WBA

HIGHER PURPOSE

There’s an interesting and somewhat symbiotic relationship between Brand Identity and Personal Identity.

Or putting it another way, we tend to identify personally with the brands we choose. We wear brands like badges that reveal our values and beliefs.

This doesn’t always go the way we’d like!

The automotive category is a good place to study this.

For example, research in Australia shows that 40% of road users believe that BMW drivers are the rudest and most aggressive behind the wheel. I think that’s an identity that most of us would prefer not to adopt! (This comes from a Budget Insurance survey.)

Some years ago, Volvo tried to detoxify the notion of ‘Bloody Volvo Drivers’ in an advertising campaign that embraced the slur and suggested most people would like to be one.

More recently, of course, we’ve seen the Brand persona of Tesla undergo a dramatic re-characterisation. While still an emblem of future thinking for some, it’s become a symbol of fascism for others. So powerful is this element of identification, many Tesla owners are selling their cars rather than wear a badge of support for Elon Musk.

But for the most part, we choose brands whose reputation says something positive about our own personal values and worldview.

So, we need to ask ourselves, with what aspect of a brand would we like to identify? Is it the brand’s story, its history and reputation. Is it the values of a charismatic founder? Is there something special about the experience of the brand – does it interact with us in a personalised way?

In a much-watched YouTube video, Simon Sinek suggests that we are often swayed and seduced by our perception of a Brand’s ‘Higher Purpose’. We’re enticed not so much by what a brand does or makes, but why it exists at all. Its reason for being.

There’s a simple model and process for evaluating a brand in this way. It’s called:

The Golden Circle: The Why, The How, The What.

It breaks down like this:

Why do we do what we do? What is our higher purpose in life?

How do we do what we do? How do we honour that purpose in a way that is different to others?

And,

What do we do? In simple terms, what are our products and services?

Let’s look at some examples.

I think one of the most convincing case studies would be Patagonia.

Why do they exist?

Answer: “We’re in business to save the planet.” That is their higher purpose.

How do they do that?

Answer: “Every product decision is filtered through the lens of sustainability.”

What do they do:

Manufacture, sell and even repair a vast array of outdoor apparel.

It’s a wonderful example. Patagonia has many competitors in the outdoor category, but their higher purpose, their ‘Why’, is differentiating, aspirational, relevant and relatable.

Google is another good example.

The Why: To make the world’s information easily accessible and useful.

The How: Massive infrastructure supporting a simple, personalised and free interface

The What: Search, Gmail, Maps, YouTube, Android OS and so on.

If we go back to biG, you can see how this another perspective we use to understand the inherent appeal of a brand.

(Insert biG BOAP)

Why do we exist?

To turn your brand from a marketing tool to a business tool – one that inspires the high-level thinking that goes straight to the bottom line.

How do we do that?

We harness the power of Whole Brain Thinking to unleash the potential in every brand, organisation and employee.

What do we do?

We consult on Brand and Marketing Strategies, Innovation Programs, Creative Campaigns, Skills Training and Executive Coaching.

The challenge of getting this process to work lies in the ‘Higher Purpose’, the ‘Why’. The

‘What’ is easy, it’s just a list of your products or services. The ‘How’ will follow the ‘Why’ and acts as a sort of bridge in the middle.

The most important aspect of this concept is integrity. You need to deliver on your higher purpose. While it can have an aspirational component, it really needs to be the driving force that operates in the background of your organisation.

This isn’t something you can fake. It has to have a resounding ring of truth.

For example, if the Apple ‘Why’ is to challenge the Status Quo, you’ll see that they chase that ambition in everything they do – products, packaging, functionality, design, customer experience in store and so on. Like Patagonia, their Why is the filter through which all plans and activities must pass.

So, how do you identify that higher purpose?

A few guidelines:

1. Go back to the inception of the company and ask what problem in the world was it solving. Did the founder have a vision, a mission? And does that vision remain, or has it morphed into something else?

For example, Nike isn’t about shoes, it’s about human potential.

Or Airbnb isn’t just about a place to stay, it’s about a feeling of belonging anywhere you stay.

2. Ask what value does the company bring over and beyond just making money for the owners and employees?

What would the world lose if the company disappeared? What difference would that make to peoples’ lives?

3. Consider what value it brings to society that differentiates it from competitors in the category. What aspect of your reputation might those competitors envy?

Why might a competitor come and work for the brand?

4. Look at the brand’s most loyal advocates and ask what appeals to them about the brand beyond the utilitarian value of its products and services.

If the brand was on a badge or a T-shirt, (assuming it doesn’t make brands or t-shirts) what does it say about the wearer?

5. Use the process of the ‘Five Whys’ to drill down to deeper meaning.

This is a workshop tool we’ll cover in other modules on the course, but essentially this requires you to ask the question, ‘Why does this brand matter?’ Whatever the answer, ask ‘And why does that matter?’ And repeat this process up to five times until you think you’ve reached the deepest and most meaningful truth.

At the end of this process you need to have achieved the three A’s:

Authenticity – the Why needs to be true to your story and operation

Aspiration – it needs to be a stretch target that inspires everyone involved

Achievability – it needs to convert to action

So, in adding this framework to the bottom of the page, we’ve almost completed the exercise.

Two items remain.

One is very easy. We describe the category in which we are operating. And we put that under the heading ‘Category Driver’ at the top of the page.

In our case, we operate in a category of Brand Consultancies. For the most part, clients come to this category because they want to create the added value of a good name and reputation.

Our intent will be to sell them on more than that.

But the most important missing element is right in the middle.

The Brand Promise.

And we’ll explore that in the next module.

END