

Jonathan Shead

## Project 1

### Whale-come to Vineyard Vines

I never thought I would see someone wearing clothing that showcased a large pink whale on it. That is until I arrived at college. Only a couple weeks of my freshman year passed before I was immersed into the Greek system and seeing pink whales everywhere. On shirts. On hats. On something as simple as croakies. During my time getting acclimated with college and Fraternity life, I, simultaneously and unconsciously, began to associate the whale logo with both groups; each appealing to the youthfulness of the group. From there I was able to begin to understand the company's brand, who their target audience was, and how a pink whale changed America's position on business attire.

Kilingsworth states, rhetoric is "an attempt to move someone..., either to incite people to action or to inspire a shift in attitude or position" (4). He extends this idea by claiming an author succeeds in doing so by appealing to a certain value shared by both the author and audience. This triadic grouping became known as the most effective way to reach an intended audience. So then what value does Vineyard Vines appeal to that makes them successful? A value shared by the common population but only attainable for some. A value derived from the pleasures of the owners, Shep and Ian's, childhood. The value of escaping the confinement of a cubicle to do what you love. For the two brothers, this included spending every summer on Martha's Vineyard and enjoying the serenity of their surroundings. And through the spirit of these activities the brothers determined the company values and rhetorical appeals that make Vineyard Vines so successful today. In turn these values of escaping the rhythm of everyday life, only attainable by some, allowed the company to produce for a select audience in order to give them exactly what they desired – a break from all the browns and blacks that flooded the business world. And thus, the Vineyard Vines brand was created – a brand that appealed to the youthful generation of business men. A brand which very quickly after expanded to the contemporary, wealthy families of America. Therefore, through an analysis the company's appeals and artifacts, one can see how Vineyard Vines successfully connects its audience with the author through the shared value of escaping the mundane. This triangulation, as Kilingsworth calls it, is vital to the effectiveness of the appeals a company utilizes to "close the distance between" (Kilingsworth, 3) itself and its audience.

Many of today's well-known companies have grown so large they fail to interact, or even attempt to connect, with their audience. However with Vineyard Vines that is not the case. As the company continues to expand each year, so did their efforts to personally interact with its target consumers. One artifact that succeeds in doing this is well is the company's website. On the Vineyard Vines website there are several options that allow you to interact with the company. From the multiple social media handles

found in the bottom left corner to the accessibility of links such as *Our Story* and *Photo Submissions*, the website allows its audience to interact first hand with the company. Even more so, the sites *Contact Us* link provides the company's phone, email, and mailing address. With the ability to contact them through three different mediums, the customer, or the audience, can interact directly with the company. This, in turn, creates a lasting connection between the author and audience. Whether it be learning how the company came about or you "just want to know what's going on this side of the pond",



[http://demandware.edgesuite.net/aahw\\_prd/on/demandware.static/Sites-Vineyard-Vines-Site/Sites/default/v1411041912931/images/slot/Headers/hdr\\_contactUs.jpg](http://demandware.edgesuite.net/aahw_prd/on/demandware.static/Sites-Vineyard-Vines-Site/Sites/default/v1411041912931/images/slot/Headers/hdr_contactUs.jpg)

the interaction that is possible between the author and audience connects them through appeals to a sense of trust – trust that the company will produce what is desired and in turn trust that the devoted customers will continue to shop with the company. Overall, the website gives the customers the ability to connect with Vineyard Vines through the shared values of both author and audience – the value of escaping the ordinary for the extraordinary. This value is clearly emphasized within the front page of the website, specifically through the image of a clean cut man standing on a boat. The image displays the value of being comfortable through the calmness of water, but still the man's attire is noticeably more upscale than most other Americans. The image displays a wealthy, high class man which further connects and strengthens the relationship between the company and audience through an appeal to similarity. At the end of the day, the website may give its customers the most access to interact with Vineyard Vines, but still there are other artifacts that successfully do just the same.

Four other artifacts come into play when talking about the interactivity of the company. Those are: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the Vineyard Vines Catalog. First we'll start with Facebook. Just as the website does so well, Facebook allows the audience, which in this case is young adults, to interact with the company through various tab pages such as *About*, *Photos*, *Events*, and *More*. Each tab specifically allows its audience interact and connect with Vineyard Vines in a different way. For example, by clicking on the *About* tab Facebook will display the company's mission as well as their overview. The two paragraphs that fall underneath allow the customer to interact with, and understand, the owners Sheb and Ian better. Directly to the right of those paragraphs is a section titled "Contact Me" enabling the ability for the customer to directly contact the company and voice his or her opinion. Similarly, under the *Photos* tab, customers can tag the Facebook page to show how Vineyard Vines is incorporated into their life. The next two artifacts, Twitter and Instagram, allow the most interactivity for the company's audience, which again is noticeably young adults. Whether it be through photo submissions, hashtags, or anything alike, the two allow the audience to share their experiences with Vineyard Vines. The example, taken from Twitter, shown on the right not only showcases an individual's humorous opinion about what the company stands for. The meme appeals to the company's high class audience by way of an indexical sign. The word "lawyer" is almost always associated with wealth and status, both of which are characteristics of the company's select audience. Therefore through this image, the values of class and status shared by Vineyard Vines consumers and themselves are reaffirmed. A unique way the company interacts specifically with college campuses is through a job program known as "Whale Reps". Essentially Whale Reps are students across the country, who attend different universities, which represent Vineyard Vines in their own way. This freedom to create your own Vineyard Vines style enables these Whale Reps to interact directly with consumers on campus. By striving to mimic the company's values, Whale Reps are able to connect with the company's audience most effectively. In turn, the audience becomes more connected with the brand. The last artifact that connects Vineyard Vines to its audience is their monthly catalog. First, I should note that the catalog is not free to anyone. Instead the catalog has to be paid for in order to receive it. This again plays on the notion that Vineyard Vines customers are wealthy people or families who can afford the extra expense of a catalog. The exclusiveness of the catalog further connects the company to its audience by only interacting with specifically the audience – wealthy people and families – they're trying to target. Therefore, only members who pay for a subscription have the ability to stay connected with all things Vineyard Vines. So as one can see, interacting directly with your audience is essential to maintaining a positive relationship between the author and audience, in which similar values are shared and expressed.



The key to successful clothing is not only following design trends, but also incorporating other social trends into a company. Likewise, numerous clothing brands could be trendy in today's design culture but what sets companies apart from the rest is incorporating trends wherever and whenever possible. A great example of how Vineyard Vines goes above and beyond can be found by opening their Facebook page. Scattered through the company's timeline one can see members of the company staff, or even the owners themselves, participating in various social trends such as the *ALS Ice Bucket Challenge*. By doing this the company appeals to both the value, and importance, of giving to charity and the value of having fun with everything you do. Participating in such social trends as these allows the audience to relate better with the company. Also within their Facebook page, Vineyard Vines uses ethos to appeal to the character of their product rather than it simply being trendy or hip. This idea can be better understood by an example. Captured below is an image from the company's Facebook page with a description that states, "Scarf Season is here! Check out some of



our favorites for accessorizing your new Fall outfits!". Now everyone knows that within the last few years scarves have become extremely popularized during the Fall and Winter seasons. Where Vineyard Vines makes a noticeable distinction is by emphasizing their "favorites for accessorizing". This use of words as a medium tells its audience that these scarves aren't any ordinary scarves found in your local department store. Instead, these scarves have a bit of Vineyard Vines' flare and character. Because of this difference, the company is able to offer its consumers something that can be found nowhere else. This plays on the idea that Vineyard Vines, and its respective customers, are high class, fashionable individuals. Thus, this slight modification to the trend connects the author to his or her audience, and vice versa, by showcasing high end designs on already established trends. In short, the company gives what the consumer desires, and then adds more.

Another resource Vineyard Vines uses to establish the value of trends within their company is the *Wedding* link found on the company's main website. By opening the link the consumer can see several other sub-links, but usually a person's eyes zone into the main content of the page. For this specific link, that person's eyes would first read this:

### **[Let Vineyard Vines Personalize Your Wedding! Walk Down the Aisle in Style!](#)**

The usage, and catchiness, of the phrase "Walk Down the Aisle in Style!" exemplifies the idea that Vineyard Vines is a trendy and hip company. Even more so, the companies Pinterest page is full of various activities or holidays where the company displays the trendiest products for each activity or holiday. Pinned posts range from "It's 5 o'clock somewhere" to "Mother's Day Gift Guide" and "Father's day Gift Guide". Simply by following their Pinterest board, the audience – who in this case is the whole wealthy, contemporary family – can be informed about all the latest trends for every occasion. Similarly the company's Twitter and Instagram pages appeal to the



adventurous and high class population, which also happens to be the company's target audience, by posting images such as a man going skydiving, or another person sitting on a mountain side. First off, an adventure, such as skydiving or sailing, is an indexical sign of high class, in which the adventure is associated with having the money to do such an adventure. And secondly, high class is a symbolic sign, in that the words high class have been agreed to be parallel and synonymous with dressing in the latest trends. Although, not every company or business is as easily able to relate to its audience through the latest trends or the most modern styles. Vineyard Vines, however, does this consistently through multiple artifacts, enabling its audience to connect more closely with the company brand.

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From custom embroidery to one-of-a-kind printed silks, thanks to our custom collection it's never been easier to get exactly what you want. So go ahead, get personal, show off your school spirit or support your home team! *Here's how it works:*

1. Decide on which product(s) you'd like, then, send us your logo via email to: [custom@vineyardvines.com](mailto:custom@vineyardvines.com) (preferred formats are EPS or PDF) and we'll get going on designing the artwork.
2. You should have your design proofs in about 1-2 weeks. Once they're ready, we'll email them to you, but if you prefer we send them to you a different way, just let us know.
3. Production times vary but generally you can expect your items in about 4-6 weeks. If you're in a hurry, we'll do our best to rush things along.

\*Minimums on certain product may differ

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For general custom inquiries as well as wedding, fundraising, corporate and holiday gifts: [custom@vineyardvines.com](mailto:custom@vineyardvines.com)

For fraternity & sorority related inquiries: [greeks@vineyardvines.com](mailto:greeks@vineyardvines.com)

For all collegiate and school-related inquiries: [college@vineyardvines.com](mailto:college@vineyardvines.com)

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**Please note:** There is a minimum of 100 units for custom products and a 60 unit minimum for products with embroidery. Minimums for Lounge Pants, Boxers and Flip Flops vary from the above, so please give us a ring to discuss.

One essence of a great company is how personalized and individual the customer is able to make products. This is another theme that Vineyard Vines excels in immensely. The *Weddings* link, located on the company website, is one way Vineyard Vines works to establish individuality within the company. By clicking within an icon that reads "Custom Weddings", the page will open into a longer document that allows you to customize your wedding attire. Customers have the ability to make the wedding of their dreams come true with select options such as color, design, logo box, and font. Within the Weddings tab is all the customization a person needs and more! Another link found on the website, and labeled *Custom Products* invites the consumer into a world of their own. The page states, "it's never been easier to get exactly what you want. So go ahead, get personal". The text goes on to claim anything from embroidery to your very own printed silks are available at your choosing. Thus the words of the text appeal of the business men and entrepreneurs of America by connecting a Vineyard Vines product with individual's desires. One other artifact that encapsulates the theme of individuality is the company's website. Specifically under the *Accessories* tab, consumers can shop for hats and belts to outdoor and tech accessories. Moreover, this specific tab allows its customers to purchase accessories for their individual needs or day by day life. Similarly, the *Gifts* tab opens into a few different sub-links that display texts such as, "For the Sports Fan", "For the Beach Lover", and "For the Golfer". By using these texts as a medium, Vineyard Vines is connecting its audience directly to his or her individual hobbies or desires. In a literal

sense, the tabs translate to "click here if you're a sports fan" or "click here if you love the beach". The company utilizes such links in order to appeal specifically to an individual type of person, making it easier for the customer to connect with the company and find what they were shopping for. Also these signs, displayed as text, appeal to an individual person's character through the use ethos. By appealing to a person's character, Vineyard Vines is able to welcome in a wide range of individuals. But take note: the company still gears its personalized products toward the group of high class, wealthy individuals. Although they appeal to the individual's desire, the company still has a set audience in which it markets to. Probably one of the most well-known products that

Vineyard Vines has been there with them from the start. Ties. Sheb and Ian created the company by first making ties that weren't the ordinary blacks and browns people we're used to seeing. Instead, the two brothers revolutionized the tie by adding fun icons and vibrant colors. This product appeals to the classy business man looking to spruce up his wardrobe a bit. And what better way to do it than pick a tie that emulates one's personality. So as you can see, Vineyard Vines has cared about the theme of individuality and personalization from day one. After all, there's no better way to express yourself than with a personalized tie. There's so many designs to choose from.

The way Vineyard Vines uses their Twitter and Instagram page to promote individual is actually quite clever! Allowing public members to post in either of the companies well know hashtags, #EDSFTG (Everyday Should Feel This Good) and #VineyardVines, incorporates that individual's opinion or thought regarding things related to the company. This, in turn, works on another level in which the audience – in this case the public member – transforms into the author. What is really outstanding about this is many of these public accounts end up influencing others to find interest in the company or its beliefs. Thus, the public member is now the author trying to connect with its audience through the use of 140 characters. In similar instances, the company's Instagram allows members to submit photos of themselves and how they choose to personally wear Vineyard Vines products. Likewise, the individual who ends up posting a photo submission then becomes the author, working to connect the rest of the company's audience through the appeal to familiarity. Simply put, when company customers see another person who is the same height, or body stature, or gets involved in the same activities, that customer tends to connect more with the company through that respective medium – whether it be text, image, or video. Overall the ability to customize and tailor Vineyard Vines' products to the individuals liking or desire bridges the gap between the author and his or her audience by allowing the customer to transform their favorite brand into something of his or her own.

Lastly, another important factor in the success of a company is how fluent or consistent their information stretches to multiple artifacts. If a person were to look through the many different artifacts that Vineyard Vines has, just as I did with this project, one would come to find that almost all posts can be found on all of the company's social media handles. Likewise, there is a connection between the company's Facebook page and blog, ensuring that important company information or promotions are able to be seen through multiple mediums. And in an even broader sense, the company's main website has all of its external social media handles accessible. Thus, one could say that Vineyard Vines does extremely well in regards to consistency.

After examining the various rhetorical appeals used by Vineyard Vines, as well as the themes that stay consistent throughout the company's product and artifacts, I've come to understand exactly what that pink whale stands for. But more importantly, I now better understand how vital it is to have a professional writer on a company's staff. The role of a professional writer isn't just to write all the content found on its' various artifacts. Even more so, a professional writer is essential if a business wants to be successful. As professional writers we are able to not only understand what the

company wants to emphasize, but we are able to put our understanding into signs and artifacts that incite the audience to stick around. We are able to use mediums such as text, video, images, or icons to capitalize on what a company's main purpose or brand is. And with the skills to do all this, professional writers become the author that seeks to connect with his or her audience - most often through a value or set of values determined by the company. Thus through an analysis of Vineyard Vines, and all its rhetorical appeals, I have come to fully understand that it wasn't a pink whale who changed the idea of business attire. Instead it was the creative professional writer sitting at a desk who transformed the value of business attire. With only a few simple words written for their motto, "Everyday should feel this good", the company and professional writer together were able to change the position on business attire from boring black slacks and a white shirt to a wardrobe full of trendy, personalized shirts, ties, and the like.

As I stated previously, I never thought I would see someone wearing a shirt with a large pink whale printed on the back. But now, after being assimilated into the Vineyard Vines brand, I can't imagine walking around campus and not seeing at least one pink whale a day.