The branding that goes beyond

We may tend to think of branding as limited to logos, ads, boilerplates in press releases, corporate identity kits that define colors on websites, or any number of marketing tools that are used to create a cohesive image. Of course, that is the part of branding that a marketing communications person would be involved with. But there is a part of branding that is more elusive but I think as important: the front lines of your organization or company. What do I mean by front lines? I mean the first impression that your company gives a visitor when he or she is visiting in person. The front line is the receptionist, the waiting area or lobby, the building, the office, whatever the visitor sees first. You can learn a lot about a company from observing this space. Recently, I went to an office where the receptionist greeted me coldly, the waiting area was cold in feel and by design. It was all marble, with nary a magazine or any other reading material in sight. There company logo had a cold, stark look to it. In short, it was not very welcoming. I sat there (because the person I was waiting for was running late…another bad impression) and thought about what they were trying to convey. Perhaps they were aiming for efficiency? Or they didn't want anyone to linger? Or most likely, they did not give a thought to the image they are giving off. In my experience, this is a very weak link in most organizations' image creation "plans." Last year, I had a client that was trying to promote high end, expensive products. You would think that the store would be rich and comfortable. it was not. I tried to convince the client that no matter how brilliant our marketing plan was, potential customers would be turned off when walking in to the store. In other words, we could get people there but we couldn't make people buy. It would be in lots of companies' best interest to take a tour of their reception areas with new eyes. Is the receptionist courteous? Presenting the company image (whatever that may be—professional or casual)? How would

a visitor feel in the waiting area? How do you look to an outsider? Is that look in line with your mission/vision?

First impressions count, right?