

Creating brand instrumentality beyond the product

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The main reason for the general fascination with brands is their ability to provide the consumers an extra value in addition to what the product\service\company themselves can provide a value which becomes the major motivation for consumers to desire the product. Everybody agrees about that, but from here on it becomes foggy. First of all, what is this value exactly? We know, for instance, of the ability of a brand to signal belonging to a certain group or status but there are some who talk about brands as the objects of the consumer's love (for instance: Kevin Roberts the CEO of "Saatchi & Saatchi", No less) or even as a religion (as Young & Rubicam declared). Also, how precisely is this value being added and incorporated into the brand? Advertisers say (how surprising) it's advertisement. They'll love the ad – they'll love the brand. Or: if they'll see emotions in the ad – they'll develop emotions towards the brand. Other marketing experts are saying lately that "a consistent and total brand experience" is the answer. So what should one do if he wishes to develop a brand? My recommendation is: read on. In this short article I intend to dispel the mystery, to provide a clear answer to both of these key questions and to suggest a workable approach to creating value added brands.

But first of all I'd like to review three very common approaches to brand development. These approaches are used by many marketers with help from their advertising agencies, their consultants, their branding companies and their design firms. These approaches although widespread – regrettably don't work. The three approaches from which I advise you to beware are: the "decoration" approach, the "corkboard" approach and the "Golem" approach (of Prague, London or New-York). The "decoration" approach sees differentiation as an external-visual matter. "We branded ourselves" say the victims of the approach and mean that special name, logo and "look" have been created for them in a seemingly sophisticated process. "We look different from our competitors, and therefore consumers will conceive us as different" delude themselves the victims. This naive approach barely exists anymore on its own; it is usually spiced with elements taken from the next two approaches to give it more credibility. The second approach "the corkboard", considers the name, the logo and the look from the previous approach as a corkboard to pin upon "brand values". "The consumer will see herself (the values she believes in) or what's important to him (service, size/leadership, advanced technology) in our messages and will immediately feel that this is a brand that suits her" say the "professionals" of this approach and its supporters. Some of them, followers of the "emotional branding" attach feelings to the corkboard in the same spirit. In the third approach the "golem" approach, branders venture to create a human-like entity with personality and even charisma, which is capable of having a relationship with the consumers and can make them love.

To my great regret this article is too short to allow a more extensive discrediting of these three approaches which lack any foundation and lead companies astray to miss the true potential that lies in brands. I prefer to use the rest of it and most of it to talk about how you really do it.

I would like to suggest an alternative approach which I find to be much more fruitful and far better substantiated by current psychological and sociological theory and research. Surprisingly, the basic logic for developing a brand with an added value is amazingly similar to the logic of product development. In both cases we create for a consumer a tool or means, to do something he wants to do. It's important to understand what "wants to do" is. From my point of view, if the consumer wants to uplift/relax/excite/entertain himself, strengthen his self image, fantasize of an alternate reality, or any other psychological usage – that is something he wants to do. Consumers are purposeful when trying to achieve experiential, emotional, psychological, inter-personal and social goals/benefits just as they are when trying to achieve more tangible goals. Brands with added value are usually means for consumers to achieve such goals. They are instrumental although it is a psychological or a social instrumentality. A brand without a convincing usage scenario – is actually not a brand. It may appear like a brand. It might have widely recognized name, logo, visual identity and advertising style, but consumers will not desire it because it is useless. All the rules of successful innovation in the field of products and services also apply to brands. The condition for success is giving the consumer something that he wants but he cannot have today, or it's just too difficult, complicated, uncomfortable, boring, too expansive etc'.

The act of branding has ten different meanings which are ten different ways to create instrumentality or usefulness beyond the tangible benefits which the product/ service/ company themselves can provide. One should know them. These are the routes to creating profitable brands.

Creating a conceived linkage to a tangible benefit

The most basic level of branding is creating a conceived linkage between the brand name and other identifiers and a tangible benefit (a result in the physical world or an experience) provided by the product itself or by any component of the marketing mix. Don't dismiss this basic level. Huge brands like Pantene shampoo which promise to amend the six symptoms of unhealthy hair look, work in this level. The added value here is minimal but important: aiding the consumer in choosing by making the deriving the benefit from a certain source - certain.

Forming a mental context

A "mental context" is a concept or an organizing principle which allows the consumer to conceive originally unrelated facts (such as: the various marketing activities of a company) as connected by a guiding intent or by some other common factor. In these cases the main benefit of the brand to its customers originates in the mental context. For example: should you stumbled into a hotel like the "Hudson" or the "Royalton" in the heart of Manhattan, you are

promised pleasure on different levels, but if you know you're in a "Boutique Hotel" your stay becomes a very different experience altogether. The Boutique Hotel is an hoteliery concept which features difference between various hotels in the same chain and even difference between rooms within the same hotel. This mental context drives you to a quest of finding the differences.

Directing an experience

This is essentially a hypnotic effect, in some cases related to Placebo. The branding here is the creation of an expectation which alters the sensed experience and enables the consumer a richer experience than what the product alone can provide him with. For instance, the expectation that an energy drink like "Red Bull" will energize, makes the consumers feel a wave of energy beyond the physical effect of the drink.

Creating a means of self presentation

Here the branding creates a symbol with a meaning that is well known to everybody in a relevant group, which enables the consumer to characterize himself and is used by him for inner communication (for example to gather motivation for an effort or to strengthen self image), for inter-personal communication (for instance to create a certain impression) and for public communication (to signal status or affiliation). The brand "ABSOLUT vodka" became a way for yuppies to signal their yuppieness to other yuppies (when the yuppie group was just forming) and so became a huge success.

Creating a means to deliver a message

The branding role in this approach is to create a symbol of another kind, its meaning known for everybody as well. That kind of symbol enables the consumer a very specific statement and/or expressing a very specific emotion. The diamonds giant "De Beers" made the diamond a means of expressing commitment, making the physical fact that a diamond is indestructible a metaphor for the lastingness of a relationship. In September 2003 "De Beers" started creating a new means to deliver a message, this time mainly for women: the Right Hand Ring as a symbol of independence (as apposed to the ring on the left hand which is often a symbol of commitment).

Building a social-cultural authority

The next branding approach is the creation of an authority which the consumers can use as a guide, to help them understand what's happening around them and to inform them which behavioral ways are normative, what will make them happier etc'. The brand "Apple" proclaimed itself to be such an authority (remember the mythological film "1984"? that is just one example). "Apple" depicted the personal computer, not only as a working tool but also as a device for self expression and creativity. The brand started a cultural trend, which is nowadays at its peak, of giving a wide verity of means for ordinary

people, not just the especially talented, for expressing themselves at professional qualities.

Creating "a long hand"

In this approach, the branding is creating means for the consumer and empowering her to act for noble objectives and high purposes, which are important to her, but which she can't achieve by herself. The "Body Shop" network made buying a way for contributing to the preservation of the environment and helping people in need all around the globe.

Creating an Alter Ego

Here, the brand is a way for the consumer to behave (at least on a fantasy level) in a manner he would like to but doesn't dare, or isn't willing to pay the price for. The provocation of the fashion brand "Diesel" is made as if "in the name of" the brand customers. They can feel like they are provocative themselves every time the brand advertises one of its outrageous campaigns.

Building an "Emotional Gym"

Opting for our civilized and protected life style, we compromise (not once, happily) a lot of our possibilities as humans. We go to the gym to prevent the degeneration of our body which, in our life style, doesn't get to face the challenges it was designed for. Similarly, we watch movies and TV series' in order to "exercise" emotional skills which aren't legitimate in our life style. Brands like "Sicily" from "Dolce & Gabbana", allows us too to experience such emotional possibilities.

Facilitating fantasies

With only a fine difference from the previous approach, this branding approach helps the consumer to fantasize an alternative reality. Consumers fantasize about irresistible sex appeal, about omnipotence and dominance, about importance, about success, about fatal love, about murder, etc'. The brand "Timberland" was designed as a way for consumers to fantasize about courageous adventures against the forces of nature.

The understanding of the different kinds of added value, the ways by which these values are instrumental to the consumer and the methods by which brands can be destined to be means for the consumer for achieving his goals, makes the difference between masterful creations of brands to an amateur imitation which produces look-alike ones.

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