

# The Promise of a Brand

by Alice O'Brien

What is "the Promise of a Brand"?

There are 5 essential questions to be asked when considering the answer to this question. Each question is equally important and the answers must all work in concert if the promise of the brand is ever to be fulfilled. There are many fine, well established and relatively successful brands out there... the most successful will have harmonized answers to these questions.

The Brand Promise can be found in the company's name, tagline, mission or positioning statement. If the promise is to be fulfilled it must answer positively to these questions:

IS IT...

- ...Ownable?
- ...Differentiating?
- ...Relevant?
- ...Stretchable?
- ...and Credible and Sustainable?

## Ownability

Can the users and producers see themselves reflected in the brand? Can it generate loyalty, emotion and affection due to its quality, trust, convenience, assurance and allure for which customers are willing to pay a premium?

If you say that your brand is "extraordinary", do the users and the employees feel this way when they talk about and or use or make the brand? If like Nike and the "Just do it" branding promise of power, self-worth and freedom are part of the value package, your brand of extraordinary must fulfill the value of out of the ordinary and memorable in terms of feeling or experience. This is true for the CEO of the company as much as for the janitor, or the newest person on the production line. When the product rolls out the door the sense of pride and fulfillment must be out of the ordinary.

To "own" something you must feel that it is right for you. That there is a good fit and that it feels comfortable. Not everyone would buy into the idea of an airline company owning a record label (or visa versa) however if the overall sense of the organization is one of no boundaries and freedom then they would begin to fit together. If the Brand spells freedom, openness and adventure then it all starts to blend into something more than the one or the other.

A few years ago for example, Stella Artois beer built and up market brand in Europe through advertising campaigns that declared it "reassuringly expensive." This allowed the beer to be owned by those who believe that if it's really good it must be expensive.

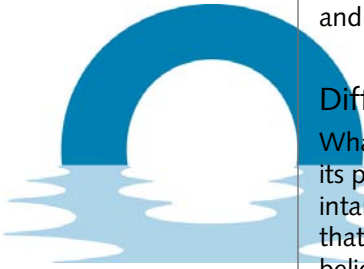
Perhaps most interesting currently is the brand SUV, Sport Utility Vehicle. OK so its not a "brand" per say but it behaves like one and all the major (and minor) automobile manufactures selling in North America are making and selling them like the proverbial "hot cakes". Why would so many business people and city dwellers need or want very expensive SUV? Most people say that they own one because they "feel safe" when driving. So given this "value" you would think that the manufactures would be branding them as "safe" vehicles. They don't. In fact, they are being proven far less stable and safe than most other automobiles.



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The reality is that they are branded as being able to take on anything and are indestructible. Thus, thousands of North American's are buying into the value of being ready for any eventuality and ready to take on the world. This is a value that many professionals aspire to and can or want to own.

### Differentiating

What is difference about your brand versus the next one in a homogenous market? What is its personality? You must distinguish yourself from the competition. It is creating tangible and intangible characteristics that make your offer unique. You must develop a name and image that can provide quality and satisfaction, while taking account of individual lifestyles and beliefs.

### Relevance

Is the promise of the brand relevant to the company or product, the producers and the users? There's not much point in building a brand that is based on "extraordinary" if the values include lowest price points and are the choice only of bargain basement deal hunters.

### Stretchable

Can you apply the promise to your internal as well as your external communications? Can it be applied to all the products or divisions of the company? How well does it behave in multiple applications? Is the brand guide flexible enough to accommodate new growth opportunities?

If the brand message is not going to work for the internal documents and say for example your employee training video as well as it works for the web site then you have a problem.

### Credible and Sustainable

Look to the future. Can your company maintain this promise and remain credible within the global economy? If you build the best possible mousetrap should you then start to build a cheese factory? A successful brand creates a powerful, memorable image that transcends trends.

While brands can go through many lives, the overall message of the most successful brands always remains the same. If you look at the Coca-Cola brand, the worlds most successful, it hasn't changed that much over the years. A tweak here and there, one slogan that works a little better and is more memorable than others, but over all it doesn't matter if "things go better with Coke", or "I'd like to teach the world to sing" both leave you with the same impression that Coke is more than just a soft drink... it's part of life.

Thus, it becomes easier to maintain this brand as it can flow and move with the trends of life. The company is not stuck with the same slogan that is no longer credible as society changes.