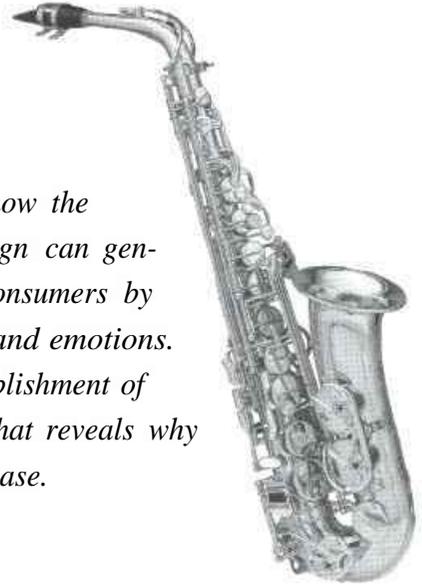


Let's Brandjam to Humanize Our Brands

by Marc Gobe

The Tsingjazz as a metaphor, Marc Gobe explores how the instinctive nature of creative processes and design can generate powerful brand solutions that resonate with consumers by connecting a valued product with a person's senses and emotions. To support such outcomes, Gobe advocates the establishment of interdisciplinary "brandjam centers" and research that reveals why people make purchases rather than what they purchase.



Marc Gobe, Founder and CEO, Desgrippes Gobe NY

In a century rife with the predictable, the dehumanizing, the dispiriting, jazz affirmed the fresh, the human, the hopeful, and it came to represent humanity at its best.

-John Edward Hosse, *Jazz: The first Century*

Design is to branding what jazz is to music: a new language of wonderful emotional experiences that unites brands with audiences. Design humanizes brands, stimulating our senses and feelings, and celebrates the power of collaboration and improvisation. But this was not always the case. The marketing of the twentieth century celebrated factories, rationality, and homogeneity.

"You can have my cars in any color, as long as it is black," declared Henry Ford, while more recently, Theodore Levitt saw a world that would be overtaken by "a confident global imagination that

sees the world as a single marketplace entity."¹ Paul Rand, one of the most influential designers of the last century and the creator of the IBM logo, claimed that "modernism... means integrity, it means honesty, it means the absence of sentimentality and the absence of nostalgia."² People then were perceived as a subservient mass of consumers that could easily be manipulated and their consumption habits regulated to fit a business production model. Design in that world had a functional role—to facilitate production. It was not thought of as a brand-building tool, required to inspire people's senses and emotions.

1. Theodore Levitt, "The Globalization of Markets." *Harvard Business Review*, May/June 1983.

2. "A Paul Rand Retrospective" (Cooper Union lecture), October 3, 1996.

Coca-Cola's NewWave

In 2000, Coca-Cola selected Desgrippes Gobe to redesign the Coca-Cola brand with visual graphics inspiring to a new generation of untapped cola enthusiasts. Our challenge was to humanize the product's iconography in new, more powerful emotional ranges.

Our new emotional model dictated a design that responded uniquely to consumers' life moments. We recognized and leveraged the way consumers respond to brands differently at different times throughout their lives, and also at unique sites. Vending machines, billboards, delivery trucks, blogs, sporting events, beach placement, retail environments—each elicits unique matrices of expectation and engagement. Graphics would be tailored for consumers according to our now famous emotional lens: an emotional need to be reassured (head), the desire to be socially and culturally involved (heart), and the craving for visceral engagement (gut). Enhancing the gut aspect of the brand was one means of reconnecting it to youth in a refreshing way. To that effect, we worked with Synovate Censydiam, a consumer insight group from Antwerp, Belgium, that probes consumers' motivations and satisfaction in relation to specific products within the context of human emotions.

In evaluating the brand's visual assets, we realized there was a powerful but abandoned icon that emotionally trumped all others—the Dynamic Ribbon. This powerful, abstract visual icon, created in the 1970s, was truly a brilliant idea; it almost suggested the action painting of a Jackson Pollock in its sprawling, dynamic flight,

and was a predecessor to the Nike "swoosh." We recommended bringing back this icon but evolving and energizing it to sensually and emotionally connect with today's youth markets across the globe, particularly with the addition of effervescent bubbles to enhance the connotation of refreshment.

We were also spending countless days in Coca-Cola's Atlanta archives reviewing libraries of the brand's history. Tracing out the brand's myriad visual iterations, the color yellow kept dancing before our eyes. It appeared on delivery crates in the 1930s, promotional materials in the 1940s, and even actresses' dresses in the 1950s. Instinctively and intuitively the team was excited about the idea of bringing yellow back into the visual narrative.

How that little bit of yellow jazzed up the brand

The new "Coca-Cola yellow" was used to highlight the brand's packaging, making it more energetic but also reframing and foregrounding Coca-Cola's "full red." Yellow helped to differentiate the dominant red and made it more inspiring. Moreover, the touch of yellow brought a surprising energy and optimism that enhanced the imagery and packaging. Though it was difficult to measure or demonstrate objectively, our design team felt the color's power and believed they might have found the "gut" translation of

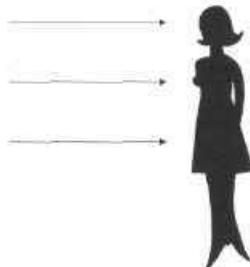
Head Heart Gut

Humanizing brands on multiple levels:

HEAD: The logic
I trust and believe in this brand

HEART: The relationship
I have a relationship with this brand

GUT: The desire
I want to be stimulated by this brand



Humanizing brands means humanizing the process by which we look at brands.



The new design had a greater impact than we had ever imagined.

the brand we were looking for.

The new design had a far greater impact than anticipated. Because consumers responded so well initially, the new design also helped shift the internal culture at Coca-Cola, opening doors for people to innovate within the company. That little bit of yellow, backed by a floating ribbon, unleashed the energy native to the brand. This emotional design did not reinvent the brand; but it released the latent potential within its image, its audience, and its company. In short, the emotional energy of the brand was brought to life.

I never felt at any point that we were designing a new packaging system; instead, I felt we were leveraging the design process to see how much potential for innovation was inherent in the brand. The process helped the company's management team to articulate its belief that Coca-Cola was not fully leveraging its emotional capital and to rethink how to connect the brand with the youth market in particular.

From yellow to fashion hero

Less than a year after the new can's launch, I was bowled over to receive a copy of *Vogue* Australia featuring a model on the cover holding the new Coke can! She was wearing the yellow and red colors of the can. The design had itself become a fashion statement! Inside the magazine, a four-page pictorial featured this same model with yellow and red fashion accessories, likewise modeled after the new can.

Three months later, the fall 2004 ready-to-wear collection runway show by John Galliano featured the new Coca-Cola can design decorating the hair of at least three of the models. Likewise, the color scheme for the makeup and accessories was Coke yellow and red! In this fleeting moment, my mind swam with delight. This was the ultimate consecration of Coca-Cola as a fashion statement and a lifestyle brand. It was now up to the rest of the organization to capitalize on this exceptional event.

A huge error in traditional marketing research is believing that consumer response and taste are a fixed target. In fact, they constantly evolve and respond to other cultural changes. Something like *Vogue's* designers picking up on the new design is, of course, good for the brand, both recognizing and amplifying its design

power. But more importantly, it helps cast a new aura around the brand that comes in the wake of its design. These kinds of changes, and in fact most of the important but subtle changes that create design success, can't be anticipated in advance, which is why intuition, emotion, and the designer's sensibility are, at the end of the day, the most promising resources one can have.

This was an unprecedented event for the Coca-Cola brand and the Desgrippes Gobe team. It revealed again the fundamental shifts and attitudes that connect a brand to culture, and it led me to the following conclusions:

- Design cuts through the clutter to reach people emotionally in the most powerful and transformative way.
- As the dominant form of communication, there is more to branding than advertising. This is because people seek a physical and sensory manifestation of a concept.
- Design is an emotional vocabulary that transcends words. It not only connects with consumers but also becomes the only brand language that matters.



Model at John Galliano ready-to-wear fashion show. It was the ultimate fashion statement.

The Coca-Cola cans on Galliano's runway are the product placement everyone dreams about. Those ideas, those connections can only be found through imaginative and intuitive thinking; the entry door to the world of the unconscious is only possible through the creative mind. In a world that is over-stimulating, design might give consumers the ability to assimilate those changes, as well as the power to choose.

It is more than design aesthetics

That color yellow in the Coke packaging unleashed one of the most exciting experiences of my career as a designer. The endorsement of this new design in the fashion world was the proof that Coca-Cola was reawakening people's admiration for the brand. Even given the powerful impact and buzz design can create with people, billions of dollars will be spent on broadcast media, overshadowing a new kind of message: design, still considered a minor investment for the success of the brand. So is design just a fleeting part of branding, or is it a more robust way to build a more financially sound communication program?

Why brand jam?

The answer suggested itself to me during the writing of *Brandjam*. I had called Michael Francis, the executive vice president of marketing at Target, to ask him if that company's design culture saved the "brand" money on broadcast advertising. His answer was, "In a word, yes. Buzz [from their design commitment] or media attention has had a critical role in defining our brand with consumers. Far from mere fluff, buzz has had an astonishing amplifying effect on our marketing mix. It has helped us to level the playing field with competitors who may outspend us. It has also added a credibility factor that marketing dollars would have never delivered."

Still, upwards of \$90 billion per year will be spent on advertising over the next four years in the US alone and, according to industry sources, 30 percent of that money will be wasted each year. Moreover, it seems the brands that have made design a driver of their corporate and marketing culture, toward the ultimate objective of enhancing consumer satisfaction, spend fewer advertising dollars for the simple reason that

Advertising Expenditure (US) in 2005

FORD	\$1 billion	TOYOTA	\$776 million
SEARS*	\$770 million	TARGET	\$602 million
MCDONALD'S	\$742 million	STARBUCKS	\$36 million
MICROSOFT	\$463 million	APPLE	\$155 million
COCA-COLA	\$426 million	RED BULL	\$51 million
KOHL'S	\$401 million	IKEA	\$86 million
BUDWEISER	\$230 million	CORONA	\$52 million
CADILLAC	\$225 million	BMW	\$137 million
EXPEDIA	\$168 million	TRAVELOCITY	\$85 million
EBAY	\$129 million	GOOGLE	\$8 million
UNITED	\$78 million	VIRGIN ATLANTIC	\$7 million
AQUAFINA	\$27 million	FIJI	\$2 million

Does spending more money in traditional media buy results?

*Source: TNS Media Intelligence, copyright 2006. Figures rounded to the nearest million; includes TV, radio, print, outdoor, and Internet (display only). *Includes Sears and Kmart.*

their brand message is supported by the desirability of their products. The desires created by TV commercials often fall flat when people face the reality of unexciting products and the uninspired environments in which those products are sold. Clearly, the solution is to broaden the way we communicate with consumers and probe their emotions.

It is more than focus-group research. It is probing the why instead of the what.

The almost-exclusive reliance on a narrow and limited form of research focus groups as the major outlet for communication is failing to engage consumers in a more sensorial and surprising way. (In general, surprise is a brand's best friend when it is evocative of newness.) This type of research has had a role to play in fostering commodity products while reassuring marketing staff. Research that asks consumers to select innovation or judge design is a sure path toward the abandonment of the most promising ideas. We all know that Absolut Vodka and Red Bull were dismal failures in focus-group research. "People didn't believe the taste, the logo, the brand name. I'd never experienced such a disaster," said Dietrich Mateschitz, the creator of Red Bull, the energy drink now worth billions in sales.

"Only if you take people out of their comfort zone will you get meaningful answers," says Anne Asensio, director of advanced vehicle design for General Motors, and previously one of the designers behind Renault's vastly successful Megane³ in Europe. In her career, Asensio has seen marketers making plans for cars they had not yet seen, mostly relying on focus-group input to help sell those products. "How could you have designed a car in the shape of an egg if you had to rely on research?" she asks, referring to the unique shape of the Megane.

If, according to industry sources, more than \$7 billion a year is spent on research in the US, then we ought to revise how we probe our consumers' desires. "Why are there so many marketing failures if market research is so compelling and insightful?" muses Jan Callebaut, Hendrick Hendricks, Madeleine Jansens, and Christophe Fauconnier, principals of Synovate Censydiam, in their book, *The Naked Consumer*. Their

answer is to stop asking people what they buy and focus instead on why they buy it.

Design is about consumer satisfaction. It is the insight and the message.

As I worked on *Brandjam*, I interviewed some leaders in the design industry to better understand the role of design in the success of their brands. From these interviews emerged this powerful idea: Design connects emotionally, but even more important, a void exists in knowing how brands should envision their new roles in an emotional economy. Design is about satisfying consumers' unmet needs through soliciting their senses, and that might be the key to its success. It challenges and stimulates marketers while wowing consumers.

Chris Bangle, director of group design for BMW, likes to say that great ideas are not always understood at first. He believes that "people need to feel your conviction." What else but design can convey such a conviction in the most authentic way? Design might be the proof of the human touch people are looking for behind brands, as well as the conviction that celebrates a company's vision.

Veronique Gabai, senior vice president of designer fragrances at Estee Lauder, claims that "the main hurdle to branding innovation is all those ideas people can't see; concepts that are not fully realized to be truly appreciated; research that informs on the wrong emotions and creates resistance to change." What Gabai means is that there is no live connection today among consumers and marketers, researchers, brand consultants, and advertisers. The human and sensory factor is nonexistent; ideas are not visualized to be brought to their full expression; everybody moves arrogantly to his or her own beat in a dissonant and disconnected fashion, creating loud messages but little brand harmony. The consumer suffers.

The Brandjam Center

Great ideas don't happen in a vacuum. Brands, like jazz musicians, need to engage in some serious jam sessions, bringing together all the play-

3. Quotes from design and industry leaders in this article are taken from personal interviews with the author.