WBA

WHAT IS A BRAND?

If we are going to build a brand, or perhaps unleash the latent power of an existing brand, the best place to start is to ask, ‘What exactly is a brand?’

You’ll find many different but overlapping answers to this question.

Some will say a brand is a story, or an experience, or a belief. There was a time when people would have simply said it’s a logo that distinguishes it from other products in its category.

And while none of these definitions are necessarily wrong, they’re not sufficiently precise to be of practical value to what we are going to be doing together.

So, let’s take a very brief look at how brands came to be, how they have evolved over the centuries and what they represent today.

If we go back to ancient times, we’ll find this:

A Mesopotamian bottle top!!

(Cut to picture)

Historians will claim that this is one of the earliest examples of branding. As long as 8000 years ago, villagers began making personalised seals with symbols that identified their particular craftsmanship.

The key word is identification, identification of the owner/creator of the object.

And it was identification and ownership that later drove farmers to burn symbols into cattle. In fact, the origin of the word ‘Brand’ is from the Old Norse for to ‘burn’.

(Cut to shots of iron burning cattle)

And, on this chart here, you can see how this sort of branding led to the development of logos.

(Cut to sheet of cattle logos)

Top left is the first logo for a cattle brand in Texas. On the bottom row you can see how the initials of Jane Long’s name become a symbol, and the also the very graphic treatment of the Borden Brothers ‘Circle O Ranch.

In the middle ages, these brand symbols became more elaborate as craftsmen formed guilds that required artisans to mark their goods with emblems of consistency and quality.

(Insert middle age, artisan brand mark)

And then in the 18th and 19th centuries, the industrial revolution accelerated these trends as packaging and trademarks began to emerge and consumers needed to identify consistent products in a sea of new choices.

Here you can see Coca Cola from the late 1800s through to its definitive design in 1916.

However, It was in the middle of the 20th century that advertising agencies started to graft imagery onto brands – imagery that created an identification with identity, values and lifestyle.

(Insert Marlboro Cowboy)

Arguably one of the most successful campaigns of all time was the creation of the Marlboro cowboy by the Leo Burnett agency in Chicago.

(Images of Marlboro cowboy)

Burnett himself conceived this campaign. He took a product that was failing to reach a female target market and reprofiled it to be a symbol of rugged masculinity. And, in the process, launched the number 1 selling cigarette in the world.

This trend of brands being closely identified with personal values and belief systems has continued to evolve and we’re now a long way from the days when a brand marque was simply a symbol that identified the owner.

These days, from a consumer’s point of view, a brand is a personal statement. Even in the most utilitarian of categories, washing detergents or motor cars for example, your choice is in some way a signifier of your values and beliefs!

So, how do we create, engineer and then manage these complex brand relationships?

Well, we need to start with a very simple premise on which we can then build.

So, let’s compare two options and then look at some examples.

(Cut to slide of Product in centre)

A traditional approach might be that you start with a product or service and promote its attributes and benefits until you have some traction in the market. You identify your target and refine your offer accordingly. At some point, you might say ‘Now I need to focus on my brand. I need a brand to create salience, to get noticed, to be remembered and so on. A brand will help my product stand out from the crowd.’

(Cut to slide of wrapping paper around product)

In this approach, you’re using the brand like wrapping paper. Your product remains the core of what you are doing. And you wrap it accordingly. If it’s a cheap product, you wrap it simply. If it’s expensive, you do something more lavish and extravagant.

Fifty or more years ago, this would have been a workable approach. But times have changed. Competitive activity has increased, as has the speed of product development.

So, if your product is constantly evolving, and you’re launching line-extensions at different price points, what do you do with the wrapping paper? Do you keep changing it?

The answer has to be no.

If the way you are presenting yourself to the market is constantly changing, you’ll lose one of the most important attributes of a well-managed brand.

Consistency.

And why is that so important?

Consistency is the mother of trust and reliability. People who are inconsistent in their behaviour are unpredictable and untrustworthy. It’s the same with Brands.

Consistency is also key to recognition and recall. The more you see something, the easier it is to recognise and remember it.

So, let’s look at a different model, one that puts not the product but what we’ll call the ‘Brand Promise’ at the centre of all activity.

At the core of every brand, lies a promise. Let’s look at some examples.

Virgin has always promised to be the ‘Consumer Champion’. In a multitude of categories, they’ve offered either a better service at a parity price, or a parity service at a cheaper price. They become a big player by giving better value than the other big players.

Their emblem is not so much their logo as this guy – Richard Branson.

(Insert shot of Branson)

Richard Branson. And he presents himself as this guy.

(Insert picture of Kevin Costner as Robin Hood)

Robin Hood. And in so doing, he presents the established brands as this guy.

(Insert picture of Sherrif of Nottingham)

The corrupt and greedy Sherrif of Nottingham.

The beauty of this Brand Promise is that it has given relevance and credibility to Virgin across a wide range of categories and products and services. All of which can change while the essential promise of being the ‘Consumer Champion’ does not.

When I worked on the launch of Virgin Money here in Australia, we developed a campaign featuring Branson that won Gold at Cannes. And we attributed the uptake of the credit card to our creative execution. But, in post campaign research, we discovered that the success was driven by the simple belief that if Branson had a credit card it was going to be a better deal than you could get at the big 4 banks. Success, in other words, was driven by the Brand Promise. The role of our advertising was, for the most part, to create awareness.

These days, it’s hard to have any conversation about branding without touching on the subject of Apple.

(Insert Apple logo)

It entered the market in the early 80s with a computer that promised ‘Revolution’ in a brilliant, Ridley Scott directed pastiche of Orwell’s 1984.

(Insert still of girl throwing hammer in apple ad)

And then over the next decade, it developed the Brand Promise of ‘Creative Empowerment’.

Computers had been trapped in the exclusive domain of left-brained, technical people. Apple liberated this technology and made it available and easy to use for right-brained creative people – a total disruption of the market.

And then, over the last 30 or 40 years, Apple has morphed into a life-style brand that uses technology to deliver on that promise of Creative Empowerment. With their MacBooks, iPhones, iPads, wearables such as Apple Watches, AirPods and Vison Pro headsets, or even Logic Pro music editing software, Apple is empowering people to create the lifestyle they want. All of these very different products are delivering on the same Brand Promise.

So, back to our model.

In a world where change is a constant, one point of absolute consistency needs to be your core Brand Promise.

Once that is clearly defined and established, you can surround it with constantly evolving products and services, you can change your marketing and advertising campaigns, you can change your packaging and wrapping paper as long as you remain true to that promise.

Think of Volkswagen for a moment. How many different VW cars and advertising campaigns have you seen over the years that reinforce the company’s core brand promise of Reliability?

Hundreds!

You could ask the same about Volvo and its promise of safety? I think their current tagline of ‘Volvo for Life’ is a very subtle way of retaining that promise of safety while adding just a touch of adventure. But the core promise remains.

So, to summarise.

A brand is a promise. A product or service is how that promise is honoured and delivered to the marketplace.

On this course, we’ll take you through a unique, step-by-step process for deconstructing a brand and identifying the promise its products and services are offering.

We’ll look at how you can ensure that promise is differentiating and motivating to target consumers.

We’ll demonstrate how you can take that promise and develop a Brand Strategy that can be captured on a single page – not the sort of dust-gathering tome you could expect from one of the big Brand Consultancies – just a single page that contains all the information for developing a consistent and powerful brand strategy.

I’ll finish with an anecdote.

Back in 2002 Porsch launched the Cayenne – an SUV.

Among Porsche devotees it caused outrage. These purists saw the brand, with its racing heritage and DNA of sleek two seaters, as the epitome of its Brand Promise – Intelligent Performance.

Critics dubbed the car, ‘The Soccer Mom Porsche’. It was seen as an aberration, a mutation.

But when it became apparent that Mom could bring the kids home from the playing fields at up to 305 kilometres an hour and burn off pretty much any vehicle at the traffic lights, that antipathy disappeared.

Why?

Porsche had delivered on its Brand Promise. Intelligent Performance.

And the Cayenne went on to save the company from Bankruptcy.

So, let’s start our sessions together by learning how to define a core brand promise and ensure it is both competitive and differentiating.

Then we’ll look at how to use it as the foundation of a brand and communication strategy.

END

(About 10 minutes)