

What's So Special About Your Little Corporation? Huh?

Brandwave is in the business of communicating value, so it's not surprising we would launch a search to document the differentiating value language communicated by some of Houston's major corporations. What is surprising is how few meaningful value promises we actually found.



In our 2009 year-end Value Language Study, a visual audit of the web sites of 113 Houston-based public corporations, we found that 68 companies, or 60%, make no attempt whatsoever to speak to site visitors from a standpoint of differentiated brand value.

Another 25 companies, or 22%, do so only in the most cursory manner, leaving only 20 firms, or about 18% who make a clear value statement on their home pages.

In other words, only 18% made a visible effort to express what makes them special.

In this economy, shouldn't we try a little harder?

Our methodology was simple: We conducted a superficial visual review of the primary home pages of each of the companies in the study group and rated them on a scale from 0 to 2.

ZERO indicated there was no value language evident at all. ONE indicated some attempt at presenting value, and TWO represented the presence of clear and meaningful value language.

All told, 113 Houston corporations scored a cumulative total of only 66 points using our 0-1-2 scale.

Before you get hung up on the word “superficial,” bear in mind that a superficial review is all most stakeholders do before they move on to something else. And if your differentiating value promise is not obvious at a cursory glance, it doesn't get through. **Period.**



ACR Group	0
Adams Resources & Energy	1
Administaff	2
Allis-Chalmers Energy	1
American National Insurance	0
AmREIT	2
Anadarko Petroleum Corp.	2
Apache Corp	0
Atwood Oceanics	0
Baker Hughes	0
Benchmark Electronics	1
BJ Services Co.	1
BMC Software	2
Boots & Coots International	0
Bristow Group	1
Cabot Oil & Gas Corp.	0
Camden Property Trust	2
Cameron International Corp.	1
Carrizo Oil & Gas	0
CenterPoint Energy	2
Comsys IT Partners	2
ConocoPhillips	1
Consolidated Graphics	0
Cooper Industries	0
Copano Energy	0
Cornell Cos.	0
Diamond Offshore Drilling	2
Dril-Quip	0

DXP Enterprises	0
Edge Petroleum Corp.	0
EGL (CEVA)	0
Enbridge Energy Partners	0
Englobal Corp.	2
Enterprise Products Partners	0
EOG Resources	0
ExpressJet Holdings	1
Flotek Industries	0
FMC Technologies	1
Friedman Industries	0
Frontier Oil Corp.	0
Genesis Energy	0
Group 1 Automotive	0
GulfMark Offshore	1
Halliburton Co.	2
Harvest Natural Resources	0
HCC Insurance Holdings	0
Helix Energy Solutions Group	0
Houston Exploration Co.	0
Hydril Co.	0
ICO	0
Imperial Sugar Co.	2
Input/Output	0
Kinder Morgan	0
Kirby Corp.	0
KMG Chemicals	1
Landry's Restaurants	1
Luby's	2

Lyondell Chemical Co.	0
Marathon Oil Corp.	1
McDermott International	0
Mens Wearhouse	2
Meridian Resource Corp.	0
MetroCorp Bancshares	2
Mexican Restaurants	1
Mitcham Industries	0
Nabors Industries	1
Natco Group	1
National Oilwell Varco	0
Natural Resource Partners	0
Nevada Gold & Casinos	2
Newfield Exploration	0
Noble Corp.	0
Noble Energy	0
Oceaneering International	0
Oil States International	0
OYO Geospace Corp.	0
Parker Drilling Co.	0
Plains All American Pipeline	1
Powell Industries	1
Pride International	0
Prosperity Bancshares	0
Quanex Corp.	1
Quanta Services	0
Rick's Cabaret International	1
Rowan Cos.	0
Sanders Morris Harris Group	1

Service Corp. International	2
Smith International	0
Southern Union Co.	0
Southwestern Energy Co.	0
Stage Stores	0
Sterling Bancshares	0
Sterling Construction Co.	0
Stewart & Stevenson Services	1
Stewart Information Services	2
Swift Energy Co.	0
Sysco Corp.	1
T-3 Energy Services	0
Team	0
Teppco Partners	0
Tetra Technologies	0
Transocean	1
US Concrete	2
US Physical Therapy	0
Ultra Petroleum Corp.	0
Universal Compression Holdings	0
Vaalco Energy	0
Waste Management	2
WCA Waste Corp.	0
Weatherford International	2
Weingarten Realty Investors	2
Westlake Chemical Corp.	0
W-H Energy Services	0

How each of the 113 companies we surveyed compared on our simple scale:

0 = No Discernable Value Language 1 = Minimal Value Language 2 = Effective Value Language



68 of the 133 companies we surveyed use no Value Language at all. Instead, they often simply fill in the blanks in a boilerplate that goes something like this:

“(Company Name) is a (adjective) provider of (adjective) (product) in the (geographic) (industry segment) market.”

In other words, “(Houston Co.) is a (leading) provider of (high-end) (tools) in the (global) (oil and gas) market.”

This is not Value Language.
It’s pure description, and not very compelling at that.



We then reviewed a control group of 25 of the world's most popular brands, and measured them using the same criteria.

Guess what?

Every one of them scored a 2.

In other words, leading brands are good at expressing value.

(Who'd have thought?)



The key to building strong corporate brands is successful expression of the value that differentiates them.

At the heart of every enterprise is some driving vision - some unique value promise separating it from the competition, which can be used to create a sustainable competitive advantage.

Value Language clearly conveys value, presents it from the standpoint of the customer, and does so in a way that clearly differentiates it. Descriptions of features and benefits do not constitute value language.

We think there are two key reasons some companies don't use effective Value Language:

1. A tendency to delegate responsibility for the brand to people who lack the authority to do anything about it.

2. The "curse of knowledge."

Responsibility for the brand resides with the CEO.

Only the CEO can articulate and drive the vision in a way that reaches all the organization's constituents. But sometimes, the CEO is such an expert on his own company, he doesn't see that what is clear to him can go right above the heads of his most important constituents, usually his customers.



To identify areas where value language can be improved, and help management focus brand assets in a single direction, Brandwave developed a protocol we call the Value Language Assessment™.

VLA is a thorough analysis of how an organization's value promise is articulated through its identity program, marketing materials and corporate communications. Its purpose is to answer five driving questions:

Is the organization actually focused around a core value promise (you'd be surprised how many aren't)?

Is the promise communicated clearly and persuasively in a way that differentiates it from all other promises?

Does the visual language support the written narrative?

Is it consistently expressed across all touchpoints?

Does it resonate with constituents?

The scope of the Value Language Assessment depends on the size and reach of the organization, but the basic premise remains the same no matter what: Once management has a clear picture of the clarity and consistency with which its core value promise is expressed and delivered, it can begin to control how it is experienced.

CEOs who ignore the value language spoken by their organizations do so at their peril. But with the Value Language Assessment from Brandwave, smart leaders can have a greater impact on the performance of their brands.

To learn more about our 2009 Value Language Study, or to schedule a Value Language Assessment in your organization, visit www.brandwave.net today.



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