



the internal world of **BRANDS**

by Constantinos Pantidos

***Brands give
meaning to our lives***

Human beings have always been searching for meaning. Without meaning, our lives are empty. Obviously as consumers, we should not aspire to receive meaning from brands. We get it from our families, friends, our relationships with people, culture, art. Brands cannot replace these serious providers of true meaning, and if they do, it is surely a sign of social alienation. However, brands do form a part of our everyday rituals. Through them we feel, sense, dream and enjoy life.

Brands with a clear ideology can enhance our daily routines, and even satisfy deeper needs which inhabit our social unconscious. If we ask consumers which criteria they use to choose one brand over another, they will most likely mention price, design, taste or quality. However, if they could truly express themselves honestly they would be much more likely to refer to feelings of a return to the innocence of childhood, or of escaping everyday routine. Our lives would surely be a little more prosaic without brands.

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In today's difficult climate there is undoubtedly a growing cynicism about our institutions and established corporate brands. However, in periods of dramatic and radical change such as this, we find ourselves returning to the reassurance of traditional values in order to restore a sense of balance.

So, now that the past has never been more fashionable we find many brands selling us nostalgic products in nostalgic environments.

Double RL (above): Romantic nostalgia is hardwired into Ralph Lauren's brand DNA. This means that the brand can switch equally convincingly between preppy luxury at its Madison Avenue and Bond Street flagships, and grungy vintage Americana at Double RL & Co. Both are true to the brand essence. So powerful is this that the brand can even take Rugby and sell it back to the Brits!



Coke is so much more than just sugary water. It represents the spirit of an entire nation; both the dynamic Americana of the 20th century and a more modern face.

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The true value of a brand

Clever marketers know how to interpret consumer research. They are aware of their brands' true value and how to maintain its relevance, rather than focussing solely on the product, which can be copied, become unprofitable or simply irrelevant. They understand that every sustainable advantage comes from the brand, not the product.



On the other hand, brands that don't offer meaning to consumers have no reason to exist. Brands narrate while products are exchanged. One of the reasons private labels gain market share, apart from lower prices and the convenience they offer, is that brands often erode their character, beliefs and ideology by resorting to discounting. As a result, the meaning they offer to the consumer is greatly weakened.

An entirely invented brand, nonetheless we buy into Hollister's trendy SoCal surf culture. With its beautiful staff and stage set stores, it may be artificial but it is executed with genuine conviction.

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The essence of Nike is the triumph of the individual; the heroism of personal skill and sacrifice. Because this can be applied to any physical endeavour, Nike is free to appropriate any sport.

The character of a brand should not change



Starbucks transformed the retail landscape around the world, not by selling us coffee but by giving us a place to stop and to relax. Starbucks DNA is about selling us time

To be a brand means that a character has been developed. Just like human beings, the real character of a brand cannot change, only secondary traits can be smoothed out over time. The soul of a true brand always remains the same. This does not mean that the brand must remain attached to the past. On the contrary, when you analyse its 'genetic code' it is easier to adapt it for any situation.

Brands often fall into the trap of adding particular associations in vogue at the time, without examining whether they really match its character. This is the point at which a brand needs purifying to make it shine again and offer clear meaning to the consumer.

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In traditional retail, we buy our products instore, take them home and don't return unless there's something wrong or we want to buy something else. Here at Apple, customers bring their iPads back to play with them instore. Why? Because the products are 'coming home'

The love brand



Brands pass through different stages. From an initial heroic starting phase they pass through a period of wisdom, with only a select few managing to become love brands. Not all big, successful brands are love brands. Their success might be down to big advertising budgets, control of distribution channels or other strategies.

Only brands which consistently satisfy a deeper psychological need and have values and beliefs that they never betray, can become love brands. For a brand to become a love brand, its product or service, its packaging, its communication, its trade dress, its catalogues, the celebrities it endorses or who endorse it, even the way its calls are answered, must derive directly from its DNA instead of being made to fit its character retrospectively.

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C Wonder may be a fledgling New York brand but its DNA has been clear from the outset. Its mission to bring luxury icons to the mass market is written through everything it does and as a result it has been instantly understood by its market.

Brand coherence

It is relatively easy to achieve coherence across the various brand elements once the brand managers have decoded the DNA. If, however, the DNA has not been distilled into a Brand Book, it becomes almost impossible to build a meaningful brand. This is exactly when we find ourselves involved in promotional wars and a communication based on functional benefits from which it is difficult to exit.

Constantinos Pantidos heads up Athens based lovetofly (www.lovetofly.eu) the Brand agency that helps its clients refine the meaning their brands offer to consumers.

Echochamber and Lovetofly are looking forward to running global retail trend and branding seminars in 2012. For more information please contact matthew@echochamber.com