

GR M10 Module 9: What is a Brand?



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“A Brand is an idea, not a thing. It is a shifting set of perceptions and associations that can be influenced, but not controlled. Memorable brands, such as Altoids or Starbucks thrive on a coherent set of products and a strong, identifiable design approach. A successful Brand connects to its audience on an emotional level, representing a feeling, an idea, a way of life. Use design to shape your own brand, whether its your band, team, gallery, or personal hair-cutting service.” Mike Weikert (http://books.google.com/books?id=rWuict_SE-8C&pg=PA51&lpg=PA51&dq=A+Brand+is+an+idea,+not+a+thing.+It+is+a+shifting+set+of+perceptions+and+associations+that+can+be+influenced,+but+not+controlled.&source=bl&ots=T1vgH_8hnU&sig=_FPqDmem0KPUMJ_pbDdMKpSwqBc&hl=en&ei=BfUmSsHtDYeltAOwvKCOBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1)

Brand Next Manifesto by Wolff Olins

(<http://www.wolffolins.com/index.php>)

“The brands of the future aren’t glossy marketing gadgets, but practical platforms for action. They help more people do more, and do better. We think brands need to be less controlling, more generous.” Wolf Olins

“BRAND = PLATFORM

Brands started as a stamp on a product, and became a gadget designed to get people to buy, an emotional lever. Now they’re becoming something bigger and different. Brands are becoming platforms.

More and more, customers are invited not just to buy things but also to do things. On the platforms of eBay, Wikipedia, flickr and YouTube, people sell things, share knowledge, and broadcast visual ideas. Through Zopa (<http://uk.zopa.com/ZopaWeb>), people lend to and borrow from each other. On Sellaband (<http://www.sellaband.com>), you can launch your favourite unknown band, and then share in the profits.

Sony Ericsson shows how its mobiles enable people to do what they love. Peugeot now invites customers to become car designers, and crowdspirit gets large numbers of people to invent new electronic products.

Newspapers like the Guardian have become less promoters of an ideology, and more a platform for a spread of voices, including those of readers.

Across the developed world, consumers are becoming active, even activists, and brands their platform. It’s a less emotional, more practical relationship – people don’t love eBay, though they love what it allows them to do.

As consumers are invited not to buy but to work, functionality really matters. Creating a brand, and designing the service behind it, are becoming inseparable.



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BRAND = LINK

It's not just individual customers who use these platforms. Other organizations do too, and brands increasingly link organisations together. The corporation of the new century is more like a constellation, and brand is becoming the link, the multiplier.

Amazon may seem like a bookselling corporation, but actually it's a constellation of retailers of electronics, homewares, toys and more – plus the wider constellation of people who review and recommend. Creative people increasingly work in consortia, forming communities through conferences like TED (<http://www.ted.com>) or websites like worldchanging.com. Cities like New York are creating a city brand to connect and multiply the impact of the myriad of agencies that promote the city.

Fairtrade (<http://www.fairtrade.org.uk>) is a German charity whose brand is a multiplier for 600 producer companies. Companies from Gap to American Express have created new products for (RED): a percentage of profits go to treat AIDS/HIV in Africa. The London 2012 brand (<http://www.london2012.com>) embraces sponsor and partner organizations.

This new world of branding isn't about self-contained citadels, or force-fields that repel other brands. Brands like (RED) embrace the organizations they work with.

As brands become less the property of an organisation and more the banner of a movement, ownership will become even looser. Logos will be things other organizations, and individuals, can borrow and adapt.

BRAND = THEME

As brands become platforms and links, they get used and abused. People want to make them their own – which means they may no longer be the same everywhere. Brand becomes not one tune, but a theme with variations.

As ideologies compete, as cultures become more multi, organizations are getting much more sensitive to context, to localness. Even Starbucks – the great exponent of a repeated formula – now believes in 'identity, not identical'.

The BBC has moved from uniformity to create distinctive channel brands. Mandarin Oriental (<http://www.mandarinoriental.com>) thinks of its hotels as a family, not a chain, so that San Francisco looks and feels different from London and Hong Kong, though there's a unifying oriental sensibility.

Brazilian telecoms company Oi has different ways of being with 'extreme', 'mass' and 'business' customers. The London cultural venue Southbank Centre (<http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk>) has a new logo that has an infinite number of variations.

The new brands have many ways of doing things, many ways of speaking. They experiment and change over time. The brand is not a perfect blueprint, and brand creators are less architects and more inventors, learning by adapting. What unites the organization (or constellation) isn't the surface logo but the underlying idea."

“The Brand Called You” by Tom Peters

(<http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/10/brandyou.html>)

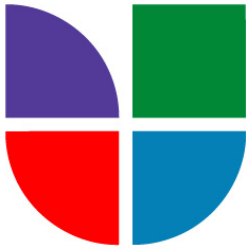
“Big companies understand the importance of brands. Today, in the Age of the Individual, you have to be your own brand. Here’s what it takes to be the CEO of Me Inc. It’s a new brand world. That cross-trainer you’re wearing -- one look at the distinctive swoosh on the side tells everyone who’s got you branded. That coffee travel mug you’re carrying -- ah, you’re a Starbucks woman! Your T-shirt with the distinctive Champion “C” on the sleeve, the blue jeans with the prominent Levi’s rivets, the watch with the hey-this-certifies-I-made-it icon on the face, your fountain pen with the maker’s symbol crafted into the end ...You’re branded, branded, branded, branded.

It’s time for me -- and you -- to take a lesson from the big brands, a lesson that’s true for anyone who’s interested in what it takes to stand out and prosper in the new world of work. Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You. It’s that simple -- and that hard. And that inescapable.”

“What makes You different? Start right now: as of this moment you’re going to think of yourself differently! You’re not an “employee” of General Motors, you’re not a “staffer” at General Mills, you’re not a “worker” at General Electric or a “human resource” at General Dynamics (oops, it’s gone!). Forget the Generals! You don’t “belong to” any company for life, and your chief affiliation isn’t to any particular “function.” You’re not defined by your job title and you’re not confined by your job description. Starting today you are a brand.

Start by identifying the qualities or characteristics that make you distinctive from your competitors -- or your colleagues. What have you done lately -- this week -- to make yourself stand out? What would your colleagues or your customers say is your greatest and clearest strength? Your most noteworthy (as in, worthy of note) personal trait? Go back to the comparison between brand You and brand X -- the approach the corporate biggies take to creating a brand. The standard model they use is feature-benefit: every feature they offer in their product or service yields an identifiable and distinguishable benefit for their customer or client. A dominant feature of Nordstrom department stores is the personalized service it lavishes on each and every customer. The customer benefit: a feeling of being accorded individualized attention -- along with all of the choice of a large department store.

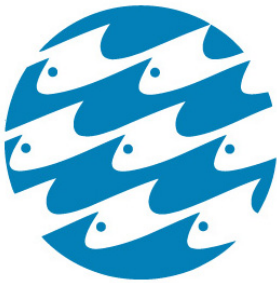
Your next step is to cast aside all the usual descriptors that employees and workers depend on to locate themselves in the company structure. Forget your job title. Ask yourself: What do I do that adds remarkable, measurable, distinguished, distinctive value? Forget your job description. Ask yourself: What do I do that I am most proud of? Most of all, forget about the standard rungs of progression you’ve climbed in your career up to now. Burn that damnable “ladder” and ask yourself: What have I accomplished that I can unabashedly brag about? If you’re going to be a brand, you’ve got to become relentlessly focused on what you do that adds value, that you’re proud of, and most important, that you can shamelessly take credit for.



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When you've done that, sit down and ask yourself one more question to define your brand: What do I want to be famous for? That's right -- famous for!

What's the pitch for You? So it's a cliché: don't sell the steak, sell the sizzle. It's also a principle that every corporate brand understands implicitly, from Omaha Steaks's through-the-mail sales program to Wendy's "we're just regular folks" ad campaign. No matter how beefy your set of skills, no matter how tasty you've made that feature-benefit proposition, you still have to market the bejesus out of your brand -- to customers, colleagues, and your virtual network of associates."

"Instead of making yourself a slave to the concept of a career ladder, reinvent yourself on a semiregular basis. Start by writing your own mission statement, to guide you as CEO of Me Inc. What turns you on? Learning something new? Gaining recognition for your skills as a technical wizard? Shepherding new ideas from concept to market? What's your personal definition of success? Money? Power? Fame? Or doing what you love? However you answer these questions, search relentlessly for job or project opportunities that fit your mission statement. And review that mission statement every six months to make sure you still believe what you wrote.

No matter what you're doing today, there are four things you've got to measure yourself against. First, you've got to be a great teammate and a supportive colleague. Second, you've got to be an exceptional expert at something that has real value. Third, you've got to be a broad-gauged visionary -- a leader, a teacher, a farsighted "imagineer." Fourth, you've got to be a businessperson -- you've got to be obsessed with pragmatic outcomes.

It's this simple: You are a brand. You are in charge of your brand. There is no single path to success. And there is no one right way to create the brand called You. Except this: Start today. Or else."

EXERCISE:

After reading the Brand Next Manifesto by Wolff Olins and "The Brand Called You" by Tom Peters, please visit the Identities section at Chermayeff and Geismar's site (<http://www.cgstudioinc.com/home.html>) to see some examples of their work. (4)(5)(6)(7)(8)

1. Choose one of the logos (visual identities) designed by Chermayeff and Geismar's, and try to figure out what kind of brand it stands for. Use MHGD, <http://www.cgstudioinc.com/home.html> and Google for your research.

2. What kind of image does the logo project? How is this image articulated (metaphorical icon, type of business the company is in...)? How does the logo convey the brand credibility traits? What kind of type, shapes, pictorial icons, and the other design elements have been selected?

3. What is it about the brand name that stands out? Is it an interesting spelling that has been enhanced typographically?

4. If this brand was a person, what kind of person would it be? Please describe this person as precisely as you could.

5. Describe one brand you are familiar with that meets some or all of the requirements described in the Wolff Olins' Brand Next Manifesto.