Moodley’s Lead Art Director Speaks on International Design // Why the US and EU should join forces.

Advertising’s Recent Paradigm Shift // Step aside sex, good is now what sells.

DJ O’Neil’s Experience Running a Network Agency // The secret behind a team of over 100 freelancers.

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As an independent online daily brand journal, Branding Magazine represents an insightful source of news and opinions from the industry.

A dedicated team of writers strives to keep its readers up-to-date with the biggest and freshest news about global brands, while concentrating on successful brand strategies, corporate and brand identity work, brand development and brand evolution.
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It’s All a Social Media Campaign from Here

By Flavia Barbat

These days were simply unavoidable. When we speak of advertising, and peruse its long history and development, we realize that it always works this way. An elite group of people begin the journey, disseminating knowledge as they wish to the masses and retaining full control. However, then the questions begin to appear and people slowly realize that they want more. The inhumanity of one-way conversations becomes evident and, subsequently, the system must change. This is what happened to advertising.
We all remember the days when we would have no choice but to sit in front of the television and watch the ads. An extreme example would be former Communist countries such as mine (Romania) where television time was limited and propaganda was the personification of advertising’s evil twin. In other countries, some might even reminisce on times when watching advertisements was an enjoyable activity. Nowadays, viewers complain about everything from the length of ads to product placement, and all that advertising does in between.

So what has changed? It’s quite obvious, in fact: It’s options. Think about this from a psychoanalytic and societal point of view. When presented with fewer media, a consumer does not know any better – does not know what he or she likes or prefers, does not know what is out there. Then, as the options grow, consumers’ eyes begin to wander and gather the courage to pick and choose. In other words, they each have a voice. And they speak to each other, consult one another, form coalitions and groups, congregate around various topics - they build the subcultures upon which society exists. The thing they value most? Conversation, communication.

When the one-way street all of a sudden has a lane going in the opposite direction, you cannot ignore it. Why, those are the rules. And, in the case of advertising, there is only one name that we could possibly give to this two-way street: Social Media. If its name is not indicative enough, this is the ‘societal’ part of the development, the moment when advertising truly ceases to be one-way, ever. Consumers now have a means by which to always - and immediately - respond. This is why I find it fascinating that there are still distinctions made between traditional marketing and social media marketing. News flash: All of your marketing efforts are now social media.

Social media channels mark the intersections of thoughts, responses, reviews, reactions, etc. It is in consumers’ natures to take to these media to voice their ability to converse with the advertisers themselves, most likely in an effort to either applaud your efforts or affect some sort of change. This is where advertisers discover the power that consumers now sense within themselves due to their discovery of options. Discussion around various forms of ads (from print and television to radio and out-of-home) is occurring within the boundaries of social media.

And while many agencies and brands alike may assume that they are taking social into consideration, what with the inclusion of social media KPI’s, metrics and ROI’s in their presentations and strategies, they forget the conversation part. They overlook the ability of quality to trump quantity and they, most likely, lose valuable customers because of it. If they wish to retain the loyalty of those forever-and-always customers, then they must engage and respond. They must score their own engagement as much as they score that of their target audience. For the frivolous customers are as easily lost as they are acquired, which is why measuring a brand’s success by its Facebook likes or Twitter followers is quickly becoming archaic.

This is most likely why we are witnessing the rise of smaller agencies and brands doing great work. They aren’t as bogged down in the bureaucratic mentality of big companies and quotas, which bestows them with the flexibility to create great content through communication with their customers. Many of them probably do the thing that everyone should: They sit social media in each and every department, not separately in the corner.
Love Is Not Enough

By Jorge Aguilar & Abhishek Mehta

Historically, marketers have been caught in the middle: While they are responsible for driving financial performance quarter after quarter, they are also responsible for building strong brands, which takes time. Today, successful marketers are proving that driving growth and building strong brands are not at odds. By sticking to the fundamentals and embracing the tools and technologies at their disposal, marketers are winning at their game.

Marketers recognize that brands today need to have a dialogue with consumers. Two-way interaction is critical to success, and the emergence of social media has enabled consumer engagement in a way that has never been possible before. Engagement is good, but if this trend du jour distracts marketers, it can be dangerous. The brand runs the risk of focusing the conversation on getting likes, being retweeted, or being repinned. Thinking only about driving engagement is not enough.

The fundamentals of how marketers must think about brand strength have not changed. Brand strength is built over time and determined by performance across four key pillars: Differentiation, relevance, knowledge, and esteem. Over the past three years, Breakaway Brands such as Kindle, Amazon, and Lego have been growing brand strength by leaps and bounds over their peers. And greater brand strength leads to greater customer lifetime value.

However, marketers are under significant pressure to deliver short-term results. A global study by Accenture found that the top business priority for chief marketing officers is to drive profitable growth. Brands must spark business growth. Marketing, sales, and brand need to work in unison to drive commercial impact. Historically, creating this union has been elusive.

The emergence of social media has enabled marketers to strengthen the link between branding and marketing. Social media has given marketers access to what consumers share, like, covet, think, and do on a public platform.

A recent study found that the majority of consumers like a brand on Facebook either because they are current customers of the brand or have the expectation of receiving promotions and coupons. Simply knowing that someone likes a brand is less meaningful than understanding the behaviors that stem from that like. Social data alone can’t create value. Knowing that a consumer likes a product is less useful than knowing that a consumer likes the product yet does not buy it in your store. Love is not enough. A stronger link between branding and sales is required.
Today, tools and technologies, such as big data, are available to create a stronger link between brand and sales. The issue, according to our recent study with Fortune 500 marketers, is that these technologies and tools have not been deeply embraced. And even among those who have—by building communities and collecting data—following through on the last three critical steps to link their online activity with sales has not been consistent (see chart). In contrast, marketers who have embraced these technologies and followed through have gained access to information and insights that lead to better decisions and growth.

**MAKING BIG DATA WORK:**

- Create social communities around your brand
- Capture individual data by providing incentives and using opt-in frameworks
- Curate data in confluence with transactional data
- Compute insights relevant and personalized for each consumer
- Collect performance metrics and use learnings for future campaigns
Case Study in U.S. Retail

A major U.S. retailer recently spent six figures per year on a social media campaign to increase the number of likes on its Facebook page. While its investment increased likes and improved engagement, the retailer lacked a quantifiable way to gauge return on investment. The retailer was focused on Step 1 (creating social communities), but was missing the know-how to accomplish Steps 2 through 5.

The retailer worked with Tresata, a big data predictive analytics software company, to understand and enhance the return of its investments. After integrating multiple data sources, including social media, loyalty programs, and transactional data, the retailer uncovered insights that allowed the management team to start measuring the impact of its investments.

The retailer found that 90 percent of consumers that like a product on Facebook actually purchase it, but not necessarily at the retailer’s stores. This revealed significant areas of growth that had not been visible to the management team. The retailer also found that 60 percent of its most loyal consumers bought the liked product at its stores, compared to only 15 percent of its less loyal consumers. This showed that the return of social media investment was greater with loyal consumers (heavy users) than with other groups. This represented an opportunity to generate incremental revenue from users whom the company might have considered as “tapped out.”

Next, the retailer ran two targeted promotions for a “center store” product. One was a Facebook-only promotion targeted at consumers who liked the product page. The other was targeted at consumers who had already liked a product page, but had not purchased the product at the retailer’s stores (which could only be done by integrating individual social media activity and transactional data, Step 3). The former promotion increased the number of customers buying the product by 15 percent and number of units sold by 23 percent (week over week). The latter promotion delivered redemption rates as high as 80 percent. The conversion rates are significant even before incorporating incremental sales when consumers came into the stores to redeem their offer.

The results from the promotions enabled the management team to understand the important role of engagement in the context of driving purchase (like-to-buy). The management team validated a core premise of marketing: Promoting what consumers like yields better outcomes than promoting what companies want to sell. The retailer is now expanding the number of fans that receive Facebook-driven promotions by a factor of 10 to capture greater share of wallet in an extremely competitive category.

The Takeaway

Successful marketers know how to manage and invest in their brand for today and tomorrow. They build robust brands that stand out and stand for something while taking advantage of all the data and tools at their disposal to strengthen the links with marketing and sales. They experiment and learn from their mistakes and failures in the quest for growth—because without growth, consumer engagement remains a broken promise.
Staying Faithful to Your Brand Amid the Lure of Expansion

By Bruce Levinson

The increasingly international CPG marketplace is bringing consumers brands, products and experiences from all over the world, and creating new revenue opportunities for brand owners. But brand expansion can entail creating mass appeal, which at the surface doesn’t sound like such a bad thing, but in reality can heavily dilute the key elements that make a brand unique. The danger lies in settling on some kind of lowest common denominator of brand attributes aiming to maximize appeal and scale of the brand. If not managed well, the brand loses its meaning and ultimately its equity.
As a consumer, I am thrilled to live and shop in today’s diverse global marketplace. Flavors that were once only found in their indigenous locales or in specialty stores have become mainstream. One might start their day with Starbucks Ethiopian coffee and a bowl of Dulce du Leche Cheerios cereal; for lunch enjoy a Near East quinoa salad, Lay’s sriracha flavored chips and a Naked pure coconut water; and perhaps end the day over an Absolut Berry Acai cocktail. Not only have foods and flavors from around the world become mainstream, they have in many cases become offerings from mainstream brands.

Part of this international bounty is due to the growing sophistication of the American palate. In particular, millennials, the most ethnically diverse generation in US history, seek new flavors and food experiences beyond what Gen-Xers or Boomers ever craved. They are influenced by an increasingly global mix of popular culture, sports, fashion, etc. that bring new relevance to products not traditionally found in their hometown. While this creates opportunities for brands, there is the risk – if not managed as well as some of the examples above – of appearing as a disingenuous and fad-chasing poser brand among a group of consumers that abhor disingenuous and fad-chasing poser brands.

This dynamic has been one factor in the movement for authentic, small-scale experiences ranging from artisanal soaps to food trucks to buying local. There is something virtuous about a brand that does not aim to appeal to everyone. For larger equities, even globally-relevant ones, brands can thrive by staying the course, knowing who they are and remaining faithful to their proud heritage without chasing the latest fad. I am particularly fond of the latest connection, for example, that Jack Daniel’s is making with Frank Sinatra, a famous advocate of the brand, in its brand communication. Frank drank Jack. There is an indelible, impossible-to-copy, lasting authenticity in that message, which should resonate well in a spirits world crowded with pop-stars-of-the-moment hawking their own libations.

Backlash against the implications of globalization goes well beyond the world of brands. This struck me recently while ordering a glass of Spanish wine at a Spanish restaurant. The waiter, also Spanish, begrudgingly poured the wine but informed me that it was “not a real Rioja.” Apparently the traditional methods of wine-making have been eschewed and replaced by more modern, globally relevant ones such as the abundant use of American oak barrels. It is increasingly hard to find “traditional Rioja” as more and more producers cater to international palates. The waiter went on to lament the movement in his home country to do away with its traditional siesta break during the day in an effort to make Spanish industries more competitive, all amid a national financial crisis.

Brand owners can take a lesson from all this and ask themselves if their equities possess something distinctive and perhaps worth celebrating, like Spanish Rioja or the siesta. If so, then tread carefully into new worlds before the lure of international riches undermine the unique brand DNA that your adoring consumers find so appealing. In fact, your loyal consumers might just like you all the more for it.
People often do not realize how much of an impact design makes on their lives and they usually take this for granted. What was pretty much unimaginable 10 years ago is a reality today. From graphic design via packaging design and advertising straight to digital media and interactive gimmicks, every aspect of design has been so complexly intertwined that we often tend to forget how simple and beautiful things can be. Take a step back, relax, don’t forget to breathe and change your perspective - you’ll be amazed by how much unexplored creativity can get the job done.

This is one of the main reasons we decided to have a chat with Wolfgang Niederl, the head of art direction at Moodley Brand Identity, Graz unit. The agency’s simplistic and honest approach to their clients results in an impeccable design which is an instant attention-grabber and an opportunity for good design to be noticed.

So, along with the interview with Landor’s Katie Taylor from last year’s Packtivity 03 event featured in our previous issue, here are Wolfgang’s thoughts on design, branding and everything inbetween.
- Video transcript -

Branding Magazine: Can you tell us a little bit more about the agency, its beginnings and what differentiated it from other competitive agencies?

Wolfgang Niederl: As you already know, we were founded in 1999 and, since then, we’ve increased in size and become pretty big, but we still follow the same principles: Make a design that’s functional, timeless. It doesn’t really matter how many people there are in a team because this is our credo for a good design.

BM: When it comes to design packaging, your clients are mostly smaller brands. Do you think working with smaller brands allows you space for more creative and original expression?

WN: Young companies and startup companies are generally more open to fancy ideas, but after all it doesn’t really matter because if a design works out for a big company, meaning that you do a redesign for a well-known brand, you have to think about it in the same way and everyone is going to recognize that you did a good job for them. Making a concept obviously helps - it doesn’t matter if it’s big or small.

BM: Your motto is “designing grown through people.” Care to explain what it stands for?

WN: What we want to do is grow with our clients; on the other hand, we want to grow by ourselves. Design is such an interpersonal thing and it has to do a lot with the chemistry between you and the client, you and the art director and the entire team together. So this is why we think we should do it for people because that’s the only way you can do it.

BM: Your website states that one of the key aspects of your advisory work is to position a new or existing brand in a clear and readily-understandable way. In today’s world, that’s a very hard task to achieve with so many products competing on the market, right?

WN: That’s the only way you can do it. You have to focus on the story of the particular brand and you have to tell it in a clear, simple and emotional way. If you can to that, you will be successful.
**BM:** Do you think every brand has a story worth telling?

**WN:** Of course! Otherwise, the brand is not interested in evolving. Design can’t save bad brands or lousy products. Even if we do work for an uninteresting brand, we try very hard to make it as interesting as possible.

**BM:** How important is digital in branding today?

**WN:** Well, it’s just one part of branding. It’s digital these days, maybe something new in 10 years. It’s important, but if the brand story doesn’t work in print, it won’t work in digital either. You can’t tell the truth on one hand and tell something different on the other.

**BM:** What’s your take on the difference between US brands and EU brands?

**WN:** What Americans can do pretty well is create an emotion. This is because they are generally emotional people and thus have emotional brands. For example, when you compare Nike with Adidas, Nike is ‘the winner brand’ while Adidas is ‘the team brand’. In Europe, it’s more of an art thing due to the typography school from Switzerland, Bauhus, etc. I think that if you mix together the these two sides you can create remarkable design.

**BM:** How do you see branding evolving in the future?

**WN:** My guess is that, especially in advertising, branding will become more and more important. With good design, brands can adapt and survive the most troubling times, but let’s also not forget that storytelling is the key to everything. People love to hear a good story and not about the product itself.

**BM:** For the end, what are your favorite sources of news and inspiration?

**WN:** For news I look up Brand New blog from Under Consideration. I’m also subscribed to Creative Review from the UK. For inspiration I get away from the blogs, get out, listen to some music, visit a museum - that’s what inspires me the most.
The New Branding Reality: “Game Changer” or “Game Over”

by Dominik Prinz

The Cambridge Dictionary defines a ‘change agent’ as “a person or thing that encourages other people to change their behavior or opinion.” I would argue that we have to add “organizations” to this definition – because we live in a time where true change is increasingly driven by brands that enjoy a massive sphere of influence.

Yet, the ‘inconvenient truth’ is that change agents are a rare species. There is not quite that many of them out there that fundamentally affect how people think, view the world and, ultimately, behave.

“Why care?” you might ask. “Isn’t change said to be the only constant?” “Are we not witnessing an age in which technological change happens at a higher rate than ever before, creating an abundance of new, exciting opportunities?” “Are we not living in a time in which mind-blowing tech startups pop up at every corner with the ambition to reinvent the way stuff works?” The short answer is: Yes, we are.

The (slightly) longer answer is: Yes, we are – but change is only positive if it is directed towards changing the right things. For example, our biggest social, economical or cultural challenges as a society. We really only witness so many Steve Jobs, Richard Bransons or Elon Musks in a lifetime – entrepreneurs and visionaries that have the unique ability to rally the troops around them to turn their very own version of a better world into reality.

And even if their respective vision might have been different and their actions motivated by different goals, one thing that unites all of them is a tiny word with mighty gravitas: Impact.

‘Impact’ is a pretty powerful thing. We live in a world where it matters more than ever, to more people than ever. An entrepreneur wants to create business impact and growth. An aspiring urban planner wants to impact the way we live in cities tomorrow. A social activist aspires to impact the way we think about a cause that matters to him. A new employee at Google wants to impact the way we build a better world in the information age. And today’s millennials represent an entire generation that is trying to define how they can spend their life in a more meaningful and purposeful way.

So that’s all good news and should in theory lead to an outburst of changemakers that will affect the world forever, in no time at all, right?

True, but here is the catch: They will need help. In an increasingly fast-paced market environment where disruptive product and service innovations are launched in ever shorter cycles, where massive investments are necessary to bring solutions to scale, or where it is sim-
ple difficult to "cut through the noise," even these type of impact-driven visionaries will need the foundational structure of an organization to thrive in. One that provides them with the capital and sphere of influence to reach the millions of people necessary in order to create systemic, not incremental, change. Change with truly transformative impact.

This is where strong brands come in. Their changing role and responsibility is to act as changemakers by providing people with the nurturing ground to grow and harvest ideas that are world-changing. We are witnessing an age in which the most powerful brands are the ones that are the most powerful change agents.

Amazon changes the way we shop. Chipotle affects the way we think about food. Facebook reinvents the way we socialize. Patagonia encourages us to adopt a more sustainable purchase behavior. Tesla redefines the way we look at mobility. These are just some of the brands that attract people who want to change the game, and are intrigued by these organizations’ capabilities to allow them to play their part in doing exactly that. With highly positive outcomes for the bottom line, the level of fascination that ‘Game Changer Brands’ enjoy has become the single most important attractor and growth-driver for them.

Now, the interesting fact is that organizations that want to join the list of the above nameplates and business model innovators will need to start changing their own behaviors, first. The traditional rules of brand management need to be thrown overboard – otherwise it’s “game over” rather than “game changer”.

Here are 5 behaviors brands should adopt if they want to survive and thrive in a world that demands more game changers:

1. Know your purpose – and never compromise it.

Organizations that want to change the game need to know in which way. They will need a crystal clear articulation of the larger role they intend to play in people’s lives, in society and the communities they engage in. They need to define how their products or services contribute to a world that is more productive, more enjoyable or more just. And once that purpose is defined, it must form the core of everything that organization says and does – without compromise. Authenticity is key, especially in an information age where consumers enjoy total transparency and get wind of every brand that goes astray.

A great example here is Patagonia. The outdoor brand pledges to help create a more responsible economy and proactively asks its customers to consume more consciously; for example, by getting their Patagonia products fixed rather than replaced with new ones. It is a brand that is very authentically and credibly holding on to its convictions. Plus, it is great proof that creating social profits actually accelerates business profits. The organization grew its revenue by one third in 2012, alone, and Patagonia founder and owner Yvon Chouinard has estimated that revenue will continue to grow at a rate of 15 percent a year.
2. Embrace empathy – and make it all about people

Brands that act as true change agents put every effort necessary into understanding people’s needs, desires, emotions and deepest motivations. There is no other way, really. Only if you tap into ‘what makes people tick’ will you be able to motivate them to reconsider their actions and behaviors.

Organizations that excel in this area invest considerable amounts of money and time into research that helps them see the world through the eyes of the people they want to touch. And I am not speaking of the “behind the desk quantitative questionnaire” here. I am talking about spending time with the people and communities you’re planning to engage with. What you want is real human insights, not excel sheets full of numbers and information. Talk to people. Listen to their stories. Understand their fears, anxieties, but also what drives them and inspires them. And then tap into what is meaningful to them – it is the only way to become and stay relevant. And you will need to be relevant if you intend to affect the masses, build a movement and create change at scale.

Take JetBlue, for example. The airline has understood that people are tired of some key conventions of the airline industry; for example, that extra bags mean extra fees or that extra snacks mean an extra swipe of the credit card. Instead, the airline has issued a ‘Customer Bill of Rights’ that is dedicated to “bringing humanity back to air travel.” People love JetBlue for that, because they feel understood and treated with respect. Receiving the J.D. Power Award for highest customer satisfaction among low cost carriers for the seventh year in the row says it all.

3. Allow Participation – and democratize your brand experience

Lorin Anderson, who evolved Benjamin Bloom’s ‘Taxonomy of Learning,’ states a very simple truth: “Creating” is the highest form of learning and key to comprehending new behaviors. What does this have to do with game-changing brands? Simply that brands that wish to change the way things are, and want others to join them in that endeavor, must do one thing: Open the floodgates and allow people in. Only brands that invite peers to co-create their products, services and overall experience will garner trust and advocacy.

There are brands that are game changers simply because their entire business model is based on co-creation and consumer participation. TripAdvisor is a great example. The hotel review platform has forever changed the way we look at the travel industry and created a new equilibrium of trust. We now base our choices on the collective opinion of other travelers, rather than the promises of shiny travel brochures and hotel websites.
4. Tell Stories and inspire people to do the same

Since the beginning of time, powerful stories have been a powerful tool to inspire and motivate people. Homer’s Odyssey has inspired people to be adventurous. The stories of massive riches in the Californian West inspired the Gold Rush in the 1850’s. And the stories told by your best friend after his summer trip to Disneyland has stirred your desire to go, as well.

Being part of a great experience enables us to tell great stories – and share them with others. Great brands understand that we live in a time where people crave memorable moments.

TOMS, the brand that gives one pair of shoes to a child in need for every pair of shoes sold, is practically based on this simple principle. I’d argue that they are not even in the business of selling shoes. TOMS is in the business of selling you the great story of how your purchase choice has helped a child in the developing world. TOMS’ customers tell this story – constantly – and thus keep growing the brand’s fellowship. That’s exactly how the brand grows its reach and impact, enabling it to do [even more] good.

5. Be Bold and (dah!) comfortable with change

An organization can’t be a credible game changer if it is uncomfortable with change. Today’s business models are in constant flux. Disruption is the new convention, and static businesses are perceived as boring and unresponsive to people’s changing needs. This is a tough one because changing, flexing and adapting one’s business model requires massive efforts – financially, structurally and mentally. But, then again, the new reality is simple: It is either ‘changing the game’ or ‘game over.’

There are businesses out there that have a proven ability to diversify their business both vertically and horizontally. Google is an often-quoted example, for the right reason: Search, Mobile Phones, Maps, Glasses, Connected Cars – you name it. There seems to be almost no category people would be too surprised about. And it has become part of the reason why Google has become such an exciting organization. It is famous for fearlessly taking on the challenges of society, with the ambition to create a more convenient and enjoyable world for all of us.

As Voltaire (and also Spiderman’s uncle Ben) has put it, “With great power comes great responsibility.” Brands do have that power. Plus, they have the ability and responsibility to affect people – how we think and, even more so, how we behave. This can create behavior change at scale, on a community level. Change that is engaging and infectious, carrying benefits for both a thriving society and growing business.

The brands that will be successful tomorrow are the ones that understand how to drive and tap into a new consumer behavior, today. And that’s how they will change the game – and, ultimately, the world.
Step Aside Sex, Good Is Now What Sells

Interview by Flavia Barbat

Although everyone is attracted to it and it definitely still sells, sex is no longer the power player in the advertising world. As consumers’ attentions have migrated away from simple proclamations made by brands regarding their products and services (in other words, advertising campaigns) and towards the actual personalities of brands, the question of how good brands are has become the nexus of purchase decisions. Product quality and price points are just two of the factors that continue to be trumped in numerous cases by the social responsibility presented by brands.

Sharing some of his expert opinions on this trend, Max Lenderman is a man who went on to build his own agency after leaving one of the big guys (CP+B). His company is named School and it focuses on guiding clients towards more purposeful and empathetic actions. In the midst of teaching brands how to transform big ideas into great deeds, Max stops to tell us a bit more about how good really does sell – and why all companies, brands and consumers should be steering in the same direction.

Branding Magazine: First of all, what drove you to start School after heading the experiential practice at CP+B?

Max Lenderman: I don’t think there would be School without CP+B. My experience in leading the experiential practice there was an integral foundation to how School looks at good work. CP+B has always had large aspirations to not only create effective communications but somehow affect culture as well. The craft that’s taught there prepared me to go after ambitious and paradigm-breaking ideas at School.

Perhaps more importantly, I was able to rub off a little advertising karma from Alex Bogusky. I came to CP+B about six months before Alex stepped away from the agency to start Common and Climate Reality project out of his FearLess Cottage. I wasn’t there for the inception of the agency and the creative work that made it a world-class shop, but I was there when Alex began his push for affecting culture in a positive way through advertising, invention, and advocacy. In this regard, he was instrumental in the inception of School – an agency that wants to help the world be a better place. In fact, we took over the lease of the FearLess Cottage and called it the School House. Good karma, man.

BM: At School, is there a particular process that you follow when analyzing a client’s situation and developing customized solutions? What do you look for as far as negatives and positives go?

ML: We do have a proprietary process to getting to the work, but we also follow some very basic tenets of brand building and creative briefing. School was co-founded by myself, Joe Corr and Shane Kent. We have deep agency and client-side roots. Joe was at CP+B and Deep Local and Shane is a CPG veteran, most recently at Unilever where he managed some of its biggest brands in the U.S. He helped write the Cleaner Planet Plan while living in London and traveling to developing and emerging markets around the world. So we’re traditionalists in a sense: We approach and solve client problems through insight, strategy and creativity.

We also infuse the notion of purpose into the approach and problem-solving process. We ask different questions to get to insight, for example: If not for money, why are you in business?
Why do your people come to work? How does the world view you? Our creative briefs are a bit different, too. We still try to find cultural tension to get to the big idea, but we’ve added two purpose-led questions to qualify the creativity. I think this infusion of intentional and purposeful querying has totally elevated the level of work at School. (My humble opinion, of course.)

**BM:** There’s a lot of buzz going around regarding the concept that “good is the new sex,” meaning that consumers are enthralled by purposeful brands. What is your opinion on this transition? What is fueling it and where do you think it’s leading the branding industry?

**ML:** Good is indeed the new sex. (It feels good, everyone wants to do it…a lot.) I’m a firm believer in purpose as a driver of consuming culture. There’s certainly a prevalence of “goodwashing” out there. Slapping a cause logo on packaging is not what it means to be a purposeful brand.

Brands are now verbs, not nouns. How you act in this world matters, and if a brand doesn’t stand for something it will fail to stand out. This proposition is supported by books such as, Grow by Jim Stengel (former P&G global CMO), Who Cares Wins by David Jones and Conscious Capitalism by John Mackey (co-CEO of Whole Foods). Studies from Edelman and TBWA show people are actively concerned with the roles brands play in making the world a better place for them. It would be foolish to ignore the power of purpose in marketing and brand building.

**BM:** At SXSW, you gave a presentation showcasing how hyper-developing countries are spearheading purpose-driven marketing. What is one country and campaign that you would like to highlight for exemplary work in this field and why?

**ML:** All over the world, people’s attitudes toward brands that embrace empathy and social change are fundamentally shifting the creative work that is breaking through and influencing culture. The marketing and advertising industry is evolving in front of our eyes in order to meet and serve this change.

I’m enthralled and inspired by the DDB Manila campaign for Smart Communications in the Philippines where they converted printed textbooks into text messages, put them on repurposed SIM cards that they branded “Smart TXTBKS” and in turn created a whole new breed of textbooks that are instantly accessible by hundreds of thousands of underprivileged families who use feature phones as their main communication tool. This work won the Grand Prix for the Mobile category.

I love this campaign because it is not simply a good deed; it’s a good idea that is incredibly endemic to the brand that embraced it. It feels authentic for a telecom to do this, and insightful to re-use “outdated” technology for a very modern purpose – to bring kids into schools and out of poverty.

**BM:** What is one piece of advice that you can give to brands attempting to find the balance between that human, empathetic touch and the successful sale of their products/services?

**ML:** School co-founder, Joe Corr, poignantly reminds us and our clients that brands are made up of people that are responsible to people and as you craft culture, you play a role in shaping what culture is. So ask yourself - is this pushing the world in a place we want the world to go? Is this pushing our agency’s work in a place we want to be together? Because we are all in this together – people who work for brands, people who work at the agencies of brands, and people who prefer one brand over another and talk to other people about it.

If our partners are brands in a marketplace of parity and competition for attention, then we fervently believe that doing great work that does good is a powerful competitive advantage. Doing good for the world and doing good for the bottom line are not mutually exclusive paradigms. Great brands should be doing work that does good. Period.
When it comes to agencies, whichever sort they are (ad, creative, media, or any other), they are an inevitable partner in regards to advertising and branding. Companies come at their doorstep with briefs, unclear concepts and vague ideas. If they have a clear concept you are in for a treat, or not? What is inarguable is that brands crave for “almighty” agencies. But are there any of that kind out there?

Instead of theoretical axioms and conclusions driven from various sources, we have decided to switch the common perspective and focus on a different type of agency in a thorough interview with DJ O’Neil, a founder of creative agency Hub Strategy. Before we let you enjoy DJ’s witty narrative and learn from his experiences, you need to know that Hub Strategy is not an ordinary agency at all. They serve clients such as Google, Microsoft and Nike, and except for that fact, they have one important differential point. Wondering what that is? This SF based “hub” agency uses a network of freelancers in the context of traditional AOR relationships. Currently, the network has over 100 high-profile freelancers!

Explaining how he paved his way to building a creative agency of the future and figuring out principles that bring tangible results, DJ O’Neil shares his views with Branding Magazine’s readership.
Branding Magazine: Being a former professor at USF, which job do you consider more challenging? How did it happen, the transition from professor to CEO?

DJ O’Neil: Well, just to clarify, about 15 years ago, I was running a small agency with a partner when I began teaching at night at USF as an adjunct professor. So I owned an agency first. But teaching did play a significant role in my starting Hub Strategy & Communications. I was teaching Integrated Advertising and I realized that the agency I owned at the time wasn’t set up to deliver truly integrated advertising. In fact, no one in the industry was set up to do it. Everyone specialized in something—ad agencies focused on advertising; web design firms built sites; digital advertising firms worked almost exclusively in digital; and design firms did design. And if you believe a brand is the sum of its parts, then all of the parts have to work together perfectly. I figured this is what the modern creative agency would need to deliver. So I left my current agency, developed a completely different business model and started Hub.

BM: What was the biggest challenge that you had to cope with while founding Hub Strategy & Communications?

DJO: The goal was to deliver, at the highest possible creative level, everything a client needed, and to make all the pieces work together. So the challenges were many. Figuring out a process for everything from web site development to package design to television production and everything in between was daunting. And we put our hand on the stove more than a few times along the way. Building out a specialized freelance creative network was relatively easy to do, but very time consuming. And finally getting clients to understand what we were trying to do was a challenge, since the approach was so different to what they were used to. Even today, it can be a challenge to explain what we do. Most people see our creative collective and think we’re a project shop. And while we certainly do projects, we’re really at our best when serving as the creative agency of record for our clients. Most of our business is focused on this.

BM: How did you come up with the idea to build an agency that operates on a freelance business model? Please explain the benefits of that particular model.

DJO: As I mentioned before, we believe that a brand is the sum of its parts. So the freelance business model was born from this belief. Our business model let’s us make this happen. We have a small full-time staff led by account management folks, strategists, and creative directors, guiding a 100-plus person freelance network of creative specialists from all over the world that allows us to be good at, well, all the parts.

This business model allows for a lot of advantages. First, we can bring clients a level of creative talent that they are not normally likely to have access to. If a client is working with a small shop, the creative bench strength is going to be limited—small shops can only afford to have so many full time people on staff. And unless you are the biggest client on the roster of a big agency, you’re going to get the “B team.”

At Hub, we’re able to bring in super senior, very talented creatives and put them on the job. We manage and direct them as if they were working for us, and we make sure all the parts work together really well. But at the end of the campaign cycle, these senior (and expensive) freelancers go away. Which means we can have great creative depth without the debilitating overhead.

We always say that we strive to do all the things a really large, great agency should be able to do, at a medium agency price with small agency speed and service.

BM: Hub’s full-time staff works with 100 senior freelancers. That is one numerous “hub.” Where did you recruit them all, and do you have any advice on how to work with so many creative people?
Mostly people find us. We get to do a lot of fun work and it, in turn, gets noticed by creative people who want to do fun work. In fact, a lot of the creatives we work with actually work at larger agencies, but moonlight with us because the work we have them do is more interesting than the stuff they’re doing at their day job.

As far as working with all these creative freelancers, we’ve found a couple of things to be important. First, give them great stuff to work on. For the most part, we don’t give our freelancers anything unless it’s going to have the potential for portfolio-grade work. Second, give them really clear briefs and a really clear outline of the budget you have for them to work within. Third, give them credit—we always give the freelancers credit in the award shows and industry pubs. Unless, of course, they’re moonlighting and want to keep their identity a secret. One time, we worked with a guy who was an ACD/Writer at Chiat, and he insisted that if we win any awards for his work, that we use his porn name (first dog, first street he lived on). We’re happy to say that there’s at least one award hanging on the wall with “Rufus Corwin” listed as the writer.

Having in mind Hub’s vast experience dealing with freelancers, can you map some of the difficulties that you have encountered?

I think the most important thing is to be overly clear with your expectations. The briefing phase is insanely important. Creatives often go off-brief and, once you see the work, you re-set them in the right direction. That’s great if they work for you full time—you just tell them to work into the wee hours to make up for the fact that they fucked up and didn’t follow the brief.

But if a freelancer goes off brief, you still have to pay them for the work they didn’t do right; and then pay them some more to go forward and fix it. So anything but really clear communication at the outset can be very expensive.

If you had a chance to describe Hub’s “creative collective” in just three words, what would they be?

Talented. Fast. Smart-as-hell. Do hyphenated words count as one?

You have some top-notch clients! What do you think attracts them most to Hub’s principles?

One of our core philosophies around here is the notion that safe is unsafe. If you’re “safe” with your communication, you will be ignored. And if you’re ignored, that means the communication you are paying for is not doing its job selling stuff. And if you’re a marketer that’s not selling stuff, well, that’s pretty unsafe behavior.

“Safe is unsafe” doesn’t mean you have to be edgy or brash. It just means that you have to be unexpected, in a positive way. It means that you have to earn the consumers attention. It means you have to entertain while you sell. We believe a great litmus test is this: Ask yourself if the piece of communication you are creating will have the possibility of being shared. If the answer is no, chances are you are making a piece of useless communication.

We pitch this philosophy to our clients from the first day we meet them. The ones that share this philosophy often like working with us. And predictably, great brands already believe in this philosophy, so the fit is usually a natural one.

Lastly, where does the future stand in regards to the ad agency’s model? Where do you see Hub 10 years from now?

That’s a good one. I really don’t know. I don’t want to build Hub to sell to some holding company. We’ve intentionally managed our growth and have been really selective regarding who we work with. Currently, we really like the work we’re doing and who we’re doing it for.

We plan to grow a bit, but stay small enough where we can still be really proud of the work we’re doing. In ten years, I hope that I’m doing only the creative things I feel like doing, and am surrounded by a team of partners that are running the place and keeping alive the vision and the standards we’ve set so far.
What is Premiumization?

By Sophie Maxwell

Premiumization has created the bridge between the desirability of the luxury world and the function and necessity of the mass market. But as more brands look to ‘premiumize’ their offers, the way to express this new focus on specialness needs to be more than just skin deep.

From the breakthrough introduction of mass market premium and ‘Finest’ brands in the 90’s, to the launch of Grey Goose and the subsequent race to create the most refined superpremium vodka, premiumization is now more prolific than ever and no less sought after. And finding the convergence between these two markets demands the right kind of magic from brand owners and marketers. As more brands enter the fray we see a continued shift in the premiumization stakes and the question of what premiumization means for brands is becoming increasingly dependent on drawing out the particular specialness inherent in a brand’s own equity.

Thanks to our work in international markets, we are seeing that premiumization is understood and appreciated in increasingly different ways. It can be category specific with, for example, rapid wealth creation in emerging markets bringing about new sources of demand for products like upmarket spirits. For example, Diageo Reserve’s global boss, James Thompson, says his upmarket spirits brands are all consistently continuing to show double-digit growth [source: Financial Review]. But this is often subject to context and location and how developed – or not – the territory may already be. It’s about understanding competitors, but above all culture, to decipher the semantics and mood of what premium really means for a particular audience and mindset.

Ask anyone to name favored examples of premiumization, particularly when it comes to brand and designer collaborations, and they would be able to name dozens. The list is now endless…and this has become a problem for the exclusivity they seek to create. Previously a route to creating desire, excitement and newness, the collaboration route has now conversely started to become a too familiar model. Borrowing or sharing kudos means that only the very best and/or original are able to partner their traits successfully or differentiate themselves through this approach.
Where the luxury/premiumization landscape offers the possibility of radical change is through a new, marked and, following the example set by the luxury sector, continual disruption of category. We are witnessing the emergence of truly revolutionary brand languages that are rooted in a brand’s core and come from quintessential beliefs but bring new energy, excitement and impact – breaking established norms – to set radically new and different standards.

We have summarized our top 5 tips for addressing premiumization today:

**Build desire** – Using powerful creative thinking to identify and drive real difference, creating a new future definition, language and space that does more than keeping up with the Joneses and truly builds new expressions of desire.

**Create new occasions** – It’s about adding new meaning, value and occasions, but in an authentic way that connects back to the core of the brand – creating value, but not valuing the brand out of its own market.

**Reach different audiences** – Luxury is no longer defined by clichéd expressions and instead leads on imagination and originality to assert its status in new ways, allowing brands to open themselves up to new audiences.

**Build long-term kudos** – Premiumization needs to come from the heart of the brand. It’s about staying true to that and finding ways to build on and heighten that specialness.

**To surprise us!** – Those looking to master premiumization ultimately need to be influenced by the luxury approach – returning to its quintessential beliefs to create happiness and pleasure through ever more unique and individual future expressions.

We will always aspire to a better quality of life. Luxury makes us feel special because it is special. Premiumness, as with luxury, establishes difference – our difference – but at a price we can afford and in ways that we can incorporate into our daily lives. If brands can develop a truly resonant understanding of what premiumization means for them, then they can use it masterfully to take their brand to a new level, communicating desire through unique and truly special, new expressions.
From Now On, Think of Your Brand Managers as Experience Managers

By Flavia Barbat

Back in March, while attending the BRITE Conference at Columbia Business School, Donald Chestnut asked the audience, “How would your approach change if your brand managers were suddenly thought of as experience managers?” As the Chief Experience Officer for SapientNitro, Chestnut is well-versed in customer expectations and how to not only meet them, but defy them. So, naturally, that question stuck with the audience - beckoning all of us to ponder on the relative importance of broadening the branding perspective into a rather all-encompassing one.

The validity of the word experience lies within its dichotomous characteristics. While an experience can be emotionally-driven, often preempted by a positive or negative adjective, a person can also have many experiences. In the latter situation, quantity supercedes quality, in which case the experience is thrown into a pile with all others that may or may not be recalled. Now, setting this parallel to the branding industry, we can say that consumers experience the same dichotomy. They encounter numerous brands, but few bless them with the visceral reactions of good or bad emotions.

Setting aside the debate between the desire for customers’ to have no reaction versus a bad reaction (or vice versa for that matter), we can safely say that either way these “experiences” require management - they necessitate strategy, thought, creativity and diversity. As Gaston Legorburu (SapientNitro’s worldwide chief creative officer) duly noted during a panel discussion at New York Festival’s recent International Advertising Awards, brands are no longer generating the stories, but rather finding their places within the stories of their consumers. In other words, consumers are continuously experiencing and, instead of constantly attempting to imagine stories that fit within their target markets’ molds, brands should be trying to participate. They should be integrating themselves into the stories that their customers are already experiencing.
Now, here lies another question: If experiences are all-consuming and generally present everywhere, then should branding be kept separate from all other departments? Should there even be such a thing as a brand manager? Although there definitely is no clear response, trends are generally showing that if there is any form of brand management, then it must have its hand in all sections of a company. And this is perhaps why the title “experience manager” seems so intriguing to many of us. As was delineated above, the word experience allows for a pan-divisional role, for experiences pertain to everything from advertising and public relations to social media and mobile. Interactions with brands occur constantly, and not just in the hot-topic mediascapes of the hour [think retail], but everywhere.

Therefore, perhaps it is not a question of what they should be called, but what spectrum their roles should contain. Surely, naming the position “experience manager” might accelerate the shift, but the actual discrepancy stems from how branding is perceived. Coming from the publishing side, we find that branding’s role is quite easily comprehended when described in editors’ lingo. Companies should think of their brand managers [experience managers, or what have you] as editors; they build the identity, plan future directions, critique concepts and content to ensure that they fit the voice and are present during every decision along the way. They are the ones ensuring that each and every touchpoint with which consumers come into contact bestow them with the familiarity of the brand, its tone and personality.

It remains ultimately insignificant what the title ends up being. What brands must realize is that a brand manager’s role has become predominant when it comes to overseeing an identity’s growth, along with all of the aspects, ups and downs that come with such responsibility. It is definitely all about the experiences that consumers are having and, call it what they will, brands will still be required to at least think of their brand managers as experience managers.

Trust us, either way, consumers will take notice. Consumers always take notice.
The First Law of Content Marketing: Help Me Help You

By Radomir Basta

The fact is, since its inception, digital marketing landscape has gone through more changes than a socialite teenager before a night out. Tactics and approaches have been tested and rejected if found lacking, or overused and ruined if they showed some promise.

Pretty much the only consistent approach out there seems to be content marketing, not only because it is so fundamental that it can’t be targeted by search engine algorithms (they can try to assess the quality of your content, but as long as it’s unique and follows the rules of grammar and spelling, you’ll be fine) but because it is, at its finest, simply based on creating amazing content. The ‘marketing’ part has to do with setting the goals for the content, optimizing it for search engines and the demographics you are targeting, building an adequate reach out strategy and everything else that helps you convert. However, all of it is meaningless if the content itself fails to engage the public.

Client Input

One of the main issues with scaling content creation is the fact that you have to create interesting and useful content for clients working in different industries. Sure, if you are running a marketing company that only deals with the promotion of other marketing companies (the sitcom would practically write itself) you’ll know what you are talking about, but if you have a more traditional, diverse client portfolio, you simply cannot be expected to have experts on hand for each and every of their fields of operation.

Aside from the clients themselves, naturally. Looking at clients as a resource may be somewhat unpopular, especially among those clients, who might object that you are forcing them to do the work that they are paying you to do, however, it shouldn’t take you too long to persuade any sensible person that this would be in their best interest. After all they have all the knowledge of the industry you need, what you need to be able to do is to get the most relevant, interesting and useful pieces of that knowledge and transform them into something that people will enjoy and share.

As tight pressed as the client is for time and resources, they should be able to provide you with a liaison of sorts, who would cooperate with you in content creation and offer insights that only someone in the industry is in disposal of. Chances are every company has at least one creative employee wishing to take on extra responsibilities and try his or her hand at some out of the cubicle thinking, you only need to demonstrate the value of this employee’s temporary assignment to your content team.
The Pitch

Naturally, expecting everyone to immediately see reason implies we are living in a perfect world, brim full of reasonable people itching to make our lives easier. Take a random comments section of a random site, and you’ll be promptly reminded that this is not the case. So how do you go about making your case to the reluctant client?

Naturally, you can start by explaining how content marketing is the only reliable way to go if they want long term results immune to the whims of search engines, but what do you do when they realize that they’ll have to invest something in content creation?

While some may be swayed by the explanation of the value of the established authority and visibility of an in-house expert (who can be credited with all the content you’ve produced together), which are benefits that they’ll retain even once they’ve done doing business with you, others might claim that they simply cannot devote any manpower to this goal. If this is the case, and none of the other arguments worked, you might want to consider deducting the projected value of consultations from your charges. It’s completely understandable if you’ve flinched when you read this, but some people will not be persuaded by anything else than you showing your unbridled faith in the necessity of such consultations. Naturally, you would have to make sure that you are getting the value for your money, i.e. someone who can actually help in the content creation process and justify the fee reduction.

Of course, cooperation with clients on this level is not always possible or feasible, especially in short term engagements, but if you’ve had a client for a while and you expect that you’ll be working together for a while to come, coordinating your efforts and collaborating in the creation of their content can only benefit both of you and result in something that will not only increase the client’s visibility but also the respect they are getting within their own industry.
Without trying to sound neither overly excited nor dead serious (so as to be in everyone's liking), I wish to uncover how an Internet meme swept the digital world by storm in less than a year, got exposure in mainstream media and even got its place in a NASCAR race. This is the story of the Doge meme and how the Internet creates wonderful things.

The Dogecoin story starts back in December of last year when the Doge meme began gaining enormous popularity. Like with all memes, the Internet was eager to exploit the funny photo of a Sato Kabosu's Shiba Inu dog in numerous ways. It got big on websites like Reddit and 9Gag, joining the ranks of crudely-drawn memes reminiscent from 4Chan’s days of glory.

Right around this time was also when Bitcoin, an Internet cryptocurrency, hit its peak of about $1000+ dollars per coin. The momentum of the meme combined with the general outburst of Internet cryptocurrencies resulted in the creation of a completely new currency, adequately dubbed Dogecoin, which further contributed to the overall popularity of the meme. New Twitter profiles popped up, new Facebook pages were created and an entire subreddit community devoted to the cause was established. The currency itself peaked at about $400 dollars and life was beautiful.

Then, Sochi 2014 came and one bobsled team qualified after 12 years of absence, but didn’t have the required money to compete further. It was the Jamaican Bobsled team which was made famous by Disney’s 1993 movie called Cool Runnings, a movie which many millennials may remember as very inspirational, with a strong message that no matter what you do, you should never give up. From an emotional perspective, this is perhaps the strong reason for which the Reddit Dogecoin community raised an incredible sum of $30,000 in a couple of days and, along with other online campaigns, managed to successfully save the day and send the Jamaican team to Sochi.

Now, Dogecoin was in the spotlight and took things beyond way beyond that of a regular meme: It raised money to build clean water wells in Kenya and built a charity that trains animals to work with children with disabilities and autism.
But perhaps the most impressive story of them all is the one from two months ago, where a 16-year-old Reddit user by the name of Denis Pavel, an avid fan of NASCAR races, noticed that one car didn’t have any sponsor livery, but the driver’s skills were impressive. Knowing very well of what the Doge community was capable of, he decided to contact the owner of the now-famous number 98 car, Phil Parsons. In less than a week, the Doge Reddit community managed to raise over $50,000 for a full-blown livery and brought a whole new set of fans to the NASCAR sport, offering a glimpse of hope to a severely-underfunded team. The best part of the entire story? Josh Wise, the driver of the car, managed to finish in the Top 20 and viewers were able to witness Doge making its rounds on national TV.

When you take into consideration all of these things, Doge is a prime example of how a certain trend can be taken advantage of and monetized (literally), while still keeping the lighthearted spirit of a joke alive. It’s one of those cases out of which brands have a lot to analyze and learn, particularly when it comes to building an incredible community around such goofy things that, believe it or not, have the potential to change the world in their own original ways.

And they just got started. Wow.
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