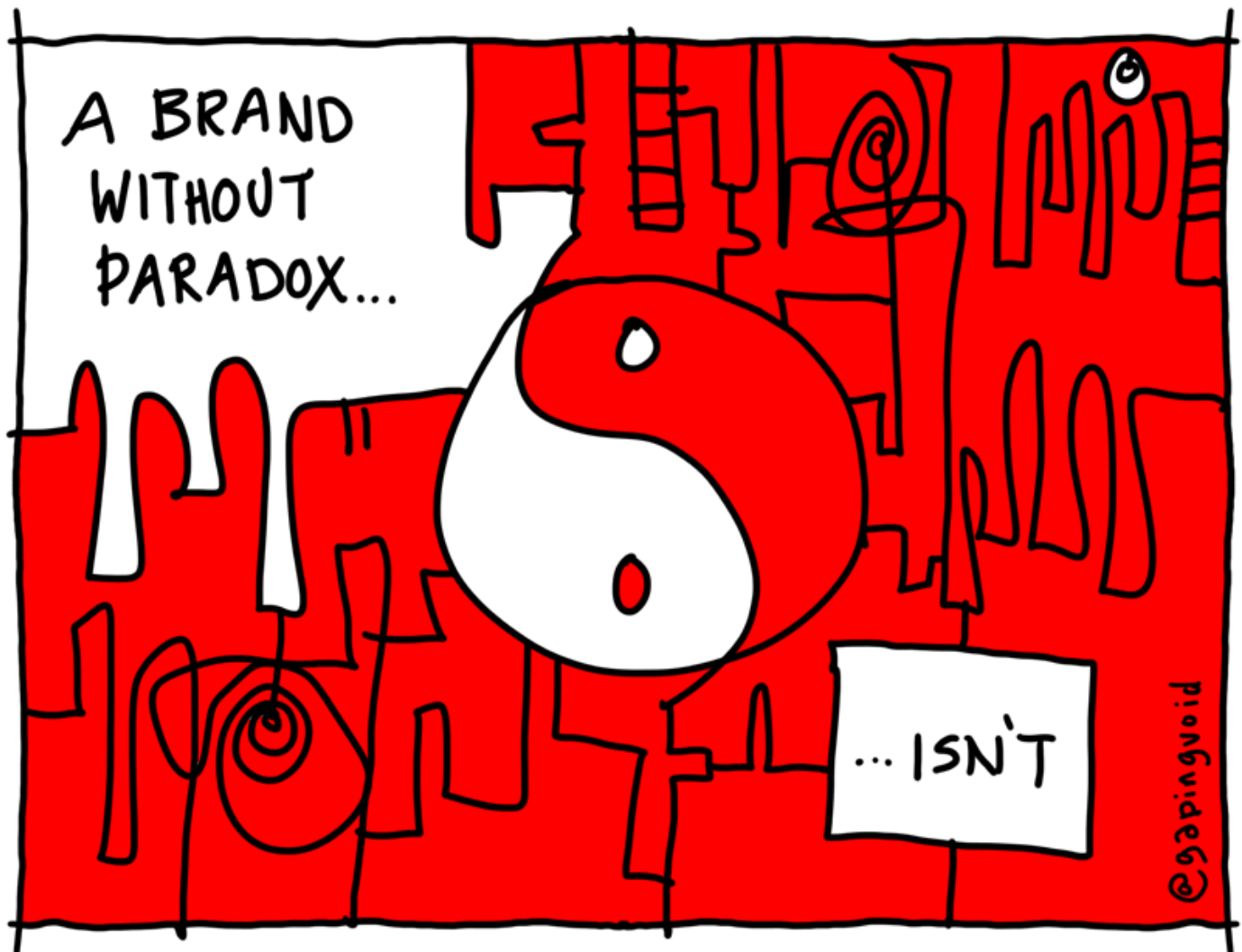


Branding Rules

14 Brand Secrets From Industry Experts



Branding Rules

14 Brand Secrets From Industry Experts

Branding means so many things to different people that it has become nebulous. It's called the "secret sauce" of marketing, but what does that mean? "Secret sauce" might mean sriracha to some, Tabasco to others, or the intangible and often unidentifiable ingredient that we all seek and/or covet.

Branding is the logo on the coffee cup. But it's much more than that. Brands are seen and unseen, something recognizable yet indefinable. Brand is an accumulation of all the thinking, positioning, brainstorming and planning needed to create a relevant experience that connects with prospects and customers. It's the customer's opinion of the company, not the messages themselves.

You can find branding all around you – it's often expressed as the slogan, the tagline, the "Just Do It" of Nike and the "Find Your Strong" of Saucony. It's the spirit of Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign. It's the Chick-fil-A cows plastering graffiti on billboards. It's Apple's packaging.

But if branding is at once concrete and abstract, contrived and uncontrollable, the logo and not the slogan and the customer experience – how can you create a memorable and meaningful brand?

We decided to ask 14 well-known marketers and authors.

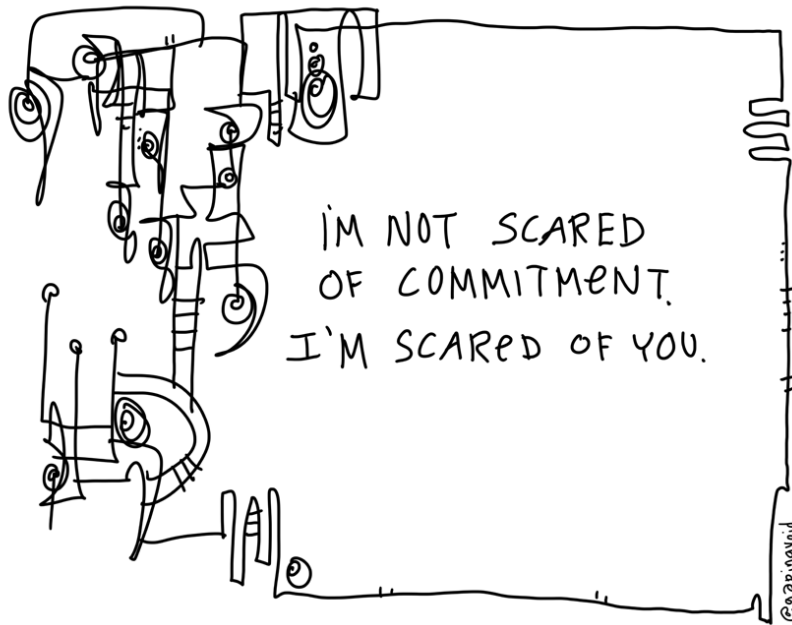
If you could impart only one piece of branding advice, what would it be?

The answers given are as varying as the backgrounds of the people asked. Their advice sometimes includes tactical measures; other times, it simply recommends a certain perspective toward branding itself or toward the people who receive the marketing message.

Some of the answers focus on how branding is the result of customers' perspectives and experiences. Others admit the fact but choose to focus on what businesses could and should do on a day-in and day-out basis.

Thematically, most of the marketers and authors state that branding starts with a core set of ideas and beliefs. It doesn't begin with a focus on what the competition is doing or what the minority clamors for. It begins with an introspective examination and a determination of values and ideals before communicating a branding message externally.

“ My number one piece of advice on branding is
‘**make and keep commitments.**’ ”



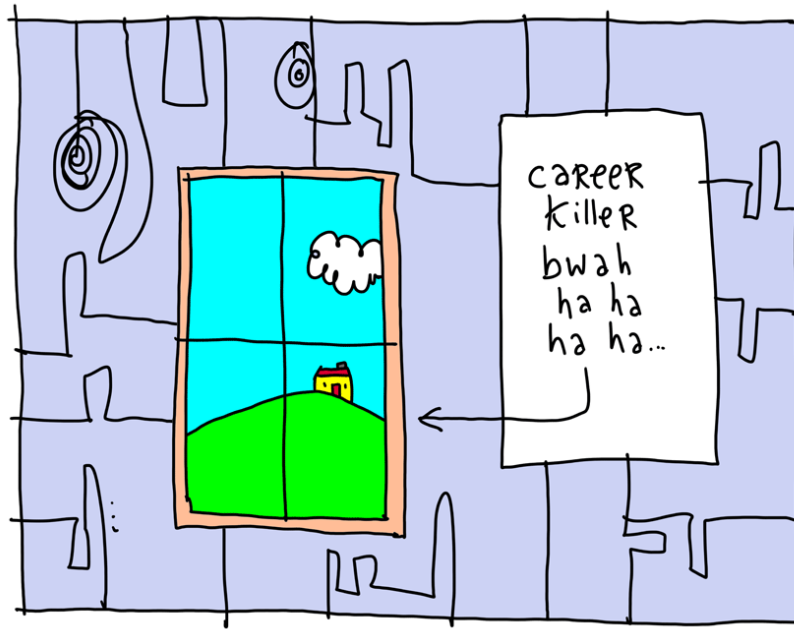
Chris Brogan says that branding is related to an upholding of principles, which for him consists of one rule:

“ My number one piece of advice on branding is ‘**make and keep commitments.**’ It’s really the best brand advice for any human. Every time I run afoul of it, I fail. ”

In context, Chris’ remarks highlight how brands succeed and fail based on their reputations for delivering on a promise. This promise could be based on product performance, delivery of goods, services, customer experience or care. Good brands deliver, and in best-case scenarios, over-deliver – always putting the customer first. Bad ones share a promise, under-deliver and generally fail.

Chris Brogan, CEO and President, Human Business Works

“ Stop looking out the window.
Start looking in the mirror. ”



C.C. Chapman, author of “Amazing Things Will Happen”, says something similar but adds that businesses shouldn’t focus too much on what their competitors are doing. Businesses have to spend more time concentrating on themselves, their opportunities, their issues and their own house:

“

Stop looking out the window. Start looking in the mirror.

The biggest branding mistake I see is assuming that because others are doing it, that you need to do it too. For instance, every year around the big game, brands try to be something they are not with their big commercials. Customers don’t like it and brands are damaged by it.

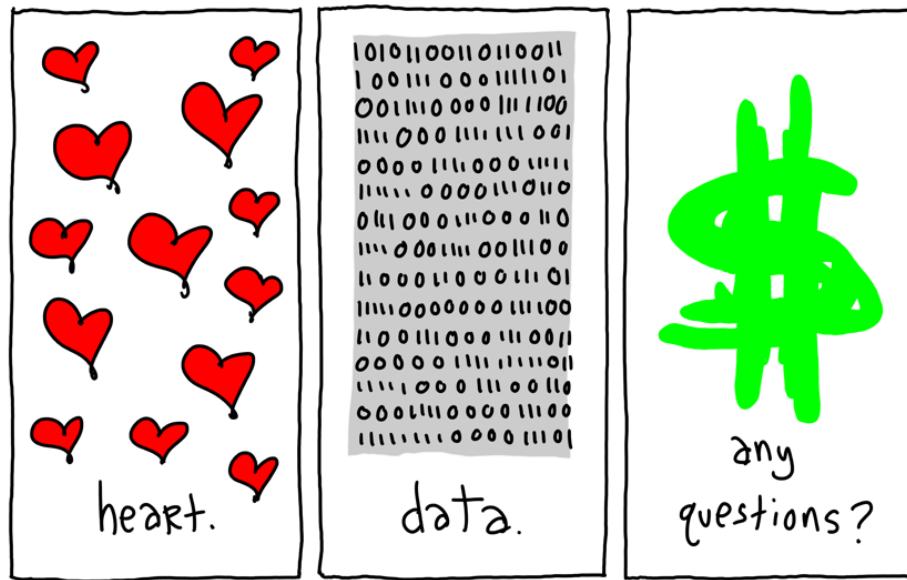
Your branding shows who you are. It can’t be faked or photocopied off of someone else.

Of course you need to look out and keep an eye on what your competitors and others are doing, but take more time to look in the mirror. Ensure everything you are creating and sharing shows the image that you see when you look inward at your company.

The view out the window may appear greener than at your own feet, but at the end of the day, remembering who you are and what you really are all about is the best option for you. **Your brand has to be yours.** No filter is ever going to make you something that you are not. ”

C.C. Chapman, Chief Marketing Officer, YSN

“ Follow your heart to **build your brand**
and follow the **data to market it.** ”



Chris Lester of CHIEF echoes Chapman. He says that powerful brands come from within, not from without:

“ **Marketing is constant change, branding is continuous stability** – follow your heart to build your brand and follow the data to market it.

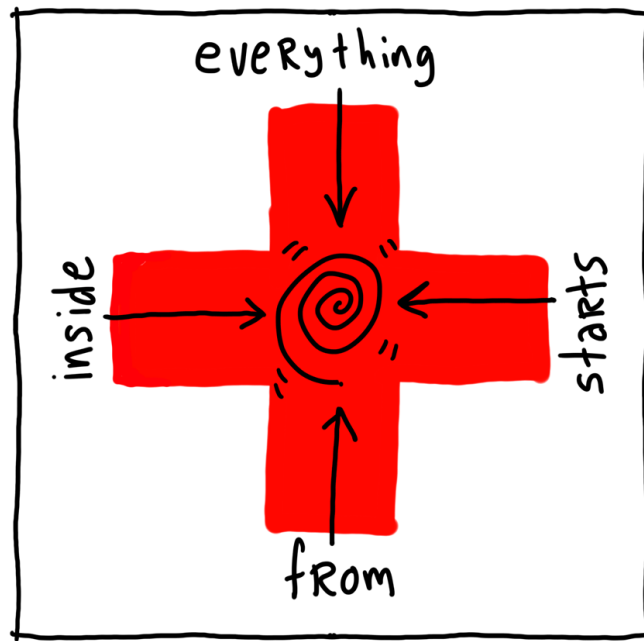
Powerful brands come from within, not from the market. They’re built from the characteristics that make your product, service or work unique, your personality attractive, and your perspective distinct – the things that define your culture and make your clients love you.

Your brand shouldn’t be a reflection of market data; it should be a reflection of you.

Your marketing, on the other hand, **should be constantly shaped and reshaped by market data and community engagement** – relentlessly seeking, responding to and connecting with the audiences most attracted to your brand. ”

Chris Lester, Co-founder, CHIEF Brand Strategy

“ The brand has to be rooted in your **values 'reason for being.'** ”



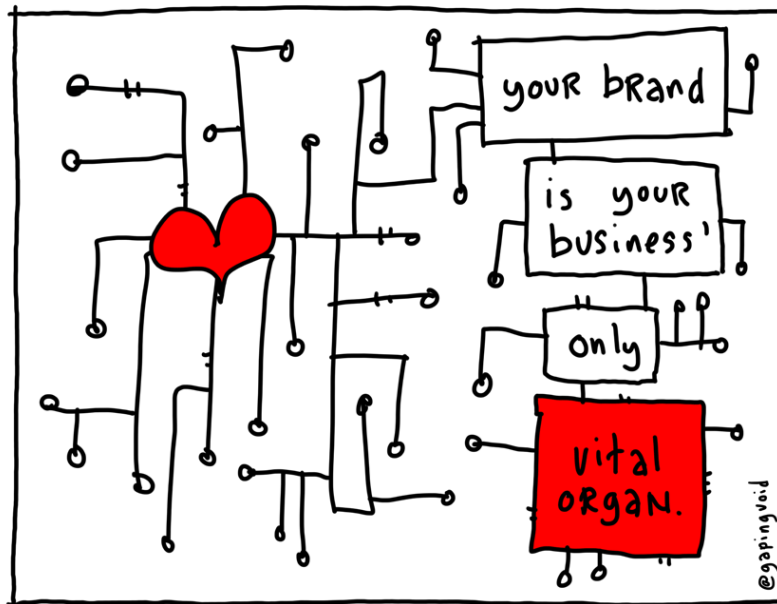
Selma Bouhl, vice president of marketing strategy and creative, and Seth Spiro, director of brand marketing and advertising at the American Red Cross say that branding is something that starts internally but is expressed externally:

“ **The brand has to be rooted in your values and your corporate 'reason for being.'** It is not your product, service or logo (though those are important components); it is the need that the product serves coupled with the values you stand for. ”

Applying Bouhl and Spiro's principle, word of mouth begins when people have their needs met. When results are mixed with character values, a brand stands out. People begin to have an emotional reaction when they see and hear about the brand. That's how strong brands are built, and why people feel compelled to talk about them.

Selma Bouhl and Seth Spiro, The American Red Cross

“ The brand is the **heart and soul** of any great company. ”



Pamela Mulder Ratti follows in Howe and Chapman's veins but examines branding through the lens of maintaining a healthy body and mind:

“ **The brand is the heart and soul (or, the secret to the success) of any great company.**
Keep it healthy, and there is no limit to what you can do.

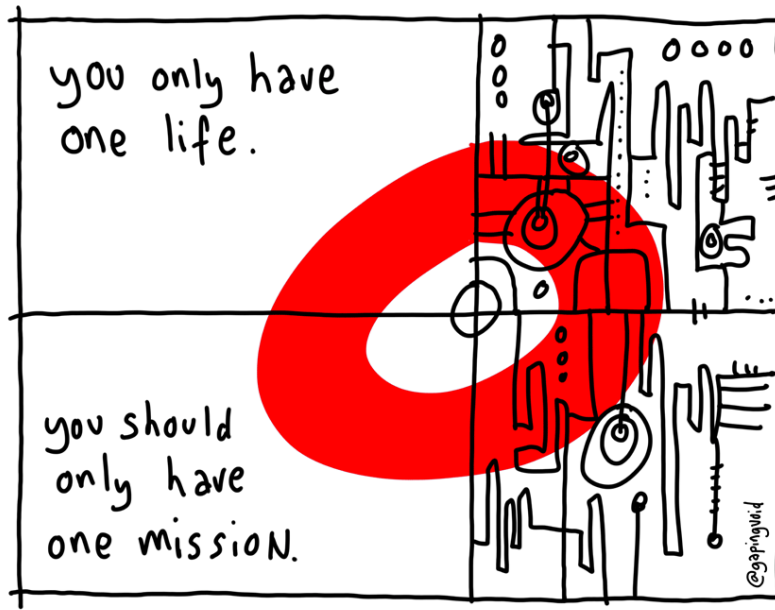
What do I mean by healthy? It's really the same thing as maintaining a healthy body or a healthy mind.

Keep the brand front and center, top of mind in every decision. Resist 'junk food,' the temptation to change it up every time the wind changes direction. **Stay the course.**
Be consistent. Be true to your brand.

Revenues will go up and down over the course of product life cycles, recessions, launches, etc., but the **brand should stand firm through thick and thin.** What you stand for will not change; what you sell or offer will. If you take care of the brand, you will ALWAYS come out ahead. ”

Pamela Mulder Ratti, President, Fadeproof

“ Narrow your focus. ”



In addition to focusing on what makes a brand that brand, a number of people suggest that businesses need to focus. When businesses lose focus, they disseminate too many messages, which dilutes their brands and confuses their audiences. Businesses have to simplify and remember who they are at their core. They have to focus on one message and communicate it across all channels.

Laura Ries of Ries & Ries says:

“ **Narrow your focus.** You might think your brand is terrific for 14 reasons, but that won't get your brand into the mind of the consumer. You might think you want to expand in 14 different ways, but that will dilute and diminish your brand in the mind of the consumer.

Not being focused is the single biggest problem facing businesses today. **To be successful at building a brand, you need to think as narrowly as possible.** And you need to stay as narrowly focused as possible to keep that brand strong. Want to expand? Launch a new brand that's focused. ”

Laura Ries, President, Ries & Ries

“ You get one message and sometimes **one chance to connect with a** target audience, prospect or customer. ”



Erin McCahill echoes Ries and uses a bit of pop culture to illustrate her point:

“Remember this scene from City Slickers? (Yeah, the first one. If you haven’t seen it, you’ll get it anyway.) Curly and Mitch are riding across the Wild West, and Curly, a man of very few words, says what I think is the most important rule and/or principle of branding and creative work.

Curly: Do you know what the secret of life is?

Mitch: No... what?

Curly: This.

Mitch: Your finger?

Curly: One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that, and everything else don’t mean s**t.

Mitch: That’s great. But what’s the one thing?

Curly: That’s what you have to figure out.

“ Now Mitch was in a midlife crisis and trying to find the meaning of life, and we are marketers trying to sell something and create engagement, but the principle and sometimes the pressure are the same.

Substitute the word ‘life’ with ‘message,’ and you’ve got the Principle of ONE. **You get one message and sometimes just one chance to connect** with a target audience, prospect, or customer.

We often get lost in trying to say everything at once. Our briefs ask us to reach everybody, and we talk to ourselves much too often. If you want someone to remember your brand, engage with you, buy from you, or just tune in – **be creative, be relevant, be smart, and know that if you do all those things right, they may remember ONE thing** (that’s just the way humans work), so you better make sure you know what that one thing is and drive it home. ”

“ Your **brand value**
should be your north star. ”



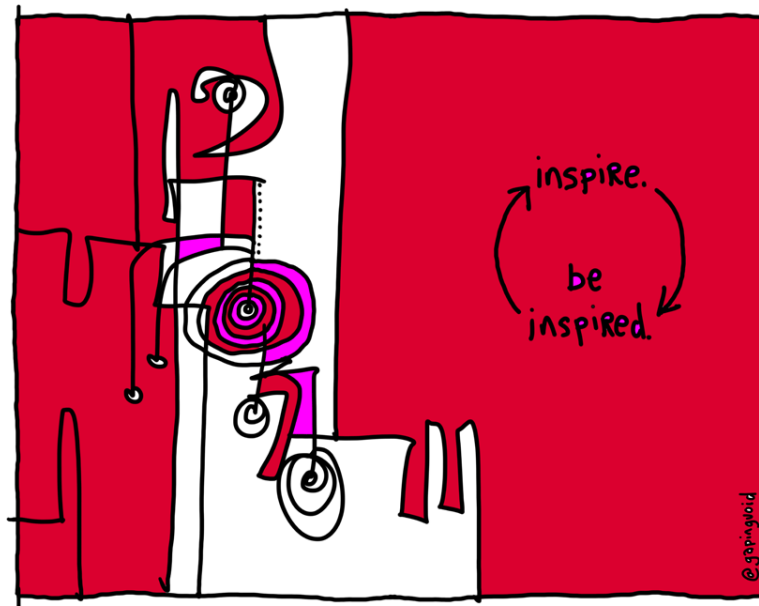
Toby Bloomberg puts the sentiment a different way; she says branding is a north star that is to be followed home:

“ **Your brand value is your north star.** To remain competitive in a changing world, organizations must continuously transform their offerings, their communications, and often their level of service.

However, brands lose their way when they divert without understanding why their customers build trust, or in today's vernacular, 'create relationships,' with them in the first place. In a strange way, **strong brand values encourage a brand to explore new avenues and still find their way 'home.'** ”

Toby Bloomberg, Director, Social Media Integration, Cox Media Group

“ **Inspiration is the most important**
part of your digital strategy. ”



Paull Young of charity: water views that “north star” as a point of inspiration. He says that businesses thinking about branding should look for the thing that will inspire not only customers, but also employees and stakeholders:

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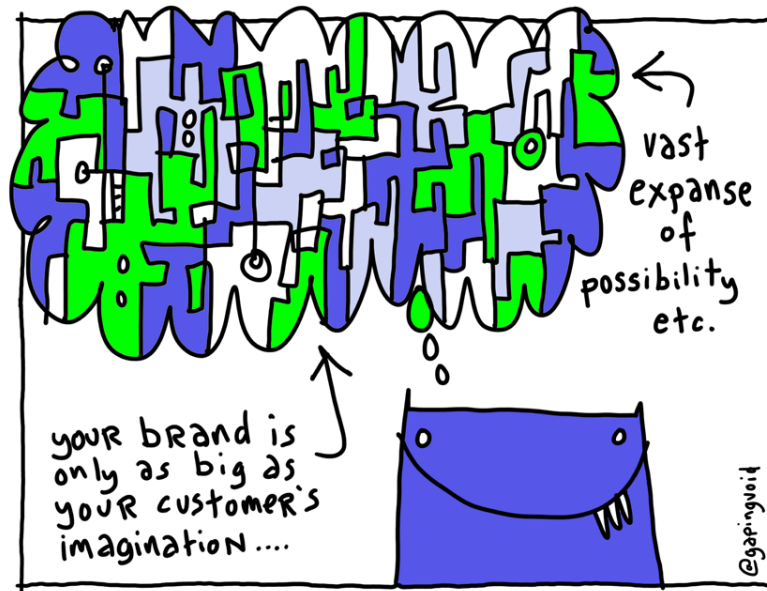
Inspiration is the most important part of your digital strategy.

At charity: water, we devote resources (especially time and passionate energy) to creating content that win the hearts and minds of our supporters and turn them into enthusiastic advocates. We’re constantly asking ourselves: **How can we make our supporters feel inspired?**

How recently have you had a conversation about how your brand can inspire your customers, employees and stakeholders? ”

Paull Young, Director, Digital, charity: water

“ Branding is what the **customer experiences** day in and day out. ”



Increasingly, marketers are focusing on customers and their experiences. They believe the brand exists as customers communicate it through social media posts, reviews and private conversations.

Branding is both internal and external. While the external relies on the message produced, it's also dependent upon the customers who receive it. That point garnered attention from a number of marketers and authors.

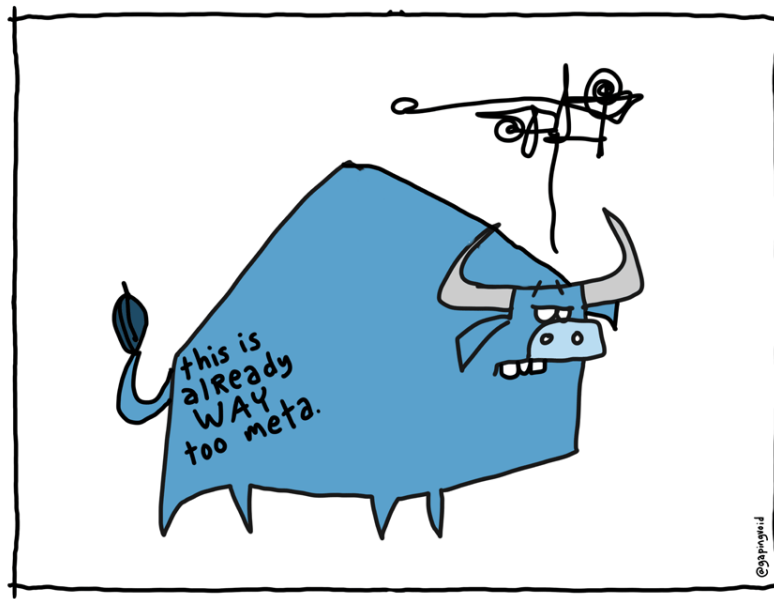
Scott Monty puts his thoughts succinctly:

“ Branding is not what your company aspires to be; **branding is what the customer experiences day in and day out.** ”

When you consider how Ford has built its social media programs, you can see Scott's words at work. Whether it was the groundbreaking Fiesta Movement in 2009 or last year's Random Acts of Fusion, customer and stakeholder participation has been the primary component of social interaction. The transformative social brand experience boosted Ford's visibility and reputation through the authentic words of the customer.

Scott Monty, Global Digital & Multimedia Communications Manager, Ford

“ **Stop sending out messages** best suited to be emblazoned on steer butts, **start listening and responding** to what people say about you in online conversations. ”



Shel Israel, co-author of "Age of Context," adds to Monty's viewpoint in a memorable way:

“ Branding began as a mark you put on the back end of a steer to show ownership. It has supposedly evolved so that it is now about **how customers and prospects feel about a particular company product or service**. For many years, this was supposed to happen by brand marketers sending out messages to customers. These messages have become more intrusive and less effective in the Information Era.

But with the converging forces of mobile, social media, data and location, brands are being shaped by online conversations. Peers impact how people feel about a company more than messages.

These days, **the conversation has more impact than the media insertion.**

My advice to modern marketers is simple: **stop sending out messages** that are best suited to be emblazoned on steer butts and **start listening and responding** to what people say about you in online conversations. ”

Shel Israel, Writer, Speaker, Co-author of "Age of Context," and Forbes Contributor

“ Successful branding is about **cooperating with customers** to co-create and co-communicate the vision. ”



Todd Defren also focuses on conversations but suggests that businesses need to do more than listen and respond. He suggests successful branding is about working with customers in an atmosphere of collaboration:

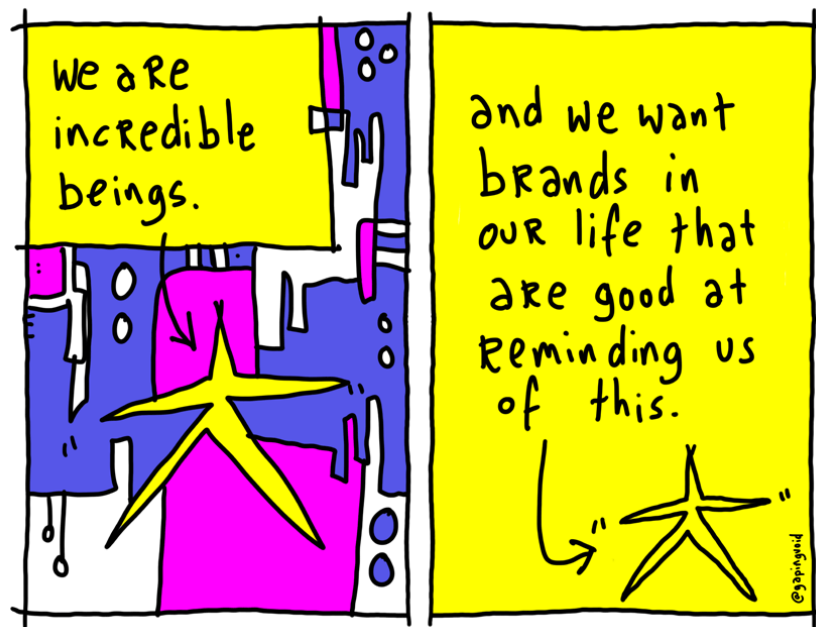
“ Branding that does not ring true to consumers is inevitably unsuccessful. Successful branding is about **cooperating with customers** to co-create and co-communicate the vision, message and practices of the corporation.

For the first time in history, corporations of all sizes can actively engage with their customers in grand acts of co-creation. We've moved from online suggestion boxes such as the ballyhooed 'My Starbucks Idea' to much more sophisticated examples of brands tapping their audiences for ideas on product development, customer service and even campaigns.

Branding is no different. What is 'branding' but the nebulous feeling consumers hold about a company? What better way could there be to ensure that consumers become advocates than to give them a meaningful role in how their preferred brands communicate and go to market? If I could impart just one piece of advice on branding, it would be to **consider 2014 an opportunity for marketers to explore co-branding opportunities.**

True branding takes years to take root. Those companies that can figure out ways to partner with their customers today will be the marketing leaders of tomorrow. ”

“ Branding involves **finding and externalizing the most profound connection** of an organization or offering with its audience. ”



Like Defren and Israel, Ellis Pines of TMP Government gives attention to conversations but emphasizes that branding must include viewing the customer not as a statistic, but as a person with dreams and desires:

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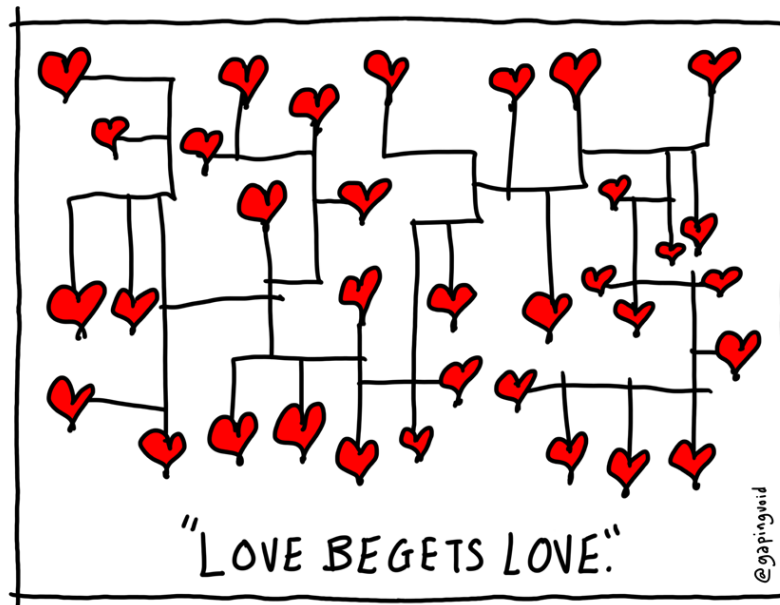
Branding involves finding the most profound connection of an organization or offering and externalizing that concept with its audience.

Most brands connect with audiences in ways that are easily duplicated by competitors. Conversely, most attempts at differentiation end up trivial. That is why I encourage clients to ask, **'Why does our brand exist? If it didn't exist, what would our audience do?'** before externalizing any connection or message.

Such questions lead to what Leo Burnett calls the **'inherent drama' of a brand**: Where does the brand resonate? What kind of archetypal patterns does it bring forth? For Burnett, it was taking a nondescript, menthol cigarette designed for the female market and investing it with the mythology of the American West. For Charles Revson, the founder of Revlon, it was realizing that 'in the factories, we make cosmetics; in the stores, we sell hope.' For Fred Smith, it was knowing that FedEx was not selling a delivery service but 'peace of mind.'

Every company and product that exists can tell this kind of story, but it only occurs through research and empathy. **You must understand the recipient**, who is the customer, not as a numerical target, but as a person, just like you, with aspirations and dreams. ”

“ If you want consumers to love your brand,
then you need to **love your consumer.** ”



Eric Duehring reflects a similar mindset when he says that branding requires a deep understanding of, and love for the consumer:

“ **If you want consumers to love your brand, then you need to love your consumer.** Not just value them, but also truly love them. You need to understand them deeply. Dreams and fears. Hopes and desires. Passions and pains. What makes them laugh and cry. Where they come from and where they are going. Who and what has let them down and why.

Listen to them. Not just as an anthropologist, but as a trusted friend – with empathy, imagination and creativity. Don’t just walk in their shoes – live in their hearts and minds.

It’s not enough to just know what makes them tick; you have to love them enough to create something special for them and then stick around to watch, listen and respond. **To learn and engage.** If you do that, they will love you for it.

It’s clear that technology and data capabilities have shifted the marketing landscape and CMO agenda. I’m a proponent and practitioner. I believe in the SCIENCE, and I work to gain from it.

But building a fact-based and data-driven marketing plan to create efficiency and effectiveness is still just table stakes. They’re required to play, but they won’t win on their own. **We still need to create and tell stories that engage and delight.**

The ART of marketing (and branding) is about creativity, emotion and imagination. It’s human- and talent-driven, and it’s something that no data warehouse, CRM platform or mix modeling can replace. ”
The science matters, so gear up, but don’t lose the Art in the process.

So, what is the **secret to branding?**



According to our panel of marketers and authors, it's something both internal and external. It's about figuring out what makes your brand different, essential or loveable, and sticking to that.

Different stakeholders are often concerned about tactics and not the Brand – but if you don't keep a solid, focused brand foundation that inspires all communications, art or copy, the messages will fail, and the brand will also eventually fail.

Listen to your customers and provide those customers with services and products that meet a need as well as delight. Make promises and fulfill them. Communicate with stories and messages that are relevant, engaging and sharable. Stay the course and commit 110% to your brand, and your brand will win. That, with a little luck, strategy, creativity and good timing, is the secret to branding.

About the Artist

Illustrations by Gapingvoid. Gapingvoid was founded by Hugh MacLeod (Creative Director) and Jason Korman (CEO) to affect change in business and business culture, using Hugh's distinct style of drawing. Gapingvoid offers bespoke services (including Gapingvoid CultureMail). Clients include Rackspace, Intel, Cisco, Roche Pharmaceuticals, Babson College, Techcrunch and Dewar's Whisky. Learn more at gapingvoid.com.

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