



CK's Epiphanies

Inspirations & revelations from
the mind of a marketer.



branding: The 3 Ps of Successful Branding: Promise, Personality & Perseverance

There's been a lot of ink dedicated to "branding" the past few years. As marketers we've all been asked to define – and defend – what constitutes a brand and why branding is an essential part of our marketing strategies and plans.

In this edition, we'll examine the remarkable returns that effective branding yields and the principles marketers should adhere to while building their brands.

We begin our issue on branding with this epiphany:

Quite often the advantage one brand has over its competitors isn't better quality, it's better branding.

The most compelling examples supporting this epiphany are most prominent in prosaic product categories:

Water: Is *Evian* really that much purer than *Poland Spring*?

Gas: Does your car actually run better on *Mobil* than on *Exxon*?

Garbage Bags: Does *Hefty* truly hold your trash better than *Glad*?

What's really clear here isn't the water, it's the power of branding.

Years ago, no one would have fathomed that ounce-for-ounce we pay more for bottled water than for gasoline (especially since gasoline doesn't flow freely from our taps). Moreover, no one would have guessed there would have been so many competitors vying to be your bottled water of choice.

Alas, some savvy marketers created the bottled water category and leveraged the power of branding to recoup significant returns.

If branding wields this much influence in low-interest/low-cost categories, imagine the implications - and the opportunities - for high-interest/high-cost categories:

Luxury Cars: Is a *BMW* more luxurious than a *Mercedes-Benz*?

Travel: Does the sun shine brighter in Bermuda than in Jamaica?

Diamonds: Do *Tiffany's* diamonds out-sparkle *Cartier's*?

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Illuminating Questions:

Want to ensure your brand's success?

Make sure you've answered these questions before building your brand:

- What are my branding goals?
- What is my brand promising its customers?
- What "personality" is congruent with my brand?
- Which programs in my plan are dedicated to branding?
- Which distribution channels will I utilize to deliver my brand?
- Which new products and services can I leverage to reinvigorate my brand?
- Is it time to extend my brand?

Possibly, but probably a diamond from either jeweler is a girl's best friend. This isn't to say that authentic differences between brands don't exist, they do. But when dealing with products competing at the same level of quality and stature more times than not the differences are conceived by marketers and perceived by consumers.

Unveiling the epiphany:

The difference between many competing brands
isn't tangible, it's perceptual.

Just as branding is a successive process of developing, promoting and managing brands; branding goals are a sequential process of "**brand benchmarks**," namely:

- **Brand awareness:** Knowledge of the brand name and offering.
- **Brand recognition:** Familiarity with the brand and proposition.
- **Brand loyalty:** Repetitive purchase and endorsement of the brand.

The marketer's ultimate goal is a high level of "**brand equity**." Representing the sum total of awareness, recognition and loyalty, brand equity is the buyer's commitment to the product as evidenced by continued purchases, uses and endorsements of the brand.

Now that we've demonstrated the impact and goals of branding, let's outline what constitutes a successful brand. Effective branding is a function of how well marketers leverage the core properties I refer to as the "3 Ps of Successful Branding."

Promise: Before you can promote, you must promise.

At its foundation a brand is a promise; be it *Volvo* promising you the safest automobile or *McDonald's* promising you fast food that tastes the same whether it's served in Missouri or Moscow. A brand's promise entails:

- Its core **competencies**: What areas are your brand's strengths?
- The **problems** it solves: What solution(s) are you providing for your customers?
- The **markets** it serves: Which audience(s) are you targeting?
- The **benefits** it provides: What advantages does your brand offer its customers?

FedEx's brand promise is "overnight delivery anywhere in the world." The company reinforces its brand promise through its marketing messages of "The World on Time" and "When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight." *FedEx* has realized great success (brand equity) because of the trust (brand loyalty) it has established with its customers.

When developing your brand's promise, ensure you that you too can deliver as you will surely be held accountable by customers, shareholders and competitors.

Bringing us to the epiphany:

Your brand is your promise to your customers.
If you want to keep your customers, you'll keep your promise.

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Personality: A brand devoid of personality is just a commodity.

Brands, like people, need personality. In order to succeed, a brand needs to be distinguished among customers and differentiated from competitors.

The most successful brands have well-defined and unique personalities that customers come to know (brand recognition), trust (brand loyalty) and develop emotional ties to (brand equity). A brand's personality is established through:

- **Design:** Typography, Logos, Color palettes, Style guidelines
- **Messaging & Nomenclature:** Brand names, Taglines, Key messages
- **Marketing Programs:** Sales strategies, Promotions, Premiums
- **Advertising Campaigns:** Jingles, Headlines, Celebrity endorsements
- **Brand Affiliations:** Partnerships, Philanthropies, Sponsorships

A brand competes on an emotional level while a commodity competes purely on a rational level. If a brand fails to establish a personality, then it's viewed merely as a commodity and competes on price alone (with price wars and low margins ultimately destroying any chances for brand success). Ergo, if you want your brand to be marketable, make sure it's likeable.

Unleashing the epiphany:

Customers will pay a premium for brands with personality.

Perseverance: Times change. Good brands change with them.

Brands must constantly evolve in order to provide compelling propositions to buyers and maintain dominance within their categories. To that end, marketers should equip every initiative with mechanisms designed to assess their target audiences' wants and needs and identify new branding opportunities.

Marketers maintain their brand's popularity and prosperity through a myriad of methods:

Brand Extensions: Extending the brand name to complementary products.

Decades after launching "the real thing," *Coca-Cola* understood that consumers needed a beverage that was low in calories but high in taste and extended the brand to include *Diet Coke*.

Sub-brands: Creating entirely new brands under the parent brand.

From feeding kids (*Carnation Instant Breakfast*) to kittens (*Friskies, Fancy Feast*), *Nestle* is sweet on the success stemming from sub-brands.

Co-branding Partnerships: Joining forces with synergistic brands.

Target now targets a broader audience by co-branding with *Amazon.com*. *Target* markets merchandise through *Amazon.com*'s site. The partnership enables both brands to benefit from the recognition and revenue.

New Product Categories: Enhancing the brand through new products and services.

Martha Stewart marked her meteoric rise to success with a cookbook. Since that time she has built an empire, one product category at a time. From bath accessories to gardening accoutrements, Ms. Stewart has seized every category spanning home and living needs.

New Distribution Channels: Unearthing new methods of delivering the brand.

Time was you actually had to visit a *White Castle* franchise to get your hands around those scrumptious little burgers. *White Castle* revived its brand and expanded its reach by exploiting a new distribution channel - now those tasty treats are available in your grocer's freezer.

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The lesson is that brands require constant care and must be reinvigorated through strategic and creative techniques in order to persevere market trends, overcome competitive threats and satisfy customer demands.

Supporting the epiphany:

In order to stand the test of time, your brand must change with the times.

Whether you're building, maintaining or repositioning your brand, use these 3 Ps as a roadmap for your branding initiatives. You can leverage the benefits of branding to bolster image and awareness in the immediate-term while positioning your brand among loyal constituents for the long-term.

Most important, you're armed with the insight that branding is an ongoing process of remaining relevant, valuable and memorable with your customers and prospects.

Next edition we'll unleash more marketing epiphanies, hope you'll join us. ■

who is CK?

CK is Christina Kerley.

Since '91, Christina has been identifying and developing marketing epiphanies for up and coming Start-Ups and formidable Fortune 500s. Passionate about working on extraordinary projects and providing exemplary service, she formed ckEpiphany in '99.

The business works with clients to realize their marketing, branding and business development objectives. For more information on CK and ckEpiphany, please visit: www.ckEpiphany.com

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