

Common sense in branding



Branding doesn't need to be rocket science, says Stefan Engeseth. In hard times we all find common sense a good way of doing things without high costs. If we don't need a rocket to go to the moon, what can we do right here on earth? First of all talk to people who don't speak rocket science when you want to talk branding.

Stefan Engeseth

In this article, I will point out some of the tools and ideas you can work on. Start with a new approach: talk to people who DO NOT work with branding. Simplicity is a great tool for common sense in branding. Use only basic words to describe your brand.

These days there are so many copy brands in retail shops, private labels create problems for the original brands. Try searching for new distribution channels for your brand. Whoever has direct contact with the consumer can set the rules on which brand the consumer should choose. Where does your consumer wish to buy? How can you get closer to your customer? Can you paint a new map for them to make it as easy as possible to find your brand?

One example of this was when I suggested in 2000, "why not offer Coca-Cola on tap in every apartment". A year later in the Sunday Times 2001, "Douglas Daft, the chief executive of Coca-Cola, is planning to compete with water by channelling Coke through taps in customers' homes". I didn't listen to colleagues who told me that this idea is too far-out for branding. There are thousands of fantastic ideas to try out on how to walk your brand to the consumer. Distribution is still on the Neanderthal stage. Try to think of how can your distribution can improve the consumer's quality of life.

Don't get cynical by trying to be No 1. Among today's consumers, they sympathise more with the "underdog" brand than the number one brand. Take part of the community that surrounds your brand with earth and heart. I feel that brands in medicine and software are losing markets point to smaller and more heart-felt brands. The world is changing not only because of the book No Logo by Naomi Klein; people really don't like to pay for bad and fake brands anymore. Today the organised consumer is pure power. It can build or kill your brand like wild fire with internet and media. Do you really want to work with an anti-brand? Can you afford to position your brand as an anti-brand? Communicate good values and your brand will deserve to be loved by the consumers. Bring love to your brand. People love people but who loves your brand?

Make your values visible, one way is to make a showroom. Whatever you call it, it is a way of conceptually consolidating all of your attractive values. There are many ways of doing this but it is also an opportunity for you to talk with the consumers. Get them to share their common sense about your brand and product. Always listen to a good idea from everyone regardless of their job title or not. The idea is what is important. This is

also a way to make your brand humble. I did showrooms for the Swedish Post for product exposure and brand visibility. Along the way, we learned that one of the main points of the showroom was also to present internal values and education. When you make a new map you always discover new things on the way. This showroom started as a zero budget project and ended with many showrooms with a great sell and branding tool that makes a difference and the right PR.

If you are branding and sell outdoors clothes in London maybe you need to take nature to the Underground. Can you see the mouse is loose in the London Underground? Play with an idea and see what you find out or even better take the mouse to the Underground and see what happens. I leave it to the reader to ponder the implications.

Why are brands interesting and products often boring? Why not make the product a part of the brand? Any one can tell that Absolut Vodka bottle is a part of the brand but can you tell who made the floor where you are right now? Take a look at the floor, you will find the name on the other side. Is the branding business upside down? Think what could happen if you work with branding this floor together with the designer on how to make the floor. Then you could make the floor like Absolut Vodka, everyone knows the brand from the bottle or your new brand floor.

The branding business is upside down and some know how to turn it around, like Richard Branson did when he took on Coke and Pepsi. Branson writes in his book, *Losing my Virginity*: "I love to give big companies a run for their money". For example, the Virgin Cola bottle was given more curves than Coke by inspiration from Pamela Anderson. That is one way of turning the brand rules upside down.

Sometimes marketing only makes an anti-brand, especially when the product doesn't deliver what the brand promises. Common sense says that you really need a good product, like Google, the online search engine. It is growing because of good customer value and satisfaction.

Regardless of the brand favoured by customers, common sense remains a useful competitive tool. At a talk I recently gave to some 60 shoe store managers, I wore one brown and one white shoe. During the last 15 minutes of the talk I placed myself so the audience could not see my shoes. When I asked the participants to say what shoes I was wearing, 15 percent were able to say they were different. It makes you wonder how interested stores are in their customers. When asked how many wore their own brands, 30 percent acceded. It makes you wonder if people believe in their own product, and whether it is here, at the level of basic values, that competition could become considerably more effective. Why not try similar tests in your own stores? (I would not mind a copy of the results!)

How can you sell and brand at the same time with common sense in branding? This is one of the issues I discuss in my book *Detective Marketing – Creative Common Sense In Business*. In hard times, common sense should be common. Who needs rocket science, not me, not you and most of all not the consumers.

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