WBA

WORKSHOP TOOLS – BRAND STAR

I think of the Brand Star as essentially a Blue Quadrant exercise in that it deconstructs the brand and then rates its attributes numerically. Deconstruction and numbers are favourites of the Blue Quadrant thinking preference. Very different from and diametrically opposed to the Red Quadrant. But, as we shall see, that’s not to say there aren’t feelings involved in this process.

The concept is based on a five pointed star.

(Insert blank Brand Star)

Each point of the star represents a core component of a brand. The exercise asks us to evaluate how strong that component is in perceptions of the brand we are examining.

So, let’s go through them one at a time and you’ll soon see how the process works.

First point of the Star is Fame.

(Word fame appears above the top point of the star)

One characteristic of what we’re going to call a StarBrand is that is famous. People know it and recognise it immediately. If we are to extend this star metaphor, we might say this brand shines more brightly than other stars in its constellation, which is to say the other brands in its category. It shines so brightly that it attracts attention.

Why is this important?

Well, the obvious reason is that we are hesitant to buy something we don’t recognise.

But there is a more subtle reason and that lies in the nature of fame itself.

We are attracted to fame. It’s magnetic. It piques our interest. I’ll give you an example.

(Insert picture of Jack Nicholson at Basket Ball match)

Often in workshops, we show participants this picture and ask them to talk about it. Invariably the conversation focuses on the old guy in the middle. No one asks about the guy to the right of picture or the boy beside him. They are not famous. But Jack Nicholson is famous and that makes him the sole point of attention.

(Insert picture of magazine rack at Supermarket check-out)

If you’ve ever been stuck at the supermarket check-out, you’ll have seen these magazines. There are loads of them. And they all share a theme. They are about famous people doing uninteresting things. Nicole Kidman having a bad hair day. Beyonce walking her dog in track pants and so on. Or they tell blatant lies about famous people. Megan and Harry are splitting up and so on.

But there are no magazines devoted to unfamous people doing interesting things.

Why?

Because fame is more engaging, people are seduced by its inherent charisma.

So, going back to the brand in question.

How famous is it? How much of that charisma has it acquired?

Let’s give it a mark on this continuum.

(Insert horizontal marking continuum.)

We’ll give it a zero if not even our competitors have heard of us. We’ll give it a 10 if we are famous, known to all in our target audience. It’s worth stressing that we’re talking about target audience and not the society at large.

Most likely the number will fall somewhere between these two extremes. So let’s collectively agree on what that number is. The easiest way to do that is to add up everyone’s score and divide it by the number of people in the room. In other words, let’s agree on the average score.

But it’s worth stressing that in a workshop situation, everyone’s opinion has value. There is no empirically correct answer here. What really matters are the thoughts and ideas the justify the individual scores. It’s in these conversations that you’ll discover unexpected gems, unanticipated perspectives that may well prove valuable later.

Once a number has been agreed, write it down and we’ll then transfer it to the Brand Star.

In this instance, let’s assume it was a 7.

(Insert dotted line running from centre of star to top point. Ten dots. Centre scores 0, point scores 10. 7th dot is now red.)

Let’s move onto the next point of the Star.

(The word ‘Iconic’ appears at the second tip.)

The question we ask here is how ‘iconic’ is our brand.

A StarBrand not only stands out, it stands for something. It represents a value system and owns a set of beliefs within its category.

If you don’t display your values, you’ll be a ‘shooting star’. You’ll burn out and fade away.

I’ll give you a couple of examples:

(Insert pictures, side by side, of Lady Di and Paris Hilton)

Look at these two faces.

On the left, you have the woman who on the day of her death was described as ‘The Peoples’ Princess by Prime Minister Tony Blair. In a household of staggering privilege, she represented the ‘common touch’. She was identified with noble causes – the care of AIDS sufferers, the removal of land mines. She was also a loving mother.

Ten years later, a quarter of a million people gathered in Hyde Park to commemorate her life.

Lady Di was a StarBrand.

Now on the left, we have a woman who was once the most famous face in America. Instantly recognised. A Fame score of 10!!!

But she stood for nothing.

If Paris Hilton wraps her pink Bentley around a lamp post, there won’t be any parties in the park ten years later.

For the most part, she is forgotten save for a few ravers at her DJ nights.

Paris Hilton is and was a Shooting Star.

Let me give you another example of a Star Brand.

Harley Davison.

Harley riders see themselves as legal outlaws, (except for the ones involved in illegal activities!), lovers of freedom and the open road, self-determination and resistance to conformity.

Harley devotees identify with the values of the brand so closely, it’s symbol is so iconic to them, that they are prepared to ink it indelibly onto their own skin.

There’s a great story of a wedding in San Franscisco where the Bible was replaced with the Harley Davison maintenance manual to give guidance to the Bride and Groom on how to take care of their marriage!!

So, the question we have to ask is ‘How iconic are we?’

(Insert continuum from zero - our values are hard to define, to 10 – we stand for something that matters.

We score a zero if our values are hard to define, a 10 if we stand for something our audience really cares about.)

Where are we on this line?

Let’s agree a number and transfer it to the star.

In this instance, let’s say we score slightly low. Let’s give ourselves a 5.

(Insert dotted line running from centre of star to second point. Ten dots. Centre scores 0, point scores 10. 5th dot is now red.)

Let’s move on to the next point of the star. This one represents ‘Integrity’.

(The word ‘Integrity’ appears at the third tip.)

Integrity is vitally important to a brand and, in its simplest sense, means that it does what it promises to do. Always!!!

Integrity is the mother of trust, the most valuable component in a relationship between a brand and consumer. Without trust, there is no relationship!!

And a StarBrand always displays integrity towards its own values. It leads, never follows, relishes being different and would never betray or compromise its own philosophy.

Two quick examples.

Virgin is a StarBrand and has always displayed integrity. It has delivered on its Brand Promise of the Consumer Champion by following this simple formula:

(Insert Virgin Logo)

Deliver a product or service of parity quality at a lower price. Or deliver a product or service of parity price at a higher quality.

And where it has failed to meet those terms, it has withdrawn from the category.

Patagonia is another example of Brand Integrity.

(Insert Patagonia Logo)

As we discussed earlier, it’s Brand Promise is to Save the World through sustainable practices and products.

It only takes one plastic bag at checkout to undermine that integrity. Or one toxic component in a puffer jacket to bring the house down.

Just one.

But to the best of my knowledge that has not happened, and Patagonia’s reputation remains unblemished.

So, once again, let’s score our imaginary or hypothetical brand.

What level of integrity do we display? (It might be easier to ask ourselves, ‘how trusted are we by consumers?’)

We score zero if we compromise our values for short term profit, we score 10 if we always stand by our beliefs and principles.

In this case, let’s give ourselves a lowish score. A 4.

But let me stress again, the score is less important than the conversation that precedes it. Understanding the team’s views on this subject is where the real value of this process lies.

(Insert dotted line running from centre of star to third point. Ten dots. Centre scores 0, point scores 10. 4th dot is now red.)

Let’s move on to the fourth point of the Star. This one represents your commitment to ‘Evolve’.

(The word ‘Evolve’ appears at the fourth tip.)

A StarBrand continues to shine by constantly evolving, not just in products and services but by ensuring that its values remain contemporarily relevant, and its actions demand continual and renewed attention.

If you don’t evolve, you go backwards. Why? Because the market is rapacious – constantly moving forward, hungering for new money and new ideas. If you don’t keep up, you’re left behind. It’s that simple.

Porsche is a great example of a brand that is committed to evolving.

For four or five decades, it was defined by its sleek, two-seater sports cars. (The two seats in the back can barely hold a couple of five-year-olds!)

And then, around 2003, it announced the arrival of an SUV. To the die-hard fans, the Cayenne was a people-mover, not a sports car.

But, with a turbo-charged top speed of 305k/h, it delivered on the Porsche Brand Promise of ‘Intelligent performance’ and went on to revive the company’s flagging fortunes.

Staying within the automotive category, let’s look at a brand that failed to evolve.

The Oldsmobile Cutlass was once America’s best-selling car!!! Far more successful than Porsche in many respects – hugely profitable, massively popular.

But in 1999 the Cutlass, after four decades in production, was discontinued.

Why?

The last ad to tells the whole story.

(Insert Print ad with headline, “Not your father’s Oldsmobile.”)

Its image had grown old. Young people didn’t want it. It was dad’s car.

Quite simply, it had failed to evolve and keep pace with the market.

So, let’s score our hypothetical brand on how well it is evolving. If it’s not progressing and just treading water, we should score a 0. But if it’s constantly innovating and staying ahead of the competition, we deserve a 10. For the purposes of this exercise, let’s give it a 6 out of 10.

(Insert dotted line running from centre of star to fourth point. Ten dots. Centre scores 0, point scores 10. 6th dot is now red.)

We have one point of the BrandStar to score.

This fifth measure is different to the others and relates very much to the exercise we did in Brand Belief.

If you score highly in the first four measures of the BrandStar, that is to say if you stand out, if you stand for something, if you never compromise your values and are constantly evolving, then you should be rewarded with a high score on this last point – Fans.

The word ‘fans’ is an abbreviation of the word ‘fanatic’. StarBrands have fanatical believers.

Their loyalty, internally and externally, is unswerving to the point of irrationality.

The StarBrand that I grew up with was these guys.

(Insert shot of Beatles getting off plane.)

This is a shot of the Beatles arriving at Sydney airport in 1963, at the start of their career.

(Insert shot of the police holding back the girls outside Buckingham Palace.)

Only two years later, this was the scene outside Buckingham Palace when they went to receive the OBE from Queen Elisabeth.

Madness.

But they were a StarBrand in the extreme. Famous, iconic, True to themselves and constantly evolving and pushing the edge of the musical envelope.

Now, you might look at these poor girls, (and have some sympathy for the cops), and think this is just raging, teenage hormones driving ridiculous behaviour.

But consider this image.

(Insert shot of man buying the first iPhone.)

This is Nathan Alford. The day is June 29, 2007. The occasion is the launch of the Apple iPhone in LA.

Nathan is one of many who slept on the streets overnight to be the first to buy this new device. And, as you can see, he’s very happy.

But let’s consider what he’s just done.

He’s stayed up half the night so he can be one of the first in line. (The shop didn’t open until 6.00pm and so that’s quite a wait.)

He’s bought a phone from a company that has never made a phone before.

It’s the most expensive phone money can buy.

And he’s not allowed to take it out of the box and try it before he buys it.

But he’s so confident that he’s bought two of them!!!

Is this irrational behaviour?

After all, he could have slept in, waited until the following day, missed the crowds, asked people if it was any good or even tried one before parting with his hard-earned cash.

But he’s an Apple fan!!! He’s not going to wait.

Fans share some compelling characteristics.

(Insert chart)

They pay more for products and services. They’ll go out of their way to find you. They won’t accept a substitute. Their loyalty endures. (They’ll even forgive mistakes.) They are a vociferous part of your salesforce. They represent a disproportionately high source of revenue.

So, the question we are asking of the brand is this. How much fandom are we inspiring? How strong is our fanbase?

If we are disposable, easily replaced by a competitor’s product or service, we score a 0. But if our users love us, recommend us, are unwaveringly loyal to us, then we deserve a 10.

In this instance, looking at the scores we’ve given so far, I’m guessing we’d get a 5 or thereabouts.

Why do I say that?

As I look at the previous scores, I’m seeing a brand that is quite well known, but doesn’t stand strongly for any clear values and beliefs. And if those values and beliefs are not clearly stated, it’s hard to act with integrity towards them. But the brand is evolving. So, it’s likely that it will have some loyal users, after all it’s quite well known and improving its products and services.

(Insert dotted line running from centre of star to fifth point. Ten dots. Centre scores 0, point scores 10. 5th dot is now red.)

But the ‘Iconic’ and ‘Integrity’ scores are holding it back. And they are the scores that really build an emotional connection to the brand.

So, to recap.

The StarBrand model lets us deconstruct the brand and evaluate five key necessary components.

1. Is it famous, does it enjoy high levels of awareness?

2. Is it iconic, does it stand for a set of values and ideas?

3. Is it always true to its values?

4. Is it evolving and keeping pace with the market?

5. Is it inspiring loyalty and devotion?

From this simple picture we can then see where we should be expending our energies.

For example, in the case of the hypothetical brand we’ve been using in the exercise we can see an immediate need to define our values more clearly and demonstrate how these are guiding our behaviour – internally and externally.

But, as with other workshop exercises, it’s the conversation that takes place while you make these evaluations that will really inform your strategy.

END