a solution, you have successfully built a reputation. In the early 1990s, there was a famous pharmaceutical product called Caffeoyl. The drug was used to relieve people of headaches and other body aches. In the mid-1990s, the company ran a radio campaign with Jingle that conveyed the brand promise. It was a simple song that went: "Maganin chiwon kai, Caffeoyl." Loosely translated in English, the song meant "the cure to every headache is caffeoyl."

The campaign was a success, and the drug was effective, so much so that you almost mentioned caffeine every time you mentioned headache. It was a strong brand association built with a powerful narrative and product excellence. This reputation boosted sales and delivered tremendous profits to the company over several years.

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*Profitability and market dominance will always follow a solid brand reputation.*

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Therefore, to succeed as a brand, you must set out with a set of core objectives, a value system, and a promise. A fanatical commitment to these three will help you build a reputation that guarantees profits and market dominance.



# HOW DO YOU BUILD A BRAND REPUTATION?

Three things will help you build a solid brand reputation: Consistency, a culture of excellence and storytelling.

## CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE

Private investors took over Eko Hotels and Suites around the same time as the Durbar Hotel. This was in the early 1990s when both federal and state governments in Nigeria were implementing a privatization policy to navigate the turbulent economic period. Over 30 years later, Eko Hotels expanded significantly and remained sought-after by corporate clients, while the Durbar Hotel only exists in our memories.



To understand how one succeeded while the other died, I spoke to a former bank executive who was heading the protocol department at the time.

Part of his job was making hotel bookings for his superiors and colleagues when they had training or were on business trips. Durbar was one of the hotels he often reserved for his colleagues until the complaints became too many to ignore, forcing him to seek alternatives. *"Our people kept complaining of bad air conditioners in their room, stained sheets, long delays in services,"* he told me. The worst thing, he continued, *"was they took too long to resolve our issues and, at some point, began ignoring us like we were making too many demands on them."*

On the other hand, even after over 30 years, the chances that you will be checked into a room at Eko Hotels with inadequate air-conditioning or stained bedsheets is almost zero. Of course, they still have challenges and sometimes fall short of customer expectations, but they have built a culture of excellence that has helped them maintain a standard that has kept them in business for this long.

Building a solid brand reputation requires a culture of excellence where mediocrity is abhorred.

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*Once individuals and organizations are comfortable with making excuses, they will struggle to develop a culture of excellence.*

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If the answer to a hotel manager, "Why does your bedsheet have all these stains?" is "It was the previous guest who used the room, or our laundry guy is new," then you will struggle to build a reputation that will keep you in business for long. When you say you deliver in 40 minutes, make sure your delivery time doesn't exceed 40 minutes. As you know, it is better to under promise and over-deliver. If you constantly fail to meet your set delivery time, you will build a notorious reputation that will keep customers away.

# CONSISTENCY

Consistency is the key to performance.<sup>1</sup> Lee-Ann Persse

To understand the importance of consistency and how it strengthens brand reputation, I will share an excerpt from an interview with Dan O'Brien, anchored by McKinsey's Allen Webb. O'Brien is one of the world's most successful decathletes. In 1996, he won a gold medal for the United States in the decathlon at the Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. His Olympic victory followed three consecutive decathlon titles at the World Championships in Athletics.

*Consistency will always win out in the long run, always. I won one event out of ten at the Olympic Games, but I placed in the top five in most other events. And so, it was my consistency in the end. For years, the world record holder was a guy from the Czech Republic who was so consistent in all the different events. He just reached a high level of consistency in each event.*

*Time almost ceases to exist for a decathlete. You're out there if you need to be out there. You don't schedule practice from 2:00 to 4:00. You show up at noon and go home when you're done. You're the first guy on the track, and you're the last guy to leave.*

*And you see that in the weight room and the training room. When I was at my highest levels of training, I don't even know if I could have told you what day it was. All I knew was that I would train for three days, and tomorrow, I'd get a day off. And so it was always the cycle: two days of work and one day off, four days of work and one day off, three days of work and one day off. That's how I lived my life.*

*You have got to love the process. You have got to love your "job." Because as much as you want to win the gold medal, you will spend most of your time training. And so, you better like it. The secret, for me, was to embrace the idea that time doesn't exist. You're out there if you need to be. You're working toward a goal of perfect training, perfect competing—not so much for a result or an outcome.*

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*It is consistency that builds reputation.*

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Think of the discipline, commitment and consistency an athlete puts in over four years to compete in the Olympics effectively. That is the sort of commitment and consistency that builds reputation.

There was severe competition between inter state commercial bus transport operators plying the Lagos – Abuja route. At the time, buses only left when they were full, so what differentiated one transport operator from another was the quality of their buses. After a while, most transport operators caught up with the competition; most had decent buses with tiny differentiating features until a particular transport operator cracked a unique value proposition.

## CONSISTENCY

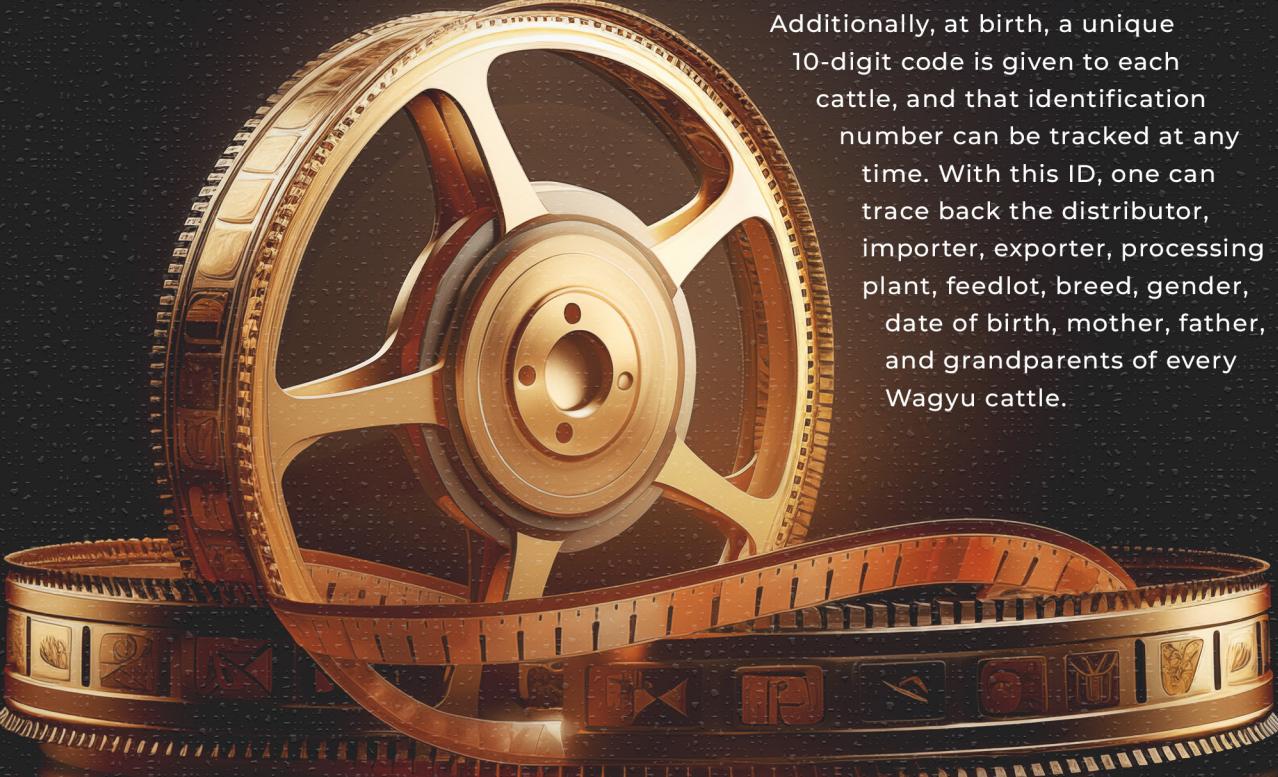
A road trip from Lagos to Abuja takes several hours, and most travellers prefer to arrive at their destination before night fall. God is Good Motors recognized this and promised their first bus would leave at 5:30 am. Only a few believed them when they started, but they stayed consistent. It didn't matter if there were enough passengers to fill up the vehicle; when it was 5:30, the bus would depart. Not long after, they built a solid reputation that people who wanted to arrive in Abuja on time were confident they could catch an early ride that was guaranteed to leave at 5:50 am.

Imagine what this sort of consistency and reputation could do for an airline brand in Nigeria that consistently lives up to its promise of taking off at the advertised time. I can bet an arm and a leg that you'd prefer to fly with such an airline even if they charged a premium.

## STORY TELLING

Have you heard of the Japanese beef, Wagyu? It is the most expensive beef in the world and boasts a unique flavour profile. However, why are people happy to pay over 20 times more for wagyu beef? Yes, it tastes great, but the taste is only part of the story. The story behind how the meat is produced does the magic.

I met a renowned Japanese chef sometime last year who narrated the process during a visit to Lagos. Chef Hayatu explained that the average Japanese feedlots will range from 10-100 cattle, which allows all Wagyu to be cared for and carefully monitored directly by farmers who have dedicated their lives to raising these unique cattle. He also explained that the Wagyu are fed a unique high-energy diet for over 600 days, often 700 days. In comparison, the average cattle are fed for approximately 120 days. There is also a specialized way of caring for the cattle, which involves singing and playing light instruments.



Additionally, at birth, a unique 10-digit code is given to each cattle, and that identification number can be tracked at any time. With this ID, one can trace back the distributor, importer, exporter, processing plant, feedlot, breed, gender, date of birth, mother, father, and grandparents of every Wagyu cattle.

## STORY TELLING

This compelling story, told by renowned chefs, restaurant owners, and food critics, makes eating Wagyu beef an unforgettable experience. These stories make you understand that you are not just eating beef but top-quality husbandry, attention to detail and safety. It is a thousand-year history of a people's way of life passed down several generations without compromise in quality. That's what you pay a premium for – that feeling of special and unique. Only powerful storytelling can achieve this.

Remember my little classroom exercise where the audience picked Italian-made shoes over those made in Ireland? The difference is story telling. It doesn't matter that Apple manufactures its product in China, where most Americans believe it thrives on inferior products: the company has found a way to leverage the power of storytelling and marketing to achieve and maintain a position of product excellence.

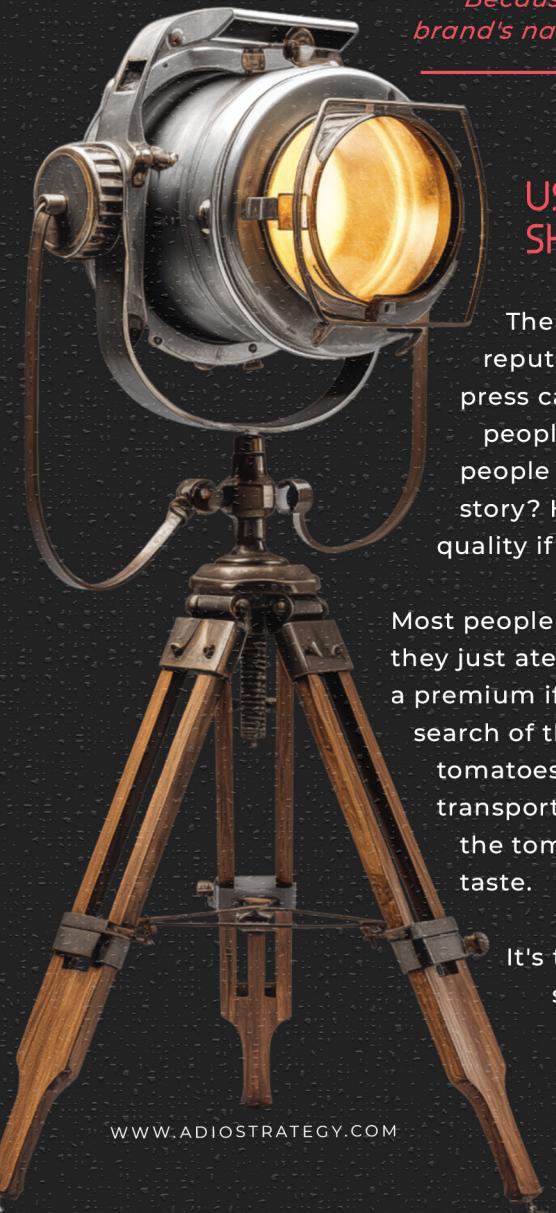
Quality, for most people, is abstract. When looking at a car engine, most people need help telling what makes an engine special or mediocre. It is storytelling that has reinforced the idea of German superior engineering. It is also why you cannot argue against the French producing better wines.

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*Because if you are not carefully shaping your brand's narrative, your competitors will do it for you.*

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## USING THE MEDIA TO TELL STORIES AND SHAPE NARRATIVES



The most effective way to shape narratives and build a brand reputation is by leveraging the media. Knowing how to use the press can differentiate between a good and great brand. How do people know what you stand for if you don't tell them? How will people know how consistent you have been if you don't tell the story? How do people appreciate your pain in maintaining absolute quality if they do not know the story behind your products?

Most people do not care where the tomatoes used in making the stew they just ate came from. But they will value that stew more and even pay a premium if you tell them how you travel hundreds of kilometres in search of the best tomato farmers. How those farmers grow their tomatoes using best practices and how those tomatoes are carefully transported from the farmlands to your kitchen. How your staff handle the tomatoes and the cooking procedure you follow to achieve that taste.

It's that story that people remember and spread around. It is that story that is the basis of your reputation.



## WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE IN YOUR OWNED MEDIA

This typically depends on your brand or business. Still, having a social media account (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn) and a website – preferably with a blog page, is advisable.

## PAID MEDIA

Aside from what was listed in the diagram, it may be essential to leverage traditional media like newspapers, radio, and television. Pay for on-air appearances when you have something important to promote. Get special features and regular news publications.

Your goal is to get noticed and get talked about.

## CONCLUSION

I started this book with the story of the missing socks to demonstrate how easy it is for a brand to derail. However, it also points to how painstaking it is to build a strong brand reputation. However, creating a reputation that people can attest to you can be greatly rewarding.

This e-book is a guide to understanding and building a brand reputation. It will help you provide a framework and road map to begin or launch the building and managing of a solid reputation. I'm confident that following the recommendations shared throughout this book, you'd quickly get a head start.



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