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Branding



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One upon a time, brands were simple products like soap, tea, boring every day products that were consumed and replaced. Nowadays brands established their place in our world, people all around the globe wear clothes that promote the names of different soft drinks, sport shoes, music bands, cell phones, universities, football teams, or other things they fill a connection with.

But why are brands such a clear and unique manifestation of our days? Simply because in a noisy world where rational decisions are almost impossible, brands represent clarity, safety, consistency, status, membership – all that a person needs in order to define itself. Brands mean identity.¹

Why are brands useful?

Brands are needed both by the organizations/companies and their consumers, because their existence brings a variety of benefits to each of them.

For the companies, brands:

- open the possibility of creating new businesses;
- assure a better differentiation between companies, products and services;
- create the possibility of good positioning in the market;
- develop a desirable image in the consumer's mind;
- give the chance to set convenient prices;
- make it possible to distinguish or single out its products;
- create the possibility to extend and diversify the business through brand extensions;
- make it possible to protect and assure its identity.

¹ Wally Olins, *The brand Handbook*, Thames and Huston Ltd, London, 2003



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For the consumer, brands:

- give a mark of authenticity and quality;
- make it possible to make quick purchase decisions, acting as “shortcuts” in our mind;
- are a source of satisfaction;
- are an element of personal identity.²

What is branding?

Most of today’s products and services are bought not sold, and branding greatly facilitates this process. Branding “pre-sells” the products and services to a buyer. It is just a more efficient way of selling.³ A public relation approach can be found in Wally Olins’s handbook, as he considers branding to be responsible “to create and sustain trust [...] to respect promises”.⁴ Branding represents in fact the activity through which we can build the entire identity of our organization, which consists of:

- conceptual identity – its philosophy and vision, its core values and guiding lines;
- verbal identity – its name, slogan, communication style;
- visual identity – its characteristic colors, logo, packaging, design of public materials and even its offices or selling points;

We can add here, if carefully and strategically constructed, the company’s structure, its communication systems and styles, the quality of products and services, the management style, and other specific elements, all which influence greatly the perceived image of the company.

² Gerard Stan, *Branding*, University masters course, Iasi, 2010

³ Al Ries, Laura Ries, *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding*, HarperCollins Publishers, US, 1998

⁴ Wally Olins, *The brand Handbook*, Thames and Huston Ltd, London, 2003



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For many years branding was constructed around a *Unique Selling Proposition* (UPS), and had the product in the center of everyone's attention. The next step was *Emotional Selling Proposition* (ESP), when similar products were perceived different because of their emotional charge. Bringing the company in front of the customers, the *Organizational Selling Proposition* (OSP) approach stressed the importance of company values and vision, organizational culture, responsibility and social involvement, making its employees the main ambassadors of the company. A fifth level is represented by *Brand Selling Proposition* (BSP) where the brand is more powerful than the product and its name appears everywhere even in the absence of the original product (ex.: like Disney, or Pokémon, or Harry Potter on bed sheets, school notebooks, pencils, toothbrush etc.). Nowadays we can observe the phenomenon of *Me Selling Proposition* (MSP), many companies providing custom made products, developing ways of interaction with their customers, transforming the client in a creator.

What is next? There are already signs that even this last phase will be overcome by the holistic approach, according to which the whole cannot be reduced to the sum of its elements. The Holistic Selling Proposition (HSP) brands are those that respond to human need of something to believe in, of tradition, religion, and communicate their identity through any kind of message, form, symbol, ritual, involving the customers and stimulating all their senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell).⁵

Brand communication

The brand communication has as its main purpose to raise the brand visibility and to consolidate its desired image. Thus, through advertising, we strive to reach brand recognition, in other words to develop the customers capacity to "*recognize or to remember that one specific brand is a part of a category of products*"⁶ and that it possesses a series of attributes.

⁵ Martin Lindstrom, *Build Powerful Brands through Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight, and Sound*, Free Press, New York, 2005

⁶ David Aaker, *Managing brand equity*, The Free Press, New York, 1991



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According to David Aaker, to know a brand is a process that consists of several steps/degrees:

- (a) the brand is not known;
- (b) the recognition of the brand – the brand can be recognized in a store;
- (c) the remembering of the brand – the consumer can name spontaneously the brand in a category of products;
- (d) the priority knowledge – the consumer names first the brand when he refers to a specific category of products.⁷

To have a well developed conceptual, verbal, visual identity is not enough; we can say that we have a brand from the moment that it exists in the minds of our clients, that we have a relation with them and we communicate our brand coherently and consistently.

Brand attributes

Any brand and communication effort should be build around a single powerful word, an attribute that concentrates the thought, unifies the public, unifies the brand, gives a clear conceptual identity (ex.: *Discover* for Pampers, *Safety* for Volvo, or *Harmony* for Ariel). This unique word that stays at the center of the brand has to be: memorable, emotional, appropriate, a differentiator for the brand and its products, and to ensure an optimum positioning in the consumer's mind.

What cannot be considered a brand?

To simply establish a name, a logo and a slogan, without a serious market, field and consumer analysis; the management's conviction that the company has a brand; or sporadic and inconsistent promotional activities. It's not the communication that makes a brand; it's the brand that communicates.

⁷ David Aaker, *Managing brand equity*, The Free Press, New York, 1991



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