

Precious brands: loyalty unlimited

Is your brand admired, loved - worshipped, even? If so, it's a precious brand. Andrew Doyle, Holmes & Marchant, explains how it might come to be that way

THERE'S A NEW hero for marketers to worship. His name is Peter Thomas and he's an insurance worker from Brighton in England. Or rather he was called Peter Thomas. Today his legal name is Honey Monster and he is perhaps the most extreme case around of brand love. He just adores Sugar Puffs and their Honey Monster character.

If only consumers of all our brands loved them so much that they decided to do what Peter (sorry, Honey) has done! Sadly most brands don't inspire this kind of fanaticism, but there are some that do get close to us. We become emotionally attached to them. They become loved objects, irrespective of what they do or what they cost. In fact being loved, being 'precious', is the ultimate achievement for any brand.

For example, ask a designer anywhere in the world what they think of Apple and you're likely to be pinned against a wall for hours while they wax lyrical about their brand.

Or, how about getting a woman in her twenties to talk about Zara? I'm told that for her it's like going into a candy store - because there's always something new to excite and entice her. And no other clothes retailer seems to inspire like this Spanish retailer.

Then there's Tic Tac. Anyone who has recently seen the movie *Juno* will remember the heroine's boyfriend, who always has his orange Tic Tacs by him. That's why Juno demonstrates her love by filling his mailbox with hundreds of packets of this precious confectionery.

What is it about these brands that make so many people love them? What makes them precious? It goes beyond the product. It goes beyond packaging or advertising. It certainly goes beyond the rational.

Oh dear, it goes beyond the rational. That's a pity because the rational is the way we mostly handle our brand marketing, isn't it? For example, it's rational isn't it that if you offer a better product, people will buy it? At least that's the theory behind the wave of premium products that have appeared on the market. But this strategy doesn't do anything to make

people love them. Premium simply becomes the next level of threshold values expected by shoppers from products. And as I have recently seen in research, consumers lump all the premium own-label brands from supermarkets together and see them as one thing, rather than discriminating between them.

This kind of push marketing doesn't work anymore. We are all expecting a lot more from the brands we buy. Something more than just knowing we have bought something better.

And that's where preciousness comes in. Preciousness translates into unswerving loyalty and that in turn converts into guaranteed income. But how do you get there? In my journey to find the answer, I uncovered some clues, which seem to work. But before letting you hear what I learnt, you truly must switch off your rational 'push' marketing mindset and really enter the emotional world of the consumer.



Emotion

If you look at brands that are clearly precious, say Innocent, Tods or Gu, it's intriguing to see that they are all first-generation brands - that is, the people who created them are still directly involved in the business. And none of them went into business on purely rational grounds. Talk

to any entrepreneur and passion oozes out of their pores. It is emotion that has driven each of them.

I remember hearing how the founder of the Campbell Soup owned bakery Pepperidge Farm started her business. Margaret Rudkin had a sick, asthmatic son who had severe food allergies. To help pep him up, she decided to replace the highly processed food she had been feeding him with, among other things, her own all-natural home-baked loaves. And yes, I know it sounds cheesy, but the bread was wonderful and friends and neighbours did start asking her to bake for them. A huge business built on the emotions of a worried mum.

And this sort of emotion clearly infuses the products of these first-generation brands and rubs off on consumers. But how do they get this emotional content across to consumers? Certainly it's not by talking about gap analysis or positioning theory. They do it by having a story. And that seems to be the next component in building a precious brand.

The story

I'm looking at a watch I bought this week in Zurich. It wasn't expensive. And it wasn't a Swatch. But it looks nice and gets compliments around the studio here. The great thing is that when I get asked about it, I can tell the story about its origins - how its look is based on the clocks used on Swiss railway station platforms.

The point is that this story tells something about me. I hate to admit it but it enables me to say look, I'm different, I'm discerning, I'm curious. And so the story not only brings the brand to life, it also brings me to life in the eyes of others.

I picked up on stories some years ago, and we often talk in our company about how design is the art of symbolising brand stories. But I was lost for a while trying to figure out how to take a brand's story and make it relevant for consumers. And that led me on to a brilliant discovery - a book by two Americans, Margaret Mark and Carol Pearson, called *The Hero and the Outlaw* (1). They helped me realise that precious brands are those that have a story personifying the product as a specific

Andrew Doyle is chairman of Holmes & Marchant, an international design consultancy. He spent the first half of his career as a marketer with Campbell Soup, Allied Domecq and United Biscuits amongst others, before entering the design industry. Holmes & Marchant's clients include Unilever, Kraft and Diageo. andrew.doyle@holmesandmarchant.com



type of hero. And that brings us to the next part of making a precious brand (2).

Motivation

So precious brands trigger emotion in consumers through their use of the story. But how should that story be pitched? Mark and Pearson point to motivational theory and Jung.

No, don't get worried. It's not that complicated. Apparently we're all driven at different times by four key drives: belonging, independence, stability and risk. And they are certainly present when we're buying things in the supermarket. So if your brand story fits snugly with one of these needs, you may find it becoming precious - because it moves your brand from being just an inanimate object to a support for the shopper's particular motivation.

Of course it gets a bit more complicated, because within each of these four motivation areas there are different types of stories that could be told to reflect different aspects or nuances of the motivational area - what Mark and Pearson call archetypes. The thing that really impressed me about all this though was that there seemed to be a direct correlation between precious brands and the clarity with which they fit human motivation.

Let me bring this alive with some examples. What motivates people to fall in love with Zara? How about the fact that its incredible business system allows for lightning-fast changes in merchandise. Not much to fall in love with there, surely? But think about the consumer value of this rapid turnaround of clothing. For someone who wants to dress differently, it is the place to go; there's always something new and inspiring on the racks. It helps people express their individuality and it really hits home for those motivated to explore - to be different.

I love the recent UK Carling beer campaign 'Belong'. It actually uses one of the four core human motivations as the copy line. Guys in their late teens and early twenties are strongly driven by a desire to belong to a gang or group. And Carling, their lager, really latches on to this need.

Some years ago I tested a range of ready meals across Europe for a multinational

company. We presented the products in different forms of packaging and I was astonished when the results came in. All the products hit pretty well the motivation to be in control. They were convenient after all. But one pack did so much better than any of the others.

It was a ready meal steamed in a paper bag. And it drew out of Europeans an amazing nostalgia for that particular cooking style used by their mums and grandmas decades ago. It touched strongly on a desire for simpler times, a return to innocence, a search for paradise.

One of my precious brands is Post-its. Not the little ones sitting on your desk but the big flip-chart versions. They cost a fortune but I can't run a workshop without them. They stay on the wall, you don't need tape, and they look neat and tidy. They hit my need to feel safe in a workshop environment. They give me control.

We've even been able to bring this preciousness into the corporate world. When we begin working on a corporate identity, we use an A4 page with 24 famous faces on it - 12 men and 12 women. Each has been chosen to represent different facets of the four types of motivation, guided by the work of Mark and Pearson.

We give the sheets to company staff and ask them to choose one of these faces as the personification of their organisation. I can't tell you how spooky it is when the sheets are handed back in. There is always amazing consistency within an organisation. The same face appears on answer after answer, and helps us really get to grips with the underlying meaning or motivation behind the client's corporate brand.

Style

Something that really stands out with precious brands is style. I don't mean beauty, although some have it. No, it's more that they all are confident enough to have their own look. Red Bull is a great example. Absolut is another. As are Tic Tac and Heinz Ketchup:

An ownable style actually brings together many of the points already made about precious brands. The first-generation brand owners can find an outlet for

their emotional attachment to their 'baby' by using a design style that flamboyantly says to the world 'I have arrived'. Style enables the creator to tell the brand story symbolically, and style can be a consumer's signal to all around them that says 'this is what I'm like'.

It's also very enlightening to observe that many precious brands actually have style guardians. I remember at Pepperidge Farm many years ago watching its style guardian pass or reject designs. Some of the rejects looked pretty good to me, but when I made that observation, the reply was that they weren't the Pepperidge Farm way of doing things - the product shots were too perfect and lacked the excessive dribbles of chocolate their style of cake would have.

Indeed, you could sort of argue that rejecting a design because of its lack of excessive chocolate dribbles is a form of precious brand zero tolerance. If a brand management will get hot under the collar about the exterior style, then imagine how difficult they will be about the product inside or the ingredients being used.

Ritual

Style doesn't just need to be about the precious brands' look. It can also be about the way in which we use the brand. When I open my Danone yoghurt, I unconsciously lick the inside of the foil lid. When I grab the Heinz Ketchup, I always give it a hefty shake. When I want to drink a Leffe, I grab the right glass and sluice it under the cold tap before pouring in my precious beer. And I always leave my Weetabix soaking in the milk for three minutes before spooning it up.

Just as with style, you could also say that a precious brand often has rituals associated with it. They reinforce the specialness of the brand. And of course the brand owner can help ensure those rituals are created. I just bought some Ecco shoes. They came with a soft bag to hold them in and a very stylish matt black shoehorn. So now, whereas my other shoes get scant attention, the black Eccos go through a special ritual when being put on or taken off. And end up being more precious.

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Worship

While I am not about to claim that precious brands are the new religion, by worship I mean the set of attitudes that assign to the 'precious object' the status of being worthy of idolatry. Think Nike and teenagers and you'll get a clear indication of what this sort of worship is all about.

We did some brilliant research with 300 teenagers across Europe using our CLICK research method. This gave them cameras and asked them to answer all our questions using pictures. One key question was 'What is the most important object in your life?' The answer from most was a picture of their trainers. So maybe we should see Niketown as a church for the worship by devotees of their precious brand.

Worship is when the object practically owns the owner. It is a subtle, yet very powerful trigger. Worshipped brands are the ones consumers want to talk about. The ones they want to convert others to. The consumer becomes the brand's missionary.

Conclusions

We all want our brands to be precious - to be loved beyond reason, to be bought without a second thought, to be cherished as an old friend. It seems those brands that are precious combine the emotion of the founder, the expression of that emotion in a story, the grounding of its story in one of four deep-seated human motivations; they have their own unique style, are often handled in a ritualistic way and, yes, get close to being worshipped.

One final thought. I wrote this in the first person, because these are my thoughts. And it occurs to me that precious brands are always first-person brands. So if you want your brand to be precious stop calling it 'it' and start calling it 'me' or 'us'. •

1. McGraw-Hill, 2001.

2. See, for example, J Howard-Spink: *Who is your brand? And what is its story?* Admap 443, October 2003.

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