

Five branding secrets to get YOU the love and money YOU deserve

Julia Roberts gets \$20 million per picture. Why? Simple - she's a strong brand. Audiences readily pay money to see her nervous laughter and megawatt smile as she stumbles through a dizzy romantic role. She's more than just a pretty face. Or body.

 By Sid Peimer 28 Jan 2004

When you think of brands like Coca-Cola, Mercedes, Woolworths and Telkom they conjure up specific thoughts and feelings. You like some brands more than others and you invest in some more easily than others. Just as you do with people.

There are many lessons we can learn about the market value of our own identity from the brands we buy every day:

1. Consistent behaviour gives rise to consistent expectations. You probably think of Volvo as 'safe' and Woolworths as 'quality'. This did not happen overnight - these brands discovered their 'essence' and made sure that everything they did (and still do) supports it.

You might not be aware of it, but you become comfortable with people because you have a fair idea of how they will behave in various circumstances. You evaluate character from people's consistent behaviour, or rather, your interpretation of their behaviour.

When we meet people, we ask them what they do. This is the short-cut we use to determine character. If they answer 'accountant', we would infer that they are precise, dependable and good with figures. If they stated 'Enron accountant', we would infer that they have outgrown those somewhat staid qualities with traits like imaginative, daring and oh-what-the-heck.

You may want to get a little more daring on the party circuit. Here's a handy short-cut a friend used at parties when he wanted to 'meet people' - he would tell them he was a paediatrician, for a number of reasons:

- a) If he could be trusted with vulnerable children (and get paid for it), then he could be trusted with the fairex.
- b) Specialists are bright, so he must be bright, and if he's prepared to be seen with you then you must be bright.
- c) He knew just enough to bluff his way (he was a kid once).
- d) He'd never heard of anyone being prosecuted for impersonating a paediatrician at a party. The downside was when they rushed in with a kid who was rapidly turning blue
- e) He was not after point 2 below.

2. Your appearance may get you a date. How you usually behave (i.e. your style) may get you going steady, but people fall in love with character. Banks are having a really hard time trying to convince us of their caring, understanding and efficient service. It's just not in their character.

You can suck in your cheeks as hard as you like, but that just means you're trying to emulate a feature of the genetically gifted, whose character is mainly composed of visual cues. You're lucky - you can walk, talk and

think at the same time - use it. Character is not made up of a list of strong/good attributes, but an eclectic mix of your behaviour. As long as you're not mentally or physically abusing anyone, no trait can be good or bad. You are who you are - get over it.

3. All behaviour is symbolic. If you tell me how much care and expertise goes into the making of your product, but you make a spelling error on the label, then I'm not convinced. If I'm shown a large man drinking a light beer, then I'm not going to believe that brand's promise either.

I throw my dirty washing on the floor, not because I don't love and respect you, but because I'm lazy as hell. But that does not matter, because if you infer from my actions that I disrespect you, then that is the result of my actions. You might wear a flimsy dress to work, because of the weather, but if a colleague interprets it as a 'come on' then that is the net effect of your communication. I know this is unfair, but if you're in marketing and you haven't realised that it's all unfair, you're not doing it right. No one cares that 'underneath it all' you're a wonderful person - it's what people see (or experience) that counts. How many times do we see the scene where a child eventually tells the parent how much they loved them? Now they get it!

4. Branding is not so much about you as it is about them. If your brand is the sum of how consumers think and feel about it, then the only important place is in their minds. What they perceive is the reality. However, many people don't really know what they want from a brand, so be careful what you ask for - you might get a vague socially correct answer as opposed to the truth. Dudley Moore gave us a wonderful example in the movie *Crazy People*: "Jaguar: for men who like to get hand jobs from beautiful women they hardly know".

That does not mean you should bend to the dictates of how people want you to be. Just as many brands discover to their detriment, trying to be all things to all people is a great way of being nothing to anyone. You can't please everyone, and some people might very well dislike you. But you're in for the long haul - you need to be true to who you really are. Once again, there's a flipside to this - you can't behave in the same way at an office party as you do during working hours - that would be inappropriate (you'd actually come across as 'odd'). If you have a good idea what your true essence is, it gives you the freedom to be flexible, a very important quality in a very competitive world.

5. Your identity comes across in your 'story'. A brand, like a person, is a story that is evolving all the time. If you can fall for a big, bad fox eating a grandmother and then impersonating her in a bed, then you can believe anything. And if you wanted to correct me, by telling me it was a wolf not a fox, then I rest my case. People believe in powerful stories. Just tell yours.

I trust I've given you some pulling power by sharing these brand secrets. The word 'secrets' reminds me of this story:

...one winter afternoon, a teacher was showing a small boy how to zip up his coat. "The secret," she said "is to get the piece of the zipper to fit in the other side before you try to zip it up." The young boy looked up at the teacher and asked, "Why does it have to be a secret?"

ABOUT SID PEIMER

Sid Peimer has had 16 careers. That's not 'jobs' - it's full-on careers (full-time from six months to six years each): Strategic planner, marketing lecturer, management consultant, copywriter, wholesale manager, franchise manager, retail pharmacist, creative director, laboratory technician, river guide, sales representative, professional actor, factory materials manager, karate instructor, shop assistant and motivational speaker. If we included jobs, we could add door-to-door salesman, suntan oil sprayer, frozen chicken cutter ... Today, he is a writer, consultant and trainer living in Strategy House on the slopes of Table Mountain. He is the mayor of www.stratplanning.com. His girlfriend does not allow him on the furniture, as his hair comes off. View my profile and articles...

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