

A brand status report

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Brand-it's been the mantra of marketing executives and designers for more than a decade, and a theme in the Design Management Journal since the publication's inception in 1987. In this issue, we seek to add to the 15 years of wisdom accumulated in these pages by asking four questions:

1. What pathways illuminate the future of branding?
2. What brand elements do consumers find compelling?
3. How can brand be leveraged inside the organization?
4. What contemporary brand opportunities and challenges stand out as especially significant?

The contributors to this volume provide responses we hope you find insightful and stimulating.

Thoughts on the future

Pondering changes over the past two decades, David Norton, vice president of experience strategy and research for the Minneapolis-based Yamamoto Moss brand and identity consultancy, looks back at the '80s and characterizes that decade as an era of image-motivated conspicuous consumption. From DeLoreans and Dallas to Nike and Nintendo, people surrounded themselves with brand-named merchandise. In the '90s, the experience mattered more than a high-profile mark. Now the goal was to make dining a memorable event, to shop with a personal assistant, and to stay at the right resort. Missing in these trends, however-- whether from the '80s or the '90s--was the ability to transform purchases into objects of cultural significance. In Norton's analysis, this gap is an important branding opportunity. The challenge, as we enter the twenty-first century, is to translate branded experiences into experiences that give purpose to life and are culturally significant. Referring to this as the "convergence between consumption and the creation of cultural capital," Norton offers examples of companies that are making this happen and five recommendations that lead to this outcome:

1. Learn how to get customers to want to spend time with you.
2. Identify your brand truth.
3. Design to allow consumers to produce their own meaningful experiences.
4. Measure the cultural capital you help create.

5. Care genuinely and deeply.

With a bold, future-oriented outlook, a team at Philips Design in The Netherlands-Marco Bevolo, head of brand design, and Reon Brand, director of creative solutions-propose supporting processes and potential products they see as emerging in this next generation of brand development. Like Norton, they stress the creation of the "longer, more meaningful relationship with stakeholders based on a deeper understanding of emerging values in societies and cultures." Several multidisciplinary research programs, which include ethnographers, cultural anthropologists, sociologists, and experts in pop culture, facilitate the discovery of these connections. Strategic Futures investigates design as an agent of change to build more-sustainable relationships among people, artifacts, and environments. Future Studies generates insights into long-term societal trends. CultureScan captures shorter-term themes and directions. Together, these and other techniques reveal brand and product strategies that are simultaneously people-centered and innovative. They also identify narratives and belief systems that client companies might use as the foundation for a broad corporate vision. Amplifying the impact of their comments, Bevolo and Brand illustrate the results of their approach with several fascinating product prototypes-wallpaper that lights up and illuminates rooms, diagnostic systems that monitor a person's health in real time, and electronics that can change the perception and design qualities of space.

A third look into the future of branding comes from Bill Lucas, a fellow in experience design, and Michael Higgins, senior software engineer, both with MAYA, a Pittsburgh-based design consulting firm. Their arena is product development for the technology industries. The "totems" brand strategy they sketch is born out of MAYA's prototypical incarnation of information-centric computing. The new software affords a uniquely tactile sense of information visualization and manipulation. It points to a "world of shared, ubiquitous information where brand becomes a more holistic phenomenon." MAYA's correlated approach to identity offers the potential to take advantage of the flexibility and breadth of digital environments to initiate more personal and effective relationships with consumers. What they see is a series of "carvings" that can be used to systematically inform an evolutionary interface. While still under development, this design scenario holds the promise of transforming the personal computer product space along with the corresponding brand experience. In so doing, it offers theoretical insights into the formation of brands within any domain.

Brand and the consumer perspective

This quarter's keynote is an interview with Anne Asensio, executive director for design, interior design, quality, and brand character at General Motors. In his questions, Dublin, Ohio-based brand consultant Jean-Leon Bouchenoire is able to draw out insights that allow design managers to translate GM's approach to brand into more-- general principles and models. A fundamental tenet is that a brand needs a soul-a distinctive consumer experience that captures both the mind and the senses. In automobiles, this involves touch, sight, smell, sound, and feel, and clearly designers can be significant players in this effort. But they are not the only players. A second lesson is that brand is a shared mission. Success depends on the contributions of marketing experts, researchers, engineers, production workers, salespeople, and many others. Quality is a critical aspect of brand. At GM, this is measured in five ways: first impression; clarity of design intent; iso-quality (interior-exterior harmony and coherence); chrono-quality (ensuring that no design features seem outdated or chronologically incongruous with the others); and ultra-quality (making outstanding overall quality the signature of the brand). Combining these creates an identifiable brand character and brand heritage that maintains customer interest and loyalty. As a task, Asensio asserts, brand development requires a blend of vision, perseverance, control, and discipline informed by close contact with current and potential customers.

At Océ Technologies, a business-to-business document management and reproduction company headquartered in Venlo, The Netherlands, executives are convinced that their firm's brand and

market presence is enhanced by how their equipment looks, as well as how it performs. An essay by Guido Stompff, manager of industrial design, explores how he and his staff preserve and refine the Océ "look" as an essential emotional link with customers. Océ's products have a reputation as reliable and efficient-sophisticated, yet user-friendly. Interestingly, they are also known by their profile. They are used by professionals and convey a high-end professionalism. The design is modular, with dimensions determined by a carefully worked out proportional system. Even as components are added or replaced-and these events can happen years apart-the visual unity and integrity of the system remains. Océ machines are also differentiated by their green and gray color scheme.

Functionally, the operator interface is straightforward and streamlined. There are no gimmicks and, when possible, input and output choices are automated. Users and owners take pride in this equipment to the point that, when the company introduced a stand-alone control station, many technicians placed this module near the entrance of their spaces to show off their skills. At Océ, industrial design is a partner in research and development and a valued collaborator in defining and sustaining how customers perceive the firm's respected international brand.

Dannielle Blumenthal, director of the Institute for Brand Leadership, a Washington, DC, educational organization devoted to excellence in branding, describes a similar situation in the housing industry. Basheer Communities builds homes in Northern Virginia and Maryland with prices from \$400,000 to \$1.5 million. Under the leadership of Diane Cox Basheer, these developments have a family/neighborhood orientation and are laid out to encourage foot traffic in the community. Where possible, they integrate existing and historic structures and are tied into streets of adjoining cities and towns. The home designs themselves are stately, with porches, verandas, and lots of windows. Light fills the interiors. Ceilings are nine feet high. Spaces flow from one to the other and invite the relaxed gathering of family and friends. Together, these and other attributes coalesce into a sought-after brand that has been honored with numerous awards, and more important, helped lift 2001 sales 31 percent above the previous year to more than \$60 million.

In a conceptual analysis of brand from the vantage point of consumers, Peter Sackett, head of enterprise integration at Cranfield University, in the United Kingdom, and Efstathios Kefallonitis, a PhD candidate at the same institution, distill six reasons for brand failure. Brand confusion occurs when one brand gets mistaken for another. This can leave buyers distrustful, as well as bewildered. Brand over-information refers to the rejection of a product or service because consumers are overwhelmed with communications and find it impossible to order and internalize brand elements. Lack of differentiation defines circumstances where one brand is so much like another that consumers fail to develop affinities with a particular product or company. The absence of a brand reality describes the inability to deliver on a brand promise, a disconnect between projected image and actual use. Brand-product dysfunction happens when one or more bad experiences lead to broader negative impressions of a brand. Unsuccessful global branding is characterized by conflicts between a brand and local culture. To counter these problems, Sackett and Kefallonitis recommend bringing the consumer into the branding process more fully, to help create a strong correlation between brand aspirations and brand delivery.

Managing brand inside the organization

The internal understanding and implementation of brand is a necessary complement to the design of brand for consumers. The trouble is that some employees believe brand isn't their concern, and many don't have access to brand information. Fortunately, a growing number of corporations are addressing these matters.

Craig DeLarge, marketing manager of e-business for Johnson & Johnson in Norristown, Pennsylvania, discusses how his company insists that brand managers include internal stakeholders in their initiatives. Specifically, he highlights the ways intranets and extranets

facilitate this effort by serving as warehouses for brand assets, nurturing brand champions and brand communities, and increasing the speed and agility of brand processes. Intranet micro-sites focus on individual brand programs and include historic information and case studies. The systems are also used to cultivate such best practices as vertical and horizontal communication, listening to the customer, training strategies, and the development of user-friendly interfaces. To monitor success, managers conservatively track the economic benefits-savings and revenue-generated by the digital brand network and cite the impact of these activities as dramatically expanding brand understanding, stimulating innovation, and saving resources.

A study of digital brand management at TELUS, one of Canada's largest telecommunications companies, confirms the themes in DeLarge's essay. The case, written by Chris Bedford, president of the Karo Group design consultants in Calgary, Canada, sketches TELUS's growth from phones to Internet, data, and wireless communications with a workforce of 26,000 people. In this context, the company determined that an intranet/extranet was the most effective tool for conveying brand. It would be available to employees, as well as suppliers, such as ad agencies, design firms, printers, and product manufacturers. It could be easily and inexpensively updated and expanded. Systems managers and Webmasters were brought in during the early stages of development to secure their commitment and to be certain the system would meet their needs. To jump-start actual use, 25 brand stewards were identified to spread the word and create a positive "buzz" within their spheres of influence. Technically, the interface is purposely intuitive and user-friendly. Content is maintained by the people responsible for information rather than being input by a central office. There is a database on brand performance, and periodic reviews help assure alignment of the brand and business strategies. Two years into implementation, TELUS executives are pleased as brand awareness has increased in all markets-and this despite a 26-- percent reduction in the 2002 brand budget.

Current challenges

To round out our status report, two articles present topics that are in the forefront of branding today. The first deals with global branding. Markets are opening and increasingly companies are selling their products on almost every continent. Procter & Gamble is a leader in this tactic, a fact made very clear in a case study on Pantene Pro-V, the world's best-selling shampoo and hair-care line. Emily Kokenge, associate director of design innovation and strategy for P&G, and Liz Grubow, global creative director of the beauty-care team at Libby Perszyk Kathman consultants in Cincinnati, explain how, by 2000, the Pantene brand was dated and somewhat stale. The number of product offerings had grown, and consumers often found themselves confused. Packaging was inconsistent country-to-- country, and competitors were moving into Pantene's market. With the benefit of centralized brand decision making, an organizational structure P&G initiated in 1999, it was possible to revisit the Pantene design with a truly global attitude. Researchers met with consumers in Chicago, New York, Paris, Frankfurt, Mexico City, Osaka, and Bangkok. The phrase Pro-V was determined to be the foundation of the brand. Emphasizing this mark, new graphics and bottles were designed as a collection of sleek, elegant products, reinforcing Pantene's premium position. Consistent but variously sized packaging was developed to suit the production and buying habits in different countries. In less than a year, Pantene was relaunched, with the new design revitalizing a 10-year pattern of growth, setting sales and market-share records in several countries.

The second analysis, by Ken DeLor, president of the DeLor Group consultancy in Louisville, Kentucky, and Martha Bowman, executive vice president at the same firm, probes the untapped opportunities in pharmaceutical branding. Drug companies devote major resources to promote individual products and create strong brands in that category. As DeLor and Bowman see it, however, that is only the first step. These corporations could brand classes of therapeutic products, for example, in the area of diabetes. They could also emphasize corporate branding-showcasing a product but simultaneously stressing the company as a name medical specialists

and consumers can trust, US Food and Drug Administration regulations can make moving in these directions more difficult. At

the same time, in an ever-more-competitive environment, pharmaceutical companies solidify their position in the marketplace with appropriate branding.

I will conclude by saying that the intention in this brand update was to include a rich spectrum of contributions. Our hope is that you find it valuable and enjoy the articles and case studies that follow.

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[Sidebar]

A fundamental tenet is that a brand needs a soul—a distinctive consumer experience that captures both the mind and the senses

[Sidebar]

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[Footnote]

Find related articles on www.dmi.org with these keywords: brand, brand experience, consumer perceptions, design management tools

[Author note]

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