

How 'brand soul' builds strong emotional ties

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Some branding exercises fall short of their goals because they're just aiming to sell the product rather than creating a deeper emotional bond - perhaps even a heartfelt empathy - with consumers, according to US-based marketing innovation consultancy Fletcher Knight.

According to Fletcher Knight's principal, Laurence Knight, whose expertise is in the food and beverage, retail, beauty and personal care, and health and wellness industries, a great example of a brand having a "soul" is the current Dove campaign for 'Real Beauty' in the US.

The Dove message presents a shift in brand development that should change the way marketers think about building brands: although short term PR grabs still have their place, the Dove team have a passion for "Brand Soul" and, by doing so, they are driving a connection with consumers that has the potential to both increase loyalty and create stronger word-of-mouth.

What's a brand soul?

Brand soul, Knight says, is all about sharing a passion and motivation with consumers - effectively, it's the relationship's main reason for buying. When brand soul exists it forges emotional bonds between brands, consumers and even employees.

"It's easy to spot brands that are trying to express their soul," said Knight. "They go beyond simple push/pull mass advertising based on insights and benefits, and into a relationship-based reason for buying."

Different souls

There are different types of brand soul already being positioned by well-known brands. For example:

- Promoters of self worth - e.g. Dove (the Campaign for Real Beauty) and Avon (The Company for Women);
- Champions of value and quality - e.g. Target (Expect More, Pay Less);
- The consumer advocate - e.g. Costco;
- The rights advocate - e.g. Google
- Anti-establishment - e.g. Virgin, Linux, Ben & Jerry, and Mini (Renegade);
- Social cause - e.g. Newman's Own, The Body Shop, Stonyfield Farm, and Prius.

Corporate impact

According to Knight, "Brand soul defines the principles that you hold dear and demonstrates how you use these principles to focus team efforts. To put it bluntly, it describes why a brand team comes to work every day, and what a company hopes to achieve as a business, beyond just maximising returns for shareholders."

Indeed, giving a brand a soul in this way can make the brand's positioning seem more authentic and can also help to steer equity development via sponsorships, alliances, affiliations, and other cause-related activities. It can also help to guide and encourage employee activity, particularly in terms of customer service, sales, prospecting, and product development.

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