

Turning brands upside down

Brands are still important in mature markets but driving value creation has been turned on its head, writes Professor Leslie De Chernatony

A new genre of brands is emerging, i.e. market driving brands. Classical marketing thinking has encouraged market driven brands which are based on careful tracking of buyer behaviour and responding to changes. However, with the growing imperative of value some visionary managers challenged conventions. Why follow consumers when it is possible to lead consumers? Underlying this approach is the notion that there are some things about a category that consumers are unable to envisage.

A market driving brand is characterised by a cluster of values promising a unique and welcomed experience. So far, this is the standard brand definition. The difference is the way the brand experience is delivered. This is achieved either through radical ideas, innovatively redeploying assets or with a unique business system.

Think of traditional internet-based banking brands then consider Zopa.com. The name, Zone of Possible Agreement, gives a clue that this brand defies convention. Lenders specify how much they wish to lend, the period and the price. Borrowers undergo a rigorous credit check and only the most credit worthy are accepted. Zopa connects lenders with credit-worthy borrowers, reducing the cost of the middlemen. Lenders see who they are lending to and what the borrowers are doing with the money. People wishing to be part of the Zopa process need to share Zopa's values. In essence, this radical idea has redeployed assets with a unique business system.

As another example, consider Filthy, the brand of fine Belgian chocolates. The name breaks conventions that ingested brands must be clean. Indeed, this is clean, but the name pulls on the Aztec myth of cocoa juice being an aphrodisiac. Daring to challenge, then suggesting a more adult positioning, the packaging reinforces this naughty but nice proposition. Instead of a table of calorific values there is a sin table. The web site shows how a notably adult approach is being taken – reflecting a perspective that men don't give women chocolates because they are hungry.

Market driving brands offer a leap in consumer value. Typically they are visionary, exciting, unconventional and boundary pushing. Build-a-Bear Workshop exemplifies this. The inanimate form of the brand, the bear's carcass, is but a small element of the typical selling price. It is the unique personification of the brand that drives the average bear price. The added voice and accessories are powerful bonding tools, christened by the owner having to say the bear promise before taking ownership (and paying) for "their" cherished bear. Market driving brands redefine consumers' roles, encouraging greater participation and thus enabling more personalisation. The California-based

brand crushpadwine.com has built a business system whose flexibility enables consumers to have minimal or significant involvement in “their” wine. Consumers decide how many vines they wish Crush Pad to tend on their behalf. When the grapes are picked, they decide the extent to which they want to participate in its processing, being guided by experts who even help design labels.

Market driving brands unleash constraints on employees and welcome radical ideas for brand development. The typical market driven brand comes from a culture based on understanding problems and finding ways to minimise these. By contrast, market driving brands have more positively oriented cultures. Techniques such as Appreciative Inquiry are more likely to be used to understand what actions individuals took that contributed to brand success. These are broadcast to a diverse group of employees who are asked to consider what could be done to amplify these brand stimulating actions, then how the organisation should restructure to deliver even more welcome brand experiences.

Market driving brands are likely to become more prevalent. At their heart is the necessity to offer greater value to consumers. They understand the basic value ratio of benefits to sacrifices and they dig deeper. Benefits are not just the classical functional attributes, rather they are conceived in terms of how these drive stunning outcomes. Sacrifices are not just monetary but rather are non-monetary issues such as relationship costs and psychological costs. Next time you debate between buying different brands of watches are you thinking about the cost or about the story the watch tells on your behalf?

Further reading

de Chernatony, L. and S. Cottam (2009), Creating and launching a challenger brand: a case study. *The Services Industries Journal* Vol29, No1, pp 75-89.

Kim, W.C. and R. Mauborgne (2005), *Blue Ocean Strategy* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing)

Biography

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No stranger to the commercial world, after graduating with a first-class honours degree in physics, Leslie worked in the marketing departments of several international corporations. Intrigued by the challenge of brand building in an era of growing retailer power, he moved to the university sector and while on the faculty of the Cranfield School of Management completed his doctorate in brand marketing. His research is globally disseminated through his books, frequent international conference presentations and a significant stream of international journal articles, some of which have won best paper prizes. Leslie was elected a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing and also a Fellow of the Market Research Society. He is also a Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Marketors.