

Why measuring experience is key to building brand value

How consumers experience brands has become a crucial aspect of brand value and needs to be measured effectively, argues **Paul Simonet** Alternative Genius

BRANDS HAVE NEVER been a more significant part of our personal and economic landscape. Understanding the real value they bring to customers and to business is even more important

Most industry experts observe that the way consumers value and experience brands has changed radically in the past ten years, but few, if any, offer a coherent systematic approach to measuring how.

In the early days of brands, we had blind and branded testing to guide us. Nothing was clearer than the customer's willingness to pay more for one branded product than another. The greater the differential, the stronger the brand - simple.

The IPA's effectiveness studies have proven the economic value of the long-term emotional affinity between a customer and a brand, but now the conceptual challenge of branding and the measurement challenge have moved on again because of new technology.

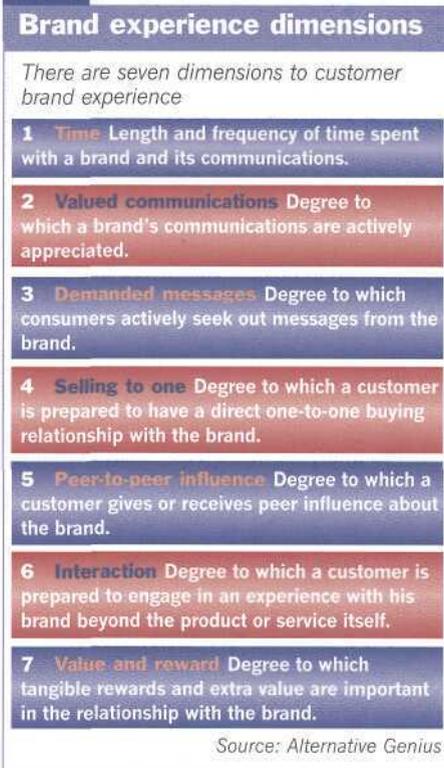
This is creating a new set of ways in which brand values are experienced, created and destroyed. New brands have arisen, such as Google and Amazon, that seem to defy the old laws of branding.

It is not that the old ways of building and recognising brand value are no longer relevant, but that they have been joined by others that may create a more present and pervasive value through a 'brand experience'. The magnification of the brand's potential impact has been driven by technology to make brands deeper and more constantly available to customers. This expansion of 'on demand' availability and unlimited scope and depth for brands has only just begun.

Brands are not being marginalised and consumers are not avoiding them. They are simply demanding more of them, in more ways, in different places, with the promise of even greater loyalty and engagement as the prize. Put at its simplest, the potential for a brand to create value for customers has moved on again. After the USP of the 1950s and 1960s, the ESP of the 1980s and 1990s, we now have the UExP - Unique Experience Proposition.

From Kleenex tissues using digital technology to invite customers to share their emotional experiences and 'Let It

FIGURE 1



Out', to Apple inviting us to 'Change the world one app at a time', we are no longer consumers but 'experiences' of brands.

Perhaps pointing out the importance of brand experience is nothing new, but we still need to find an adequate methodology for measuring, simply and powerfully, how this impacts on how a customer values a brand.

The first key question is what makes up a 'brand experience'? What is the set of dimensions on which a brand experience can be holistically and consistently measured? From a broad-based audit of cross-disciplinary methodologies and a thorough peer review with a variety of research practitioners, we have established that there are seven dimensions to customer brand experience that need to be measured and drawn together in a single Brand Experience Value (BEV) analysis (Figure 1).

Each measure goes beyond the rational or emotional assessment of the appeal and is geared to measure the degree to which a Customer is prepared to accept an engagement experience with the brand.

To express the seven dimensions of

BEV, a 2i-question survey has been developed. There are three questions per dimension, and each dimension can be questioned for any brand and for the defined category in which the brand operates.

Each of the three questions explores the brand experience dimension in a slightly different way, but so that they can be added together to give a single value for the importance of the particular brand experience dimension.

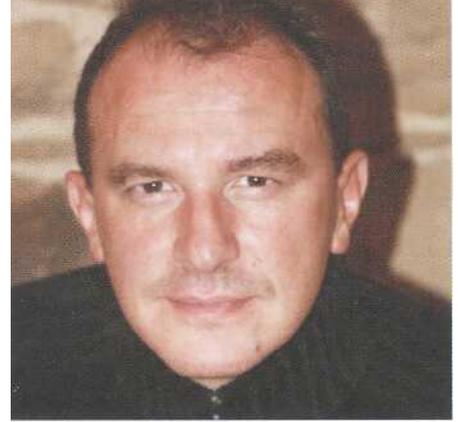
The results from the questionnaire are best represented by using a 'brand experience web' (Figure 2), which illustrates the brand's experience value 'footprint' and the bias within that strength.

The examples shown are from three very successful brands, but it can be seen that there are biases in the strength of each of these brands. Each was generated from a small sample and, in all cases, the respondents were consumers of the brands in question.

• **Sporting goods brand** (Figure 2a): This brand has very considerable strengths for customers in terms of communications - both push and pull that leads to a very credible and intimate relationship. There seems little wrong for this brand. However, the degree to which it relies on communications is limiting the depth of its relationship. The relative weakness of Peer-to-peer, Interaction and Value measures suggest there is a lack of mutual commitment that competitors may exploit. Is this brand admired more than it is loved?

• **Motor manufacturer brand** (Figure 2b): This brand is strong with its customers, with a lot of its value based in direct interaction and tangible delivery. There appear to be opportunities for communications to add greater value and to consider whether Peer-to-peer communication could add strength to the brand. It may be strong for existing advocates but less attractive to new customers.

• **Beer brand** (Figure 2c): This brand has a very traditional footprint driven by communications, peer group and events. Many of the technology or interactive channels appear to be underperforming. The dimensions on which the brand performs well are some of the most costly to support. There are opportunities to



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improve the personal engagement and value side of the brand experience.

The analysis shows where a brand's 'experience value' lies. We are measuring the value of the engagement experience customers are having with a brand, rather than what they know, think, feel or have seen about a brand. This makes our understanding of a brand three-dimensional - rational, emotional and experiential.

The BEV method helps us answer questions such as: is my brand well-adapted to how the consumer brand landscape is changing? Am I happy with the BEV customers are getting from my brand? Where can I improve? Where can I win?

In addition to understanding the experience footprint of any selected brand, the method can be used to assess and compare with the competition, with the category in general or with the footprint of one user group within a market or brand versus another. In the case of our beer market example, one of the brand's strongest competitors has begun to succeed in building out of the traditional beer profile to begin to embrace more intimate personal communication and deliver more value to its drinkers (Figure 2d). What is it about the experiences and interactions our competitor is offering that are resonating with more consumers? Are the types of events and experiences they engage with more relevant to the drinker audience? Is this relevance also driving the sense of Value and reward?

Again, not surprisingly, non-owners' experience value is a shrunken version of owners' (Figure 2e). Traditional research methods often lead to the answer 'improve your image among non users' - ergo, advertise. The BEV method promotes more radical and disruptive questions. For example, perhaps, creating more personally engaging interaction (maybe using a media or lifestyle partner) would break the narrow choice frame that often limits purchase in the car market.

Perhaps galvanising the Peer-to-peer channel would effectively close the gap between users and non-users. The brand experience web shows us these issues simply and in context.

The BEV analysis also allows us to look

FIGURE 2

Brand experience webs



across categories. FMCG and technology services have a different brand experience footprint. This is useful in understanding the challenges that are faced by marketers in breaking category boundaries for traditional brands and offering new value for changing consumers. What can Google learn from Guinness, and VO5 learn from Virgin? In the highly available, highly engaged technology environment, more than ever, apparently different brands compete to offer customers BEV that goes beyond product difference.

The way customers now value brands has changed, and BEV has become crucial. BEV's seven dimensions describe the dynamic engagement experience that customers can have with a brand. From this, we can create a measurement method that can represent those dimensions within a usable framework

The purpose of the analysis is to enable a brand to understand its 'experience footprint' in both an absolute and a relative sense, and to consider clearly the dimensions via which value might be increased. The analysis allows all the dimensions of experience value to co-exist in the same method but allows one to understand separately the influence of each.

Why superior BEV matters

BEV matters in the same way that brands have always mattered, only more so. A stronger brand experience is a means of being better able to compete. A broader brand experience is a means of being better able to compete over time and over territories and changing market conditions.

A more consistent and coherent brand experience is a way to ensure a more valued relationship and a preparedness to engage personally in a brand, pay a premium consistently and recommend that experience to others with confidence.

But only a superior method of understanding brand experience can lead consistently to superior brand experience.

• The survey, developed with HPI Research, is available at alternativegenius.net and from warc.com