



Getting Beyond Clever...

It's time for Brand 2.0

Babble on Brand

Increasingly, there is a frightening over abundance of marketing talk, focus, and foible on the nature and role of brands. It takes great discipline and energy to sort through all the babble to harvest the precious seeds of wisdom about brand and what it means for marketing in particular, and for business in general. Not every result of a Google search yields trustworthy information or actionable knowledge. A serious sorting is required.

But for those willing to do the sorting, a profound lesson emerges: The concept of brand, branding, and its role in commerce is far more powerful than we often acknowledge. If it weren't so, how would we explain the persistence of this concept? After all, in the hunger for the new next thing in business, concepts that are overused and overworked customarily fade from the landscape of what is relevant and deemed current. They fall out of use. But that has not been so for brand and branding talk.

It must be that this particular overused and overworked concept is just too important to go away, too relevant to fade, to powerful to ignore. If that's the case, then it's time for savvy marketers to rise above the babble on brand and re-polish the power of the concept. It's time for Brand 2.0.

Leaving Brand 1.0

Prior to positing what might be at the core of Brand 2.0, it may be useful to know what should be left behind from its previous life-form. There may be many things that fit that bill, but perhaps the one phenomenon that contributed to the greatest fatigue of Brand 1.0 could be called "brand cleverness." For some reason, many major brands believed that their differentiating competitive advantage would come from out-clevering their competition. The pinnacle of this cleverness competition, it could be alleged, came in the form of the Go-Daddy television spots, the ones trying to position a URL registration brand

by using gratuitous sexual innuendo coupled with an attempted clever twist. The entire campaign, despite mentions in post-Super Bowl polls, has yielded miniscule brand value. In fact, its greatest contribution to the marketing profession may have been that it ran only on Super Bowl weekend, and quickly disappeared.

Brand cleverness, practiced by Go-Daddy or by any number of other brand wannabes, does not yield significant brand positioning value. It's a part of Brand 1.0 that rightfully rests in peace.

Brand 2.0

What, then, is the hallmark of the next generation of brand thinking and brand work, or Brand 2.0 to use the vernacular?

It may be most accurate to characterize Brand 2.0 as the emergence of "Smart Brands." In contrast to the pursuit of "brand cleverness," Smart Brands achieve crucial positioning and power through the convergence of six key elements... **the Six Traits of Smart Brands.** Those Six Traits can be expressed as CAD6...or Commitment, Agility, Definition, Differentiation, Diligence, and Discipline.

Commitment. A Smart Brand understands that the hard work of building and sustaining a brand position is not episodic. It requires careful planning, informed leadership, financial commitments, and a long-term view. Smart Brands take a very strategic approach to their positioning and create solid integration among all their brand-impression execution points. Smart Brands stay committed in good times and in bad. Consider the Toyota brand...faced with some significant market distrust around quality and dependability, they remain nonetheless committed to sustaining their brand, and investing in the process of regaining brand loyalty.



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Agility. A Smart Brand, albeit it strategically committed, also has to be agile enough to respond to new market conditions, whether positive or negative. The Southwest Airlines brand regularly demonstrates great agility. Recently, they seized the opportunity, true to their brand essence as the low-cost and customer-friendly airline, to loudly tout the fact that they would NOT charge for checked baggage. That brand response came as a rapid reaction to other carriers imposing baggage fees. Their very Smart Brand demonstrated consistency with great agility.

Definition A Smart Brand is well defined. They not only know who they are and what the brand stands for, they have also articulated those definitions. The definitions of the brand are promoted internally, used regularly as the litmus tests for all brand-representing initiatives, and endorsed at the highest levels of the company. The Starbucks brand is a stellar example of a company who has defined their brand thoughtfully and carefully (“inspiring and nurturing the human spirit, one person, one cup, one neighborhood at a time”), and then promoted and used that definition to benchmark everything they do. You can sense their brand definition in everything that bears the mark of Starbucks.

Differentiation. A Smart Brand is distinctive in both its core and its ongoing representation. That means it has to start differentiated, and stay differentiated. Apple Inc. is just such a brand. The company began by establishing a brand that would be distinct from other technology companies (notably IBM at the time), committed to both design excellence and intense focus on the user experience. Apple has steadfastly maintained that differentiation, through all their product development launches, their category pioneering, and all their marketing campaigns. There is no other technology brand like Apple. Now that’s differentiation.

Diligence. A Smart Brand is thorough and pervasive in the ways they live their brand, understanding that brand is not merely about logos or graphics...it’s about behaviors and emotions and physical spaces and services and products. In sum, in every way the company lives. The Disney brand has firmly grasped the importance of diligence. From their aggressive protection of their graphic properties to their designs of the theme park properties, Disney understands the importance of diligently infusing everything with the hallmarks of the Disney brand, right down to referring always to their theme-park staff as “cast members.”

Discipline. A Smart Brand resists the terrible temptation to boredom that looms ominous for every serious brand, and most often that boredom comes from within. No one becomes bored with a brand more quickly than the internal staff responsible for its nurturing and development, and these are the very people who must exercise rigorous discipline in maintaining the presence and presentation of the brand. A Smart Brand stays disciplined, recognizing that their consistency in presenting their brand does not induce boredom in the marketplace, but rather a deep sense of welcome dependability. Consider a long-standing brand presence such as the Ford Motor Company. Campaigns come and go, vehicle sub-brands emerge and fade, but the parent brand maintains great discipline in simply being Ford.

These **six key elements** of a Smart Brand constitute what can be called, Brand 2.0.

Seizing the power of the concept we know as “brand,” and leveraging it for marketing success will enable Smart Brands to succeed in the competition for awareness and loyalty in the marketplace of today and tomorrow.

