



DE-MYSTIFYING BRAND PERSONALITY

... its all in the customer's mind

Whitepaper #6



The struggle of every brand is the urgent need to connect with targeted customers. In a noisy and crowded marketplace – one with competing images, promotions, and messages – *how do great brands break through and create powerful differentiation and real preference?*

Like courtship in a crowded room, brands have a fundamental need to stand out ... to be noticed ... to demonstrate their innermost beliefs ... and to touch customer's motivations and preferences. If a brand were a person: How would you get to know me? How would you get to like me? How might you develop real feelings for me? What would be the basis of our relationship?

As described in last quarter's newsletter – great brands focus beyond "transactional loyalty" (e.g.: negotiated sales, frequency points) to nurture a real connection ... one that engenders emotional loyalty.

Some brands have charisma. They demonstrate a "persona" that extends well beyond their brand's functional benefits. And through that, they are able to create greater depth and dimension for the brand ... one that connects with customers on multiple levels. Consider **Harley-Davidson**, **Cricket Wireless**, **Crate and Barrel**, **Nickelodeon**, **Starbucks**, **Charles Schwab**, and **Celebrity Cruises**. These brands have developed "personality" as a key strategy for competitive differentiation and loyalty building.



... Crate & Barrel's identity-building and personality are integrated

As marketers, we often enjoy creative catch phrases to describe marketing propositions ... brand essence, strategic positioning ... and so on. Likewise, the concept of "brand per-

BRAND PERSONALITIES

Charles Schwab *Demystifying Investing ... Demonstrating Great Knowledge and Expertise*

ESPN *An Authoritative Passion for Sports, Knowledgeable with a bit of Irreverence. Approach Sports Coverage from All Angles*



Rugged and Macho with Spirit of Adventure and Freedom

TARGET *Stylish & Trendy, Younger, Competitively Priced*

sonality" is found deep within marketing textbooks ... the realm of consultants, professors, and lengthy whitepapers. Often, however, it is discussed in disassociated terms – removed from the realities of a brand's strategic and tactical efforts.

First of all, every brand's got it – brand personality that is. Some, however, evoke feelings ... others are bland. The critical difference is that some brands focus on it, understand it, and exploit it. To them, it is integral to their brand's experience, service interactions, and customer relationships.

Herein lies the reality. Brand personality can't be conceived as just a marketing tool ... invented through creative genius and embedded in advertising slogans. Rather, brand personality is a whole-brand, whole-experience, whole-organization mindset.



... Harley-Davidson draws attention to its "genuine" lifestyle personality

Personality gives a brand dimension and depth. It can breathe life into inanimate images. It can be the cornerstone for service delivery ... and connecting emotionally with customers. In saying this, one asks:

- *Is our brand's "personality" unique and differentiated? ... Is it authentic and real?*
- *Does it energize and excite? Does it create value?*
- *Does it strike images in the targeted customer's mind ... ones that resonate and motivate preference?*
- *Does it bring to life the brand's promises, products, services, and experiences?*

Some brands have well defined personalities. **Starbucks'** is outgoing, youthful, personable, and friendly ... a refreshing escape, freshness, warmth, and comfort. It is demonstrated through their service interactions, their packaging, their décor, their product offerings, and their corporate culture. **MTV**, on the other hand, is a total expression of youth, individuality, and breaking conventions ... a loud shout for independence and freethinking.

Nike's personality is unabashed ... aggressive and empowering ... somewhat self-important. It is about achievement and winners ... a passion for competitiveness. To contrast this, **Cricket Wireless** is "every-man" ... comfortable, welcoming, and relaxed.

What Personality Reveals about a Brand

Recently, a marketing guru wrote of personality as "a brand's outward face." Rather, I think of it as an inner soul. It isn't a marketing invention, a media campaign, or a training indoctrination. It is, however, all these things ... and much more.

Great brand personalities are multi-dimensional. As with humans, brand personality has both depth and multiple facets ... and reveals four basic qualities of the brand.

1. Demonstrates a Brand's Passion and Expertise ...
Defining the Brand's Ultimate Purpose and Differentiating It from the Competitive Set.
2. Creates an Affinity with Targeted Customer Segments ...
Touching and Energizing their Motivations.
3. Projects the Brand's Core Values and Beliefs ...
Describing How Customer's can Expect to be Treated.
4. Communicates an Over-Arching Tone, Style, and Attitude about the Brand's Experience and Customer Interactions.

Consider brand personality as the "voice" behind a brand's values ... a brand's competitive positioning ... and a brand's functional attributes. Personality communicates and projects these through human traits. It is understood and interpreted by the customer – and exists in the customer's mind.

Consider **Home Depot** versus **Lowe's**. Home Depot's personality is somewhat disheveled, masculine ... yet passionate about home improvement, gardening, and repair. It's tool time. Lowe's, on the other hand, is highly organized, controlled, contemporary, slightly snobbish, and fashionable.

Whereas Home Depot penetrates more against males, Lowe's indexes higher with females. Given that women are making more and more home improvement decisions, Home Depot has a longer-term personality problem. The brand understands this ... and has been trying to adapt their product selection, merchandising, and personality to address it.

Consider **MTV** versus **CNBC** – or **IBM** (*corporate, formal, professional ... somewhat stiff*) versus **Apple** (*individualists, artsy, freethinkers, innovative*) versus **Microsoft** (*aggressive, mainstream, arrogant*). It's all about ... "how they speak to us" ... "how they touch us."

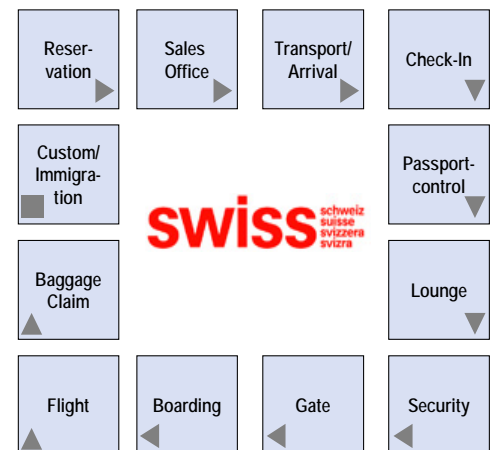
Touch-Points

A brand's personality – for good or for bad ... whether bold and challenging or bland and forgettable – is the cumulative, customer experience across all of the brand's touchpoints. It is demonstrated through everything a brand does including product design, merchandising, décor, signature elements, background sounds, and even smells.

The demonstration of personality across touchpoints is a keen strategy for many new, high-growth brands. Likewise, some undergoing re-vamp and re-birth are also focusing on personality and touchpoints.

The new **SWISS** airlines – the re-birth of the previous international carrier – is developing a distinct "personality" ... *Swissness: prestige, efficiency, reliability, innovation, and a passion for flying*. With a competitive signature of "a new airline with 97 years of experience,"

SWISS has developed a touch-point strategy where identity, imagery, personality, and service signals are integrated with this distinct personality to connect with customers.



... The new SWISS Air Lines pursues personality across touchpoints.

Like SWISS, innovative brands communicate and demonstrate personality across the web, at call centers, and through every

customer interaction. It is nurtured and defined via employee selection criteria, training, empowerment, service standards, and employee celebrations. Personality is similarly influenced by the sales team, executive interactions, and the tone of a company's annual report.

Building on this, many brands create unique environments to convey and energize their personalities. **Virgin Atlantic** is a case in point. Their hot red color communicates an aggressive, in-your-face, passionate personality. This is further energized by their use of avant-garde décor. Likewise, **Starbucks** has mastered environmental design to convey their personality.



... Virgin Atlantic creates personality in part through its décor and surroundings

Personality – Attitude & Tonality

Visual cues play an important role in signaling a brand's personality.

- **JetBlue's** "blue" and their high-fashion, designer uniforms signal a strong, differentiated personality ... a stylish statement that is noticeably distinct from other economy brands ... and run-of-the-mill mainstream cattle-carriers.
- Just as distinct, **Southwest Airlines'** "every-man" personality is evoked in their warm colors, their employee training, and their customer service interactions.
- **Cricket Wireless'** "bright, lime green sofa" communicates this brand's relaxed, comfortable, residential personality. This "residential" cue supports the brand's positioning that Cricket can be a replacement for your home phone.
- **Starbucks'** signature music cues a multicultural personality ... one that doesn't just fade into the background. You hear it ... you're aware of it. Additionally, their merchandise drives both brand identity and a unique flair – interesting, inviting, personable.

As such, it's the cumulative impact of all these cues ... all these images ... all these interactions that brings a brand's personality to life.

Some of the most "personality-oriented" brands are dramatic representations of their founder's own personality. Herein, Herb Kelleher, Charles Schwab, Martha Stewart, Steven Jobs, and Richard Branson ... have built powerful brands that are energized by their personalities.

The **Charles Schwab** brand's personality, for example, is all about "demystifying investing ... demonstrating great knowledge and expertise." This clearly builds on Charles Schwab "the man." As Theresa Johnston noted recently in Stanford Magazine when talking about the company's founder, "*Schwab dresses impeccably but projects an easy-going, approachable personality.*" Schwab himself is quoted as saying "*personality is to a man what perfume is to a flower.*" This, in essence, sums-up the opportunity to create depth and dimension through brand personality.

Power Building

Brand personality is also playing a powerful role in the introduction and growth of new brands ... as they seek to create noticeable differentiation and generate trial in crowded market-places.

Victoria's Secret was an early innovator in this area. Their provocative personality played an important role in creating developer and investor excitement. With targeted customers, their buzz stimulated interest and motivated trial. Long-term, personality has enabled this venerable brand to remain fresh and relevant ... whereas others may have come and gone.

Even in non-experiential segments, brand personality can be a powerful asset. **Target Stores** comes to mind. Over the past 5-years, they've focused on building personality – this in an industry where personality, at best, plays a secondary role.

Target's personality of "young, trendy, and stylish" contrasts with the typical perception of dowdy discounting (AKA: Wal-Mart and K-Mart). Their personality is backed by ... "*quality, trend-right merchandise, unique product designs, and innovative lifestyle statements.*"

As described in Target Corporation's 2000 annual report, "Target Stores [growth] is propelled by our ability to protect and enhance our distinct brand character. We strive to provide our guests with a shopping experience that is consistently better than, and different from, their experiences at our competitor's stores. By offering innovative, well-designed merchandise, compelling prices, and clean, attractive stores, we deliver excitement and value."

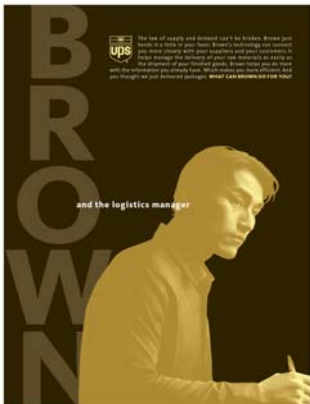


... Cricket creates a "comfortable, every-man" personality

Even bland brands attempt to make a virtue of their personalities ... or the lack thereof. **UPS** – case in point. Their current marketing thrust creates personality around "the amazing color brown." *What can brown do for you?* The objective is to demonstrate the brand's personality attributes of reliability, resourcefulness, and partnership.

Some brands had personality ... and lost their way. **The Gap** comes to mind. Others, like **Ford Motor Co.**, have chosen to re-discover and re-connect on brand personality.

Chairman Bill Ford's current brand spots are designed to create a brand personality that connects the heritage of the Ford family (e.g.: personality traits of honesty, hard work, toughness, and a passion for automobiles) with Ford's current offerings. Bill's personable, candid tone – and a montage of historical footage overlaid with contemporary images – combines to connect with targeted consumers, both current "brand loyal," as well as defectors.



... UPS's strategy is to dimensionalize "bland" as its personality

Reflections

A brand's personality must reflect the perceptions, motivations, and values of its targeted customers. In saying this, personality is in the eye ... or mind ... of the beholder.

For example, loyal users of **American Express** view the brand's personality as sophisticated, dignified, and educated. On the other hand, those "outside the brand" tend to see American Express as sophisticated, classy, snobbish, and condescending.

Some brands build personality by ... well ... building personalities. **MTV**, for example, has focused on creating programming, supporting promotions, and interactive applications built around real-people that reflect the brand's personality. This started with MTV's early VJ's ... and has attained cult-like status with programs like *The Osbournes*, *Road Rules*, and *The Real World*.

For example, backing up the voyeuristic, offbeat (even for MTV) *Osbournes* – we can now read Kelly, Melinda, and Jack's diaries online. Likewise, "well-tested" MTV personalities

from *Road Rules* and *The Real World* are re-packaged in a new series called *The RR / RW Challenge*. Herein, participant's personalities have been turned into trading cards.

Fundamentals ...

Clearly, brand personality is not a panacea. The basics of sound product design, quality service, and true market demand are much more important. But building on these fundamentals, brand personality can greatly energize and excite – creating value and differentiation. Brand personality communicates expectations and reinforces decision-making. At the same time, it can nurture trust and comfort.



... Starbucks creates personality through merchandising

Strong, proprietary personalities are multi-dimensional. They are demonstrated and reinforced throughout the brand's entire experience – both in front of the customer, as well as behind the scenes. It must be authentic and deliverable ... and driven by conviction and strategic discipline.

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