



Target: Expect More Pay Less

Iconic Brand Paper

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Introduction

Target. Everyone knows the bullseye logo, possibly has seen their mascot dog, and may know of Target red balls that guard their store locations. They have become a staple in retail. Since its founding in 1962, Target has evolved from a discount chain into a design-driven, emotionally resonant brand that bridges affordability and aspiration. Its most known **slogan**, “Expect More. Pay Less.”, embodies the delicate balance between value and experience that has allowed it to persist and thrive amid changes. This paper explores the factors that make Target iconic. This paper contains its history, performance, competition, brand strategy, consumers, engagement, marketing tactics, and cultural relevance. It also provides insights into Target’s continuation to remain iconic and relevant today.

History of the Brand

Target’s story begins with the Dayton Company in Roseville, Minnesota. In 1962, the company’s executives sought to merge the rising popularity of discount retailing with the sophistication of department store shopping. The result was Target. It was a new version and idea of the “upscale discount store.” Its core concept, providing stylish products at affordable prices, set it apart from traditional discount chains like Kmart or Woolworth’s. The first Target store opened with the promise “Aim Straight for Target” and later rebranded to “Expect More. Pay less.” in the 1990s. This established the foundational **brand positioning** that remains consistent today with keeping up with modern times. It displayed the promise the brand had and the vision and promise to its customers.

Over the decades, Target grew not only in scale but in brand personality. In the 1980s and 1990s, the company leaned into aesthetic appeal, building different store layouts and memorable



advertising that emphasized joy and modernity. During this era, Target adopted the **red bullseye logo** that would be a recognizable symbol. Its advertising slogan and visual identity conveyed friendliness, modern simplicity, and optimism.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, Target solidified their position. Collaborations with designers introduced high fashion to the mass market and showed their goal of making it stylish and affordable aligned with their brand. These co-branding partnerships redefined the retail experience, offering exclusive collections that drew attention. Target's "Design for All" initiative encapsulated its belief that good design should not be a luxury. It continued upon its brand definition and set itself apart from its competitors appealing to an affordable **ideal self**. The early 2000s also marked Target's emergence as a cultural icon, affectionately dubbed "Tar-zhay," a humorous, pseudo-French nickname reflecting its elevated yet playful identity.

The 2010s brought both challenge and reinvention. Target expanded into Canada. However, it failed due to issues with management and supply. They decided to stick to what they had built in the US market and its operations. They used **omnichannel marketing** and they modernized stores, improved supply chains, and leveraged digital innovation to integrate online and offline shopping. Today, Target's stores function as both retail destinations and online shopping offering membership called Target circle.

Category and Brand Performance

Target operates within the **mass retail category**, one of the most competitive sectors in the U.S. economy. The category has undergone shifts driven by globalization, technological innovation, and changing consumer values. Retail giants such as Amazon dominate on price and



convenience, while specialty retailers like Costco carve out niche markets through membership or product focus. There are various giants in the retail industry in which Target has to differentiate and stand out.

Despite these challenges, Target has maintained strong performance and differentiation. It has always managed to keep its ranking in the top retailers and has secured its place. In recent years, Target's **omnichannel** approach has also proven effective making use of digital applications as well as having physical stores. Target's resilience in the category stems from its ability to blend functional value and **emotional value** as the brand strived to do when it first started. This hybrid approach has made Target not only a retail destination but a brand. This allows it to gain a position between its competitors.

Competition

Target's major competitors include Walmart, Amazon, Costco, and increasingly, digital disruptors like Temu and Shein. Each represents a distinct strategic **positioning model**. Walmart dominates through cost leadership offering the lowest prices. Amazon leads in technological innovation and service differentiation with fast shipping and convenience. Costco appeals to exclusivity via its membership model. Temu and Shein use social commerce, social media marketing, and cheap prices.

Target's approach differs fundamentally. Its differentiation strategy centers on lifestyle and emotion rather than price or logistics. Its stores are bright and inviting, making the shopping experience inviting. While Walmart sells necessities, Target sells possibilities. Target also has sub-owned brands that allow the same brand image to be conveyed to its shoppers. Owned



brands like Hearth & Hand with Magnolia and All in Motion build trust and value to the consumer.

Target's greatest advantage lies in brand perception making it iconic and differentiated. This positioning has allowed it to gain **loyalty** even without being the cheapest or the fastest option in the marketplace.

Brand Strategy

Target's long-term success is the result of human-centered brand strategy. Its **slogan**, "Expect More. Pay Less.," encapsulates a dual promise. It promises quality and experience despite its prices. This strategy reflects both value-based positioning and emotional branding.

Central to this strategy is design differentiation. Its "Design for All" philosophy elevated everyday shopping into a form of **self-expression**. It shows integrated marketing through media and style. The brand's identity, minimalist aesthetic, and messaging revamped its message and solidified the brand. Target's also has cultural relevance. Initiatives such as Target Forward show commitment to sustainability and community development.

Consumer/Brand Relationship

Shoppers frequently describe Target as a "happy place." This sentiment embodies successful emotional branding. There are positive feelings that extend beyond the product experience. Target's consistent store design, product selection, and staff contribute to the full experience for their customers.



On social media, this relationship has transformed into a different culture. Viral trends like #TargetRun and #TargetHaul went viral on TikTok and Instagram where they show unintentional spending and hidden finds. The customers show the Target experience and are able to support what Target has aimed to do in their stores. The “Target Run”, where shoppers visit for one item and leave with many, has become a part of its appeal and part of its experience in a funny way.

Target Audience

Demographically, its main customers include middle income families as well as millennials and Gen Z. These consumers value convenience, design, and ethical consumption. This fits the brand image that Target has pushed. Millennials and Gen Z represent strong segments due to Target's brand personality. It fits the scope of inclusive, creative, and optimistic. These consumers value brand authenticity and visual consistency, which Target has stuck to in their stores and marketing. Through the use of practicality and emotion, Target maintains a strong brand relationship with its audience.

Marketing Tactics and Effectiveness

Target's marketing efforts have consistently shown innovation and cultural relevance. Over the years, it has executed numerous campaigns that strengthened the connection to its consumers. The “Design for All” campaign established Target as the intersection of style and accessibility, highlighting its partnerships with renowned designers. Seasonal campaigns such as “Hello, Goodbuy” and “Back to School with Target” showed how Target plays a role in daily life. Online, Target amplifies this through influencer partnerships and user-generated content. TikTok



creators and YouTubers regularly feature Target in “shop with me” videos, further expanding organic reach.

Distinctive Brand Elements and Persistence Over Time

Target’s ability to persist as an iconic brand over more than six decades lies in its stability and reinvention. The affordable design and joyful experience has never changed even if it adapts to the times. Its iconic red bullseye logo, clean design, and friendly outreach serve as brand identifiers that remain recognizable. The company invests in store design, innovation, and digital integration allowing it to continue its prevalence.

Target has always tried to anticipate consumer needs. From the differentiation in shopping experience to digital transformation, it aligned operations and brand communication with broader cultural trends. It also reflects brand adaptability. Target maintains its image despite the cultural changes throughout time. Whether through designer collaborations, sustainability initiatives, or omnichannel convenience, Target has continued to stay relevant.

Future Outlook

To remain iconic, Target must continue to innovate while preserving its **brand and promise** as it has continued to do. With the rise of artificial intelligence and more technological advances, future success will depend on deepening its brand and continued investment in personalization and customer experience. Moreover, Target can strengthen its relevance by extending its brand storytelling into the aforementioned emerging platforms. Target is iconic but it is never guaranteed.



Conclusion

Target shows an iconic brand. There is a clear promise, consistent values, emotional connection, and adaptability. From its origins to its current role while continuing to stay relevant, Target has proven that retail can be both functional and inspirational. Its success lies in how it balances loyalty and quality. Consumers engage not only with its products but also the brand image. The red bullseye that we know and love stands not merely for shopping but also for its promise to the consumer and experience that Target shares with us.

Appendix

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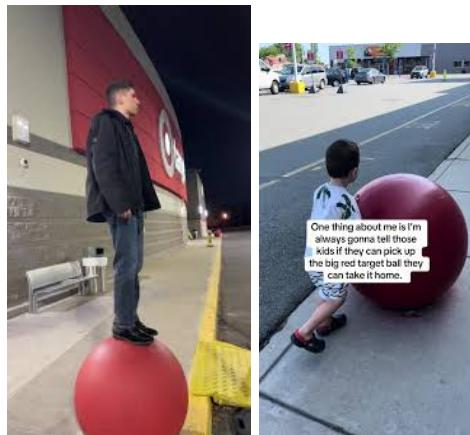


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Target Red Balls Trend (Standing and Stealing them)



Target Stores (Inside)



Target Mascot





Plunger on Target Logo



Target Design For All Campaign



Target App

