The Brand Innovation Manifesto

How to Build Brands, Redefine Markets and Defy Conventions

John Grant

John Wiley & Sons, Ltd

The Brand Innovation Manifesto

‘Only liars need to be consistent.’
A terrific quote in John Grant’s new book
that told me so much about the last generation
of marketers and their professional advisors
that I don’t know whether to laugh or cry.

This book of simple and profound insights.
will, if you let it, empty you of what you know.
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What you know will always attack your creativity.
John Grant’s book is an effective antidote to knowledge.
Let your mind play with his insights and ideas, and your appreciation
of what can’t be anticipated will flourish. You will be rich!

Michael Wolff

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How to Build Brands, Redefine Markets and Defy Conventions

John Grant

John Wiley & Sons, Ltd

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For Yong Ja and Cosmo.
"Daddy finished book now."

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Introduction

Method Beauty Soaps (with the slogan *People Against Dirty*) used a very old cultural idea – the *confessional* – to create a very modern marketing campaign. According to its Cannes Lion award-winning entry:

> We launched a viral campaign for Method's Holiday Cleaning Kit with the Come Clean website. This viral website lets people start the New Year fresh by letting them confess to things they have done during the past year – it captures people's confessions and then streams them in a screensaver and on the website. When confessions are entered a woman's voice reacts to the confessions and tells you how what you've done is wrong but that you are forgiven. Can also see and buy the Holiday Kit.[1]

Example confessions, which I picked randomly from the company's site, included:

> I FOUND A BOOK UNDER MY BED FROM MY HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY. I AM 33.
>
> I ONCE GAVE MY NUMBER TO A CUTE GUY WHILE MY DATE WAS IN THE BATHROOM.
>
> I ONCE RIPPED THE LEGS OFF A DADDY LONGLEGS AND THREW IT OVER A LAKE.

This is a great idea. It is simply fascinating reading what other people have confessed to. It tugs on a side of human nature that marketing usually doesn't reach. Most of the creative work is done by the audience. It almost doesn't even feel like *marketing*.

How do you come up with an idea like that?

This book is devoted to helping answer that question. I will argue that you need to adopt a new mindset and draw inspiration from a much broader range of cultural ideas. The heart of the book is suggesting 32 types of idea that you could consider.

The old generation of big brands – like Coke, Marlboro and McDonald's – were built through image advertising. They married the 30-second TV spot with "personality" devices that people identified with.

But those days are over. The new generation of brands – like Zara, Starbucks, eBay, Google and Amazon – are built differently. Rather than being based on image, these are stunning products and one message that shines through all the examples is that great brand ideas are no substitute for great customer experiences. A constant flow of product and service innovations should be the starting point for any brand thinking. You can get a long way just by making the best products, as Samsung has shown. And you can fall way behind if your brand becomes barren and bereft of innovation; just ask Sony.

That's not to say that innovation is only about technology. Successful product innovation is about adding lifestyle-shaping ideas. Nokia stole a march through simple ideas, like phone covers and ringtones. Text messaging has been a huge leap for mankind, albeit a tiny step for mobile operator technology. Innovation is ultimately about improving people's lives, and it doesn't matter whether the technology is advanced.

New Marketing is no longer a fringe point of view. The biggest companies in the world have been pursuing a post-advertising strategy: companies like Procter & Gamble and American Express making public statements that advertising is not the way forward and, more importantly, investing in leading-edge alternatives, like P&G's Tremor and Amex's downloadable show featuring Seinfeld and Superman. Amex has reduced the proportion of its advertising budgets spent on TV from 80% to 35% in the last ten years.

The title of this book refers back to my first, *The New Marketing Manifesto*, and this is in some ways a sequel. That book described general rules.

This new book gets deeper into the underlying principles and the emerging platform ideas. The *brand innovation* in the current title is intended to be a contrast to the old system of creating and communicating a *brand image*.

The four key ideas in this book are as follows:

1. A brand is nothing abstract, like some mysterious essence – it is simply the sum of the great ideas used to build that brand. That starts with great product ideas, like the basic Starbucks experience. But it can extend into all sorts of cultural additions, like Starbucks and Fair Trade, music CDs, Africa 05 and so on. All of these initiatives are real: making a difference, tangible, close to people's lives. None is there "for image".
2. Over time, the brand becomes like a molecule, built up of successive and connected ideas. Each new idea can add to a brand's interest and keep it alive in people's minds. When you look at a brand like Nike, what you need to consider is not (as many have claimed) some timeless values to do with "winning", but rather the actual cultural ideas that Nike has created, including *Run London*, Nike Free, Nike iD, plus other "brands" it is associated with, like the Brazilian soccer team.
3. The way to manage brands is coherence, not consistency. Consistency is the idea that you need to make your marketing all look the same. But the most interesting brands, like people, are authentic (true to themselves) and can afford to be freer in their range of activities. Only liars need to be consistent. The ideas do not even have to be about the brand. They can be about bigger issues (Dove and the *Campaign for Real Beauty*) or can be ideas with an independent existence, like iPod with the rock group U2.
4. Brands, like stories, are supposed to have a point. Branding is a means not an end. And the molecular structure is still supposed to be coherent. It should be driven by a singular cultural logic (with a watertight business case). Otherwise you will end up with a ragbag of ideas without any unifying theme, ethos or purpose.

The first section of this book sets out my theory of brand innovation in detail and puts it in context: what is causing these shifts (e.g. lots of new media choices), the history, the debates, illustrated by examples of brands doing things in the new way. In this section I introduce the idea of building a brand molecule and also advise on how to develop a tight strategy that will make it coherent.

The second section catalogues the 32 main types of cultural ideas that brands can add to their "molecule", for instance communities, habits, crazes and so on. Most markets use only six or eight of these. The best way to think of stunning new brand ideas for your market is simply to try out the other 24–26 ideas, which are proven in other markets but will be a bolt from the blue in yours. For example, Häagen-Dazs revolutionised the ice-cream sector with its adult advertising. But it was only repeating a tactic that bras and chocolate bars (like Flake) had used for decades.

The third section is "how to" – a practical approach to organising projects and developing new brand ideas and new ideas for existing brands. It shows how you can mix and match the 32 ideas within your market. And sets out a hypothetical example of taking on an old-school image brand with *New Marketing* techniques: *Let's kill Lynx*.

The people I have written this book for are all those who are trying to do something new with brands: people working in (many types of) agencies, people in marketing departments, people running businesses large or small, people making fresh starts, in new jobs or as entrepreneurs. I know that many of you have a limited amount of spare time to read long, turgid business books, so I have tried to make this book modular: the sort of book you can dip into for inspiration, with lots of examples and a practical approach. Nonetheless, I do find that what holds many marketing teams back is what they assume is possible. So I have spent plenty of time in the first section on what a strong brand is today and how best to plan and develop your brands for tomorrow.

I would encourage you not to just read this book but to *interact* with it:

- Check the examples I am talking about through Google, look at the actual creative campaigns, photos from the events, articles about the brands and so on. There is so much rich information out there and seeing (and feeling) how it works is a vital part of the experience, particularly if you want to reapply some of the learning to your own market.

- Try the 32 ideas for your own brands, paying particular attention to the ones that have not been used in your market, to stimulate new connections and starting-point ideas.
- Check out my new website, http://www.brandtarot.com. Here I have turned the tarot card illustrations you see in the 32 brand idea sections into a fun, interactive tool to tickle unconscious processes of ideation. I am also planning to make these available as physical cards that you can order. And you will be able to post comments on the book, join chats with the author, tap into my latest thinking and projects, follow links to some of my favourite marketing ideas and all that good stuff.

That's quite enough introductory remarks. As James Palumbo, esteemed founder and CEO of Ministry of Sound, is fond of saying: "Let's get on with it!"

SECTION
I

BRAND THEORY REVISITED

1

Challenges to the Old Model of Branding

1.1 From Ad Idea to Media-Neutral Idea

The sweeping changes in brand marketing have not come about because people have suddenly stopped aspiring. The glitzy shopping and celebrity culture of the past ten years show that we are far from over consumerist dreams of "the good life". If anything, the basic human needs and greeds that consumer capitalism promises to fulfil are given freer rein. These days people expect to have luxury, or style or status, or to "better themselves", to become glamorous, cultured, intellectual, even progressive (the "right-on" are often paradoxically among the most consumerist – in being committed to right-on brands and lifestyles). Whatever questions there are about the sustainability of this belief system, it is not fair to claim that it has faltered yet.

The big debate within marketing is between two paradigms, which I call *brand image* vs *brand innovation*.

It might be worth setting out some contrasting features of these two approaches, as in Table 1.1.

Some companies still have faith in brand image. Levi Strauss clearly does, as it has just unveiled a major new TV advertising campaign. Eight years of sales decline led the company to question whether its (highly entertaining) music video-style advertising was still working. And so it has changed direction, producing yet more (highly entertaining) TV advertising: featuring Shakespearean poetry instead. But it has not addressed the bigger question: what is the place of this brand in people's lives?

Table 1.1 Brand image and brand innovation compared

Brand Image	vs	Brand Innovation
Messaging		Involvement
Static		Dynamic
Promising		Delivering
Look and feel		Experience
Fantasy		Authenticity
Advertising		Culture
Audience		Community
Consistency		Coherence
Image		Currency
Passive		Interactive

Some companies reject brand image absolutely, like Red Bull in the UK, which refused to run global advertising (*Gives You Wings*) until the brand was well established. Instead, like Hannibal crossing the Alps with elephants, it stole up on the soft drinks sector by working through festivals, wholesalers, garages, corner shops, students, nightclubs . . . and in the process built a liquid counterculture.

But the situation is not as simple as two sets of marketers and brands with different approaches. Many, like Nike, combine both approaches. And commentators from both camps read the same evidence and case histories, and claim support for their side:

- A *brand image* view: Apple's iPod proves that iconic advertising, design and PR still work. After all, the product is just an MP3 player. What makes it stand out is the brand, meticulously constructed by advertising and design. And just look how disciplined and consistent they have been. If only lesser brands could follow suit.
- A *brand innovation* view: iPod's success has nothing to do with brand image. It is a great product, a radically different experience, linked to the iTunes music store, which made downloading legal. It seemed to

take off through imitation – like a fashion craze. The ads just reflected the fact that people wanted an iPod when they saw others wearing one.

How did this debate get started? As far as I can remember, there was no debate 15 or 20 years ago. But in the mid-1990s a view, which I call *New Marketing*, emerged for all sorts of understandable reasons, outlined below.

It Was an Advance

Marketing is a creative discipline. And in creative fields, when somebody produces a radical new way of doing things, many others tend to copy – especially if it is high profile, generates lots of publicity, wins awards and so on. The case studies that I covered in my first book *The New Marketing Manifesto* were pioneers. They came out of a cultural context – postmodernism – and an explosion in media channels. Suddenly it seemed possible to produce marketing communications that broke the old rules, using ideas that were interactive, personal, agitating or just plain scruffy. In that book I tried to capture some of the common features of this movement in a series of new rules:

1. Get Up Close and Personal (e.g. Nike getting involved in grassroots sports fixtures)
2. Tap Basic Human Needs (e.g. Gucci tapping into broad glamour rather than niche luxury)
3. Author Innovation (e.g. Tetley's round tea bag, which toppled a 35-year brand leader)
4. Mythologise the New (tapping into changing social values, e.g. Clarks Shoes' new take on middle age)
5. Create Tangible Differences in the Experience (e.g. Guinness producing a "draught in can" system)
6. Cultivate Authenticity (e.g. MTV *Unplugged* returning to acoustic sets and live performance)
7. Work through Consensus (e.g. AIDS advertising in cinemas to get new couples talking)

8. Open Up to Participation (e.g. Sainsbury recipes in advertising and store promotions)
9. Build Communities of Interest (e.g. Oddbins teaching its customers about wine, holding tastings etc.)
10. Use Strategic Creativity (e.g. Gap using dance, an idiom that involved people in the idea of comfort)
11. Stake a Claim to Fame (e.g. Richard Branson's many publicity stunts for Virgin)
12. Follow a Vision and Be True to Your Values (e.g. IKEA, whose consistent thread was the question: "Is this us?")

That list has stood the test of time pretty well.

If I wrote that book again now I would probably drop rule 11. Being famous has become a mixed blessing, often a recipe for hubris (in the form of an attack by an NGO) and for being seen as inauthentic, corporate and domineering. I might even substitute "be humble"! And I would probably modify rule 4. As I will explain, I have come to mistrust the idea of cultural trends research. But I still believe that brands should be signs of the times, creating a sense of *currency*, seen as the way things are done now.

But I wouldn't write that book again now, because the reasons those rules apply have become clearer. The 12 rules are like 12 blindfolded people describing an elephant. They grasp many significant details, which are valid, yet they seem to miss the consistent whole. That is why I am writing a new book. It has just as many examples as the first book (because I reckon nothing is more helpful to understanding or coming up with new ideas). But it also has a general theory running through it, which addresses the thorny question: *what is a brand.*

It was clear by the time I wrote my second book – *After Image* – that there were significant doubts about the validity of the old model of *brand image* marketing and the brand image television commercial. Here are a couple of sobering statistics:

- The number of TV advertisers increased by 27% between 1996 and 2003.[2] This reflects a number of changes, all equally concerning to the mainstream TV brand image advertiser: media inflation (so that any one advertiser can afford less airtime), media fragmentation (more channels, more spots, fragmented audiences) and more advertisers competing for share of mind.

- Consumers are rejecting marketing messages (ads, junk mail and so on), according to the Yankelovich *Marketing Resistance Survey* in the USA.[3] For example, 69% are interested in products/services to block/skip or opt out of marketing; 59% say marketing has little relevance to me; 61% say marketing is out of control.

The situation has changed since the heyday of brand image in the 1960s. Then only 48% of consumers reported a mixed or negative view of advertising; now the figure is 72%.[4]

One major development that is more and more apparent in research groups on marketing ideas is the phenomenon of marketing literacy. I see this as the ability, for instance, to discern that there is a difference between hiring a good agency and being a good brand. It is the critical ability to "read through" marketing and examine its construction and intention.

This insight – that consumers are jaded, cynical and marketing resistant – is generally accepted. The question is, what can we do about it?

Some suggest a sensible, opt-in approach, what Seth Godin calls *Permission Marketing*.[5] I am more of an advocate of marketing that is not junk – so that it won't be rejected because it is not "messaging" (more on this later) and it is good stuff, which is welcome, be it a Harley Owners Group news letter, BMW short film or Gmail invite.

Some have described the situation with advertising, direct mail, spam, outbound telesales and so on as a new tragedy of the commons,[6] analogous to the seas that get over-fished because as resources deplete, people fish harder. Advertising and other forms of messaging are shouting louder and louder, and people are covering their ears.

I think this problem is both over- and understated. There are hundreds of examples in this book of marketing ideas that have caught people's imagination. Most of the rest is just commercial noise, like the signs over the shops when you walk up the street. No matter how many new ways of messaging marketing employs, people just do not want to know. Yes, it is annoying to have to put handfuls of junk mail into the recycling bin. No, marketing resistance doesn't extend to new *non messaging* forms of marketing. If anything, all the rubbish makes good marketing ideas stand out as more attractive.

Nevertheless, that wouldn't be my view if I were on the board of a public company, paying for this spiralling-out-of-control frenzy of messaging. People are starting to ask questions. One of my clients ran a test of their direct marketing and found conclusively that it produced no uplift in sales. They then did research groups with recipients of their mail shots and found that no one opened them. No wonder the marketing wasn't making a big impact on sales!

It Was a Response to New Media

The second reason a *New Marketing* paradigm emerged in the mid-1990s was that there were new media choices, just as previous paradigms of marketing had emerged in response to the appearance of national print media, radio, then commercial TV.

We went from a few choices of advertising medium (TV/print/radio) to an abundance of choices. In a recent presentation to a financial services company, I listed over 200 choices of types of media they could be considering. (It is not just consumers who suffer from information overload!) And within each of these types of media, there are often hundreds of different titles and options.

The internet and mobile phones are obvious examples and have spawned many new formats, but there have been just as many offline developments. To highlight just a few key examples:

- Customer relationship marketing is developing beyond the Tesco Clubcard model (i.e. tracking purchases to target promotions and offers). It is often used these days to educate customers. Nestlé in France uses a club to teach people to cook better, healthier meals. It has an informative website, helplines and even a cookery school where people can take courses.

- Brand experience marketing, like the *Bud Rising* music festival in London, associates the brand with cool new bands and music. People also get to drink the product at the gigs and meet the brand in a social context: *the way things are done in these places*. A key audience for this activity is students, who are actively adopting new lifestyle habits.
- Customer communities represent an advance compared to passive target audiences. The key feature of communities is the interactions of members with each other. They also give new members something to join and belong to. The Harley Owners Club, a 900 000-person community, is the engine of the brand.
- Entertainment partnerships are booming. Insiders reckon that sponsorship of music stars will soon be as big as sponsorship of sports stars. Every single will be sponsored, every album, every tour. U2 tied up with iPod in a deal so synergistic it was difficult to see which brand was promoting the other. Rap icon Rakim appeared in advertising for Hennessey: confirmation that Henny was the official drink of hip-hop celebrity culture.

Ten years ago I worked on a pitch for a government antismoking campaign. The research I conducted used a panel of people who were giving up smoking – for real – and spoke to them before and during the first week. What I found was that before giving up the research groups favoured “good ads”. But once they were actually giving up, all this entertainment interest went out of the window. The most effective single piece of communication proved to be notes of support, in time-stamped envelopes, saying things like: “Well done, you got through the first day, that’s the hardest part over with.”

Back in 1995, what we did with that insight was ignore it and come up with an ad campaign that better addressed how people felt while giving up. Today the Central Office of Information is launching a state-of-the-art CRM system that can send quitters timed text messages. We didn’t think of it ten years ago because it wasn’t really possible. Now it is obvious. And we are probably just beginning to fathom all the uses of new media.

But we *should* have been able to respond to the insights back then. For instance, what if people wore an *I QUIT* badge for their first week? The advantages could have been:

- Staking a bit of pride by telling friends can help people stick to their resolution.
- There could be a bandwagon effect, seeing all the people quitting at the moment.
- Advertising could ask everyone to be nice to a person wearing the badge.
- Past quitters might step forward at a bus stop and say things like: “I got off ’em last year, keep up the good work.”
- And retailer partners could offer lots of treats and support wherever quitters went: a free drink in a no-smoking pub chain at the end of week 1, and so on.

In the last ten years it has become natural to think of ideas that are *viral*, *peer to peer* and *interactive*. The properties of new media have changed our view of how to use old media, just as advertising in the 1930s started using celebrities in posters (like Hollywood posters). They could have done it before, it just never occurred to them.

The new media have brought much more than new applications. They have brought new ways of thinking, new strategies, new ideas in their wake. And with 200 or so media to contend with, we are stockpiled with new ways of marketing for decades to come.

It Was the Natural Approach of a New Sort of Advertiser

The *brand image* approach was developed to suit the advertiser of its day: mass-produced products, which required differentiation.

In contrast in the 1990s, marketing’s centre of gravity moved towards media, services, retail and software as the new growth sectors. These sectors are cultural, experienced in use, diverse, fluid. A TV channel, an internet auction site, a supermarket, a bank . . . these are much harder to summarise in an “image” campaign. Branding becomes more like the frame around the picture than the picture itself. The main source of ideas is the direct experience of the service rather than the advertising. Advertising becomes like the trailer for a movie – you don't want a fancy, imposed idea getting in the way.

Some of these new advertisers tried to do branding the old-fashioned way. They hired marketing directors from the old fmcg companies and agencies that wanted to continue to produce "great advertising ideas" for these new clients. But the approach that actually works for these sorts of clients is bigger than advertising ideas. It demands platforms that are cultural, integral to the business, and that link directly with company strategy:

- HSBC turned its advertising into a global etiquette guide and ran a January sale.
- The BBC was reanimated by launching digital channels and services.
- FCUK made a statement that you could wear (*FCUK Fashion*).
- Google made Gmail by (member) invitation only.
- Selfridges became a cultural theme park.
- IKEA challenged traditional British taste.
- Tesco got parents to collect computer tokens for local schools.
- Virgin turned every new launch into an "advertisement" for the brand.
- Penguin launched sampler-sized anniversary editions.
- Oddbins taught people to appreciate wine.
- Apple and then Starbucks became major forces in music.
- BA put beds onto its planes.
- Zara sped fashion retailing up.

As with new media, these sorts of *New Marketing* idea proved an inspiration for more traditional mass-produced goods. Even brands like Persil, Dove and Budweiser have started using media-neutral ideas, with a broader cultural remit than selling their wares.

It Was a Response to a New Era of Business Strategy

Gone were the long corporate planning cycles and in their place came big ambitions and rapid change. Marketing directors are driven today not by the need to build a brand, but by the need to develop their market, launch new extensions or initiatives. An old-fashioned brand repositioning, with its five-year time horizon, is too slow compared with the rate of change in the strategy and business model. Brands needed to be faster and looser.

I'm not saying brands shouldn't use advertising. I am saying they should beware the old advertising models, which are about fixing the image and positioning of your business to some enduring promise. What if you had made a "brand ad" about IBM ten years ago – would it still have any relevance now? In contrast, IBM's media-neutral *e-Business* idea (which also made for reasonable ads) was flexible enough to carry the company through an era when it bought PwC Consulting and sold off its PC manufacturing – from boxes to advice.

But even a general commitment to the way the world is going can be too definite. I was in the middle of putting together a review for BT of its advertising strategies – many of which had been about its commitment to *new wave* telecommunications such as broadband – when its chairman made a speech in the City about how its new strategy was about going "back to core telephony". At times like this you realise that branding needs to be more of a marriage with consumers – taking all new developments in your stride – and less a once-and-for-all statement of what you are about.

It Was a Response to a Need for Cultural Leadership

It is easy to overstate how settled life was in the old days and how fast it is changing now. We have not lived through the upheaval of a world war. But we have lived through the end of the job for life and the birth of the internet and we have entered a condition of uncertainty (which may or may not be a phase) that social sciences call postmodernism.

The result is that we live with a basic uncertainty about how to lead our lives: what to wear, what to eat, how to communicate and have relationships, how to get on in life. Self-help media content, which supplies ready answers, has been booming. And the role of brands has shifted, from reflecting a stable, static social order to helping establish new customs. One business leader who saw this was Nobuyuki Idei, the CEO of Sony in the late 1990s:

> We are committed to creating new lifestyles and providing new forms of enjoyment to people in the network centric society of the 21st century.[7]

This is a call for cultural innovation, rather than just product innovation. And it is ideas, not technologies, which usually create new lifestyles: easyJet rather than Concorde. Here are just a few examples of the sorts of thing I understand to be new lifestyle ideas – some owned by brands, others freestanding (but no less influential on brand fortunes):

- text messaging
- Channel 4 cricket
- organic
- *Big Brother*
- one-a-day health drinks
- Harry Potter
- PlayStation
- camera phones
- downloadable music
- iPod
- Harley Owners Group
- Friends Reunited
- eBay
- Google
- Sudoku
- *Make Poverty History* wristbands
- the gym
- male grooming
- alternative medicine
- internet banking
- Starbucks.

As with new media and new marketing strategies, new lifestyle formats have often provided inspiration for other new possibilities. Yesterday I read about a new vibrator (sex toy) called Je Joue, which has (ringtone-style) downloadable rhythms!

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. To appreciate what is new in brand marketing, we need to stop and consider the classic approach to developing and promoting brands.

1.2 The Old School

While marketing practices and media options have changed radically in the last ten years, the theory of brands (and perhaps more importantly, the processes by which marketing communications are developed and evaluated) proved more resistant to change.

When conventional companies attempt new sorts of marketing they often try to justify and track their plans using the old model. A major cultural sponsorship will be measured by how many seconds of airtime it buys for the logo. A CRM programme will be tracked through direct response measures. A buzz marketing campaign will be measured by direct sales uplift among the population in which the idea was seeded. And all of these initiatives will often be assessed through brand image tracking: measuring awareness, positive brand associations and perceived benefits.

Of course it is natural that companies should want marketing investments to be accountable. But they are measuring all these new forms of marketing as if they were advertising or direct mail. They are potentially making much greater contributions in other areas than “image”, but if you don’t track the real effects you will not see them.

Often the most old-fashioned element in marketing plans is the (implicit) definition of what a brand is. The classical idea of this was expressed, by Professor Doyle, as follows:

$$S = P \times D \times AV$$

Strong brand = product benefits × distinct identity × added values[8]

A brand marketing programme would thus be aimed at:

- Communicating a distinctive product benefit or set of benefits (USP).
- Communicating a distinctive identity: name, logo, look and feel, personality.
- Communicating distinctive emotional brand values.

That's a lot of communication – especially if you do not operate in a market where customers are intrinsically fascinated by what brands have to say. But it is such a familiar model, and fits so well with the way that we are used to planning our marketing programmes, that many readers will probably be wondering: what is wrong with that?

The problem is that, while it fits the old way of marketing, it short-changes brands stretching into new media and business models. It also ignores the pressure on brands to adopt a more authentic approach than "selling" your USP, identity or image.

Why would new media require a new brand theory? Surely they are just new ways of building the same old strong brands? Actually no, the old formula for strong brands was adapted to advertising (and similar) media. It was not a theory of brands so much as a theory of brand advertising. That is why it does not generalise; and why, to some extent, it always short-changed brands. If you look at the history of the ideas behind each term in this formula, then you find each was developed by ad agencies (or similar) in order to justify their approach.

The first term of the equation – a distinctive proposition or *benefit* – has a long history (as does a recognition of the need to cut through the clutter of other advertising):

> Whatever is common is despised. Advertisements are now so numerous that they are very negligently perused, and it is therefore become necessary to gain attention by magnificence of promises, and by eloquence sometimes sublime and sometimes pathetick. (Samuel Johnson, 1759)[9]

Without the need to advertise their wares, no producer would necessarily have noticed this need for "promises" about particular features over others.

People who produced chairs may have never stopped to wonder whether it was more important to claim traditional designs, quality construction, comfort, durability, association with landed gentry or with the merchant middle class. They would simply make chairs, in a way that was handed down through apprenticeships. The chairs were then placed in shops for sale.

Many manufacturer companies still have this producer mentality today. If you ask an engineer why a new car is good they will point to 101 advanced features. And if you look at the process by which people choose cars, you find they will generally research options on their short list in great detail, in order to answer the question: "Is this the right car for me?" So we can already see that the idea of having just one key benefit is neither a reflection of how products are invented nor really a reflection of how people choose, buy and appreciate them. It is mainly a requirement of a certain type of "hard sell" advertising.

In his book *Reality in Advertising*,[10] Rosser Reeves introduced the term *unique selling proposition*, defining it in the following way:

1. Each advertisement must make a proposition to the customer: "buy this product, and you will get this specific benefit."
2. The proposition itself must be unique – something that competitors do not, or will not, offer.
3. The proposition must be strong enough to pull new customers to the product.

Rosser Reeves was very clever to brand this as the *USP*. But the advertising business has a short memory, and there was little that Reeves said that had not been said 40 years earlier in 1923 by Claude C. Hopkins, who worked in advertising as a copywriter at the start of the twentieth century and established a method he called *scientific advertising*:

> The time has come when advertising has in some hands reached the status of a science. It is based upon fixed principles and is reasonably exact.[11]

What Hopkins had figured out was that by using up to 20 different versions of the same ad, you could work out which headlines attracted the most coupon responses. This kind of optimisation approach is still used today, not only to test copy, but different media weights and combinations. Direct Line grabbed 40% of the insurance market using an ad campaign that was fine-tuned in this way.

Hopkins was clearer than Reeves on the fact that the writer does not know enough people to judge (or guess) which headlines might work best. But with Reeves, he assumed that the way to sell a product was to headline its most attractive quality:

> The product has many features. It fosters beauty. It prevents disease. It aids daintiness and cleanliness. We learn to exactness which quality most of our readers seek.[12]

The product that Hopkins had in mind (that promotes beauty, prevents disease and makes you clean and dainty) must have been Palmolive Soap, a client of his. Hopkins also described competitive strategy between brands in military terms and articulated an early version of the concept of positioning:

> The maker may say that he has no distinctions. He is making a good product, but much like others. He deserves a share of the trade, but he has nothing exclusive to offer. However there is nearly always something impressive that others have not told. We must discover it. We must have a seeming advantage.[13]

It was quite a realisation to have made over 80 years ago. It also arguably contained some seeds of destruction – being a model of marketing communications based on brands with *seeming advantages* (i.e. rather than real ones!).

The second term of Professor Doyle's equation is *identity*. It is design companies who use this concept most, to the extent that they sometimes seem to assume that a brand is only an identity and aesthetics is the whole of the subject. Design was a part of what Doyle meant, although he also included the notion of awareness under this heading. It is not just about having a distinctive design. It is about people having a distinct idea of you in mind.

A number of successful historical advertising campaigns took their brand identity and plastered it everywhere: Coca-Cola with 10 million square miles of signage in the USA by the end of the nineteenth century; the 1970s classic Benson & Hedges surreal art posters; mobile operator O2, which seems set on "owning blue" (in contrast to competitor Orange?).

Some have argued that being seen as the most famous, first, biggest or otherwise leading brand is the key factor in brand acceptance and success. Advertising luminary Dave Trott (writer of classic ad lines like "Ariston – and on – and on" and "Hello Tosh got a Toshiba?") made a career out of the notion of making the brand name famous. However, I would tend to side with advertising researcher Mike Hall, who pointed out that there are limits to the power of brand fame, his example being that everybody has heard of Ford, but how many want to drive one?

David Ogilvy is credited with introducing the concepts of brand image and personality in 1955:

> Products, like people, have personalities, and they can make or break them in the marketplace . . . Every advertisement should be thought of as a contribution to the complex symbol which is the brand image.[14]

Brand image is an umbrella term for the emotional *added values*, which form the third part of Doyle's classical formula for a brand. It is this term that has dominated discussions of brands for the last 50 years. It is no coincidence that the medium that dominated over those last 50 years was television advertising. Television advertising very often uses a personality device: a famous spokesperson, actor or sports star; or a fictional character like Ogilvy's "Man in the Eyepatch" for Hathaway shirts – devices that added personality.

Television – according to psychoanalytic media theory – seems to work through identification (you put yourself in the place of the people on screen and feel things vicariously through this process). The result in the case of TV advertising is supposed to be that you associate those feelings with that brand; although many ads are remembered in vivid detail, without people remembering who they were for. And there have been many "great ads" for what people know are rubbish products. Part of the reason this classical model has been broken is that people have become more discerning over time, less likely to take advertising at face value.

A recent casualty appears to be Stella Artois beer, which is in serious decline at the moment. This was the leading premium lager brand in the UK with a whopping 40% market share. However, prominent competitors like Heineken have shifted to importing their beer from the country of origin. And proper continental lager is much more widely known and available. Stella projects a Euro cinema (advertising and sponsorship) image, yet it is brewed in the grey industrial town of Newport, Wales. Not that Leuven in Belgium is necessarily a nicer town, but it is at least where the image emanates from. And for whatever reason, beer brewed outside the UK does seem to taste better.

There is no doubt that people do buy certain brands for reasons like personality, image and added values, in fashion, cars, newspapers, perfumes and so on. But that is not to say that they buy the idea that an image advertisement will turn a Ford into an Aston Martin. And there is less reason to assume that a theory of identity-confirming purchases describes why people buy certain brands of fast-moving consumer goods. And less reason still to assume that it might apply to knowledge markets where we find many of the world's strongest brands – eBay, Google and so on – which do not have much of an "image".

To summarise: each of the terms (in the definition of brand as S = P × D × AV) derives from explanations offered by leading professionals in agencies, based on:

- how advertising (TV and print) and design (packaging and logo) seemed to work;
- their typical client at the time: fast-moving consumer goods and "badge" brands like cars, cigarettes and perfumes;
- back in the days when people seemed mostly to like and accept advertising.

The key implication of that whole edifice of twentieth-century brand theory is another formula:

BRAND MARKETING = MESSAGING

That is hardly surprising when it was invented by people who wrote adverts. Advertising in its formative press, poster and radio stages was used to deliver messages. When TV advertising came along, these uses continued (for instance soap powder advertising) but it also became popular to use little dramas (like soap operas in advertising). These were still thought of as delivering a message, but a message about the image or personality.

Look at any ad agency creative brief today and you will usually find a box that asks what the *message* (*proposition*, *key thought*, *benefit*, *promise* etc.) should be. JWT finesses this slightly by asking what the *desired response* should be. But none that I know went as far as we used at St Luke's, in having no such heading about messages. Our brief used to ask WHY? (the client problem) and HOW? (what sort of idea might solve it – for instance the brief for the IKEA *Chuck Out Your Chintz* ad suggested "furniture feminism"). Looking back I am not sure it was wise to leave out all consideration of target audience. That was in reaction to an account planning tradition in London that smothered everything in cloying qualitative group "insights". Daft, but fun at the time!

This messaging in a standard agency brief could focus on any of the brand ingredients, as we have already seen:

- communicating a distinctive product benefit or set of benefits (USP);
- communicating (i.e. displaying) a distinctive identity: name, logo, design;
- communicating distinctive emotional brand values.

Once again, you may be wondering: "What on earth is wrong with that?" Well, for a start it simply does not describe today's brand activities. Where is the "messaging" in any of the following?

- A brand experience event.
- Thought leadership publishing.
- Customer training courses and seminars.
- The rich, searchable information on a website.

- The brand as author of new language/terms.
- User groups, communities and fan sites.
- The countdown to a launch or event.
- Rumours, gossip, word of mouth.
- Helplines, call centres.
- Viral emails and promotions.

It is possible to measure the results of these activities in terms of brand image, perceived benefits and awareness. But it is pretty stupid to do so, because they do not work like passive TV ads or static design. They are interactive, involving, part of culture "out here".

The only thing more stupid than measuring this sort of activity as if it were advertising is scripting it, to try to make it as consistent as possible, in the process squeezing the life out of whatever "live" event or interaction there could have been. Sound familiar? That is what I mean about the danger of applying an old theory to new marketing. But it is more than a theoretical issue. It is a conflict between different ways of doing the same thing . . .

1.3 Protestant vs Catholic: The Battle for Brand Theory

Wherever marketing is discussed – in agencies, marketing departments, research companies and boardrooms – there are two schools of thought:

- *Catholic: keep the faith.* All this new-fangled nonsense is all very well. But there have always been stunts, promotions and so on. And surely the World Wide Web turned out to be nothing but a big mail-order system? The only thing that matters when it comes to building brands is big TV campaigns. Just look at the great stuff being done by advertisers like Apple, Honda and Bud Light. The rest is all small change.
- *Protestant: stop the rot.* Image branding doesn't work any more. Many of the old TV-advertised brands are on their knees – Coca-Cola, Kodak, General Motors . . . Ad agencies are all too quick to take the credit for

> successes that were nothing to do with advertising – like the iPod. And what happened to all those dotcoms who drank the ad agency Kool Aid? The power brands today aren't image brands and often aren't established by advertising either: eBay, Red Bull, Harley, Google . . .

You may think I am exaggerating? Let's review some real comments. First, the Catholic, keep the faith view:

> My recent book draws upon cultural theories and historical research to rethink how consumer brands are built. My research demonstrates that brand icons are built by targeting symbolic fault lines in the nation's culture. Much like those actors, politicians and sports stars who become cultural icons, iconic brands use advertising to author stories that help a nation's citizens manage their identities in the face of challenging shifts in society.[15]

This is an interesting development. The *post-tradition and custom society* – with symbolic fault lines and difficulties in managing identity – was a part of the justification I used in *The New Marketing Manifesto*. Professor Holt is using the same insights to justify an old-fashioned (in my view) advertising approach.

Now the protestant, stop the rot school:

> Volkswagen arrived in the U.S. in 1949, the same year Doyle Dane Bernbach was founded. Over the next decade, Volkswagen generated many favorable stories in the press, including a glowing review in *Consumer Reports*. By 1959, Volkswagen was the largest selling imported car in America. That year Volkswagen sold 119 899 cars, which represented 20% of the import car market. The next year "Think small," DDB's first ad for Volkswagen, ran and the rest is history. As powerful as the advertising was, Doyle Dane Bernbach didn't actually start from scratch. Nor should they have. Advertising needs the credibility created by publicity. Volkswagen advertising did what advertising does best. Take a fast brand and make it even more successful.[16]

This is a great rhetorical retaliation: were the theories that ad agencies peddle ever true? Look back at all the iconic brands from yesteryear and you will usually find a *New Marketing* reason for the success (e.g. word of mouth) *and* an agency taking the credit, even though its showy advertising often appeared after the event.

A similar point is made by a careful consideration of another classic case for image advertising. Nike's real launch idea – a cultural platform that propelled it from a million-dollar specialist athletic shoe company to a billion-dollar consumer business – was *jogging*. Not only did the company benefit from this craze, jogging was invented by Oregon sports coach Bill Bowerman, one of the Nike founders:

> In the early 1960s, Bowerman took his team to run against a team from New Zealand. While there, he noticed townspeople running, just for the joy and convenience and fitness it offered. He brought that experience back to Eugene and started the country's first running club. Then he wrote a book about how to run for fun and fitness. He called it Jogging, and the running boom was born.[17]

Fun though all this sparring may be, I doubt that the argument will be settled by arguments. It is a paradigm shift. Some will cling on to past notions. Others will trumpet the new theory, in which not only the conclusions but also what is studied change. One may win out in the long run. It is far from decided. Both sides think they are right.

The argument is about vested interests. Some ad agencies, direct marketing and design agencies feel motivated to cling to a messaging model because it justifies their kind of idea, and their lion's share of the budget. Other agencies – PR, sponsorship, promotion, internet, media, CRM, advertiser-funded content, talent agencies, event, brand experience and so on – can tend to favour *New Marketing* because it better describes and argues for their sort of marketing.

But I have met plenty of people in ad agencies devoted to new models, and just as many people in integrated agencies who don't feel comfortable until the brief (and preferably any external communication) has a slogan-style selling proposition.

Their clients seem equally undecided. It is not as simple as "cool" clients favouring new approaches, or "traditional" clients sticking to tried-and-tested formulae. Levi Strauss seems to believe that TV ads are the only thing that drives its business. That is unlikely to be the only reason its sales have declined for eight consecutive years, wiping out $3 billion in annual revenues. Yet you do have to wonder about what Einstein said – that doing the same thing over and over, in the hope of a different result, is insanity. Kenny Wilson, brand president for Levi's Europe, said of the company's new TV advertising:

> "It demonstrates independence and freedom of thought. Young people appreciate the fact that it's not the same as anything else on television." Levi's is hoping the £21 million campaign will help reverse a seven-year decline, which has seen its sales plummet by 42 per cent.[18]

And while cool brands can be conservative, there are advocates of radical approaches in unlikely (by reputation at least) quarters, notably P&G, whose CEO A.G. Lafley said:

> We're testing a lot of alternatives to television advertising. So I don't want my businesses to lock down too precise a number because I want them to have their minds open [that] there may be better ways to communicate convincingly to consumers than just turn on the tube.[19]

It is hard to resist noting that (in contrast to Levi's) P&G was entering its fifth year of strong growth in revenues and profit, even before the Gillette merger. Coincidence?

Summary of Chapter 1: Challenges to the Old Model of Branding

There has been a shift from *brand image* marketing to *brand inovation*: more interactive, involving, authentic and dynamic. These two paradigms are not just alternative methods, they are competing views of how brands work.

This development seemed to happen for a number of reasons:

- It was an advance, the development of new creative approaches.
- There is a surfeit of old-style messaging and advertising resistance.

- It was a response to the opportunities to use new media channels.
- These new channels have also inspired new ideas of what is possible in the old channels.
- It reflects a shift in who is doing brand marketing, towards media, services, retail.
- It responded to more dynamic, fast-evolving business strategies.
- It responded to change and uncertainty in people's lifestyle choices, needing new ideas to live by.

The old theory of branding was summarised by Peter Doyle as:

$$S = P \times D \times AV$$

Strong brand = product benefits × distinct identity × added values

A brand marketing programme would thus be aimed at:

- Communicating a distinctive product benefit or set of benefits (USP).
- Communicating a distinctive identity: name, logo, look and feel, personality.
- Communicating distinctive emotional brand values.

Historically all of the terms of this equation were introduced by advertising people. And there is a suspicion that they say more about a certain sort of advertising than about brands. There is a schism and a running battle between traditionalists and *New Marketing* reformers; "Catholics and Protestants". As in religious schisms, there are arguments over the interpretation of history: which came first – the great brand or the great ads?

The split is not as neat as being between traditional fmcg advertisers and new-style cool advertisers. Levi Strauss is an example of a cool company committed to the old way of doing things. Procter & Gamble is an ardent enthusiast for the new wave. And many companies I meet, both clients and agencies, do both and contain advocates of both approaches, often with considerable internal tension and debate about brand strategy.

2

A New Theory of Branding

2.1 What Is a Brand?

I have a different definition of a brand to offer:

A BRAND IS A (CLUSTER OF) (STRATEGIC) CULTURAL IDEAS

I will explore the two (bracketed) other parts of this definition in the following sections. In this section I just want to explore the basis of this definition, that:

A BRAND (has something to do with) CULTURAL IDEAS

Culture is a broad field encompassing traditions, customs, beliefs, artefacts, patterns of lifestyle, worship, family, work, economic exchange, knowledge and so on. It is fantastically diverse. And so, I will argue, is branding.

Here are two fairly typical definitions of culture, courtesy of Wikipedia:[1]

> Sir Edward B. Tylor wrote in 1871 that "culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".
>
> United Nations agency UNESCO states that culture is the "set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social

> group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" [UNESCO, 2002].

Wikipedia also notes, however:

> While these two definitions range widely, they do not exhaust the many uses of this concept – in 1952 Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn compiled a list of more than 200 different definitions of culture in their book, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* [Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952].

Most definitions of culture – including the two just quoted – blur the boundaries between external manifestations and ideas in people's heads. Neither means much without the other. It is not much use having road signs, books or art without people thinking about them.

This internal/external culture duality is an essential feature of human nature. The ideas are shared – otherwise they literally have no agreed meaning – and yet they are experienced as our own ideas. When we stand before a painting and get something from it, it is as if we had painted it ourselves; we get the same "ahah!" This is the starting point for a lot of (mostly French) philosophy, psychoanalysis and literary theory.

I like the term *cultural idea* because it hovers on this dividing line – "cultural" meaning it must be shared, "idea" meaning it is got in a personal, internal way.

Seeing brands as made up of cultural ideas allows us to revisit the claims made by advertising agencies for their primary role in creating brands. Advertisements can be powerful and influential too, but they are just one of many kinds of cultural ideas that shape brands. Volkswagen as a brand was made up of a rich cluster of cultural ideas. Writing in the early 1960s, Ernest Dichter (a Vienna-trained psychoanalyst and one of the founders of modern qualitative research) explained brands like VW as follows:

> Perhaps the strongest appeal that the small foreign car made to that segment of the population, which first bought it, was its appeal to individuality. A

> minority of well-educated and well-to-do intellectuals, chafing at the general conformity in their own suburbanised living patterns and in the general climate of life in America, found in the small foreign car a symbol and an outlet for their revolution against a common and ostentatious taste – represented by Detroit.[2]

That seems a credible explanation. It is like the place the mountain bike has taken in today's culture, in opposition to the (eco-unfriendly, corporate and conformist) connotations of car ownership. Dichter went on to discuss "other psychological considerations which are almost as important":

A. The feeling of fun (in driving).
B. A social introduction (attracting attention, being part of a fraternity).
C. A well-defined category (as the antithesis of American cars).
D. Contagion. "Their interest was originally aroused, not by advertising, but by actual exposure to the car" which was "followed by interest in advertising".

Most of what Dichter said about the VW could be put more simply as a cultural idea:

VOLKSWAGEN WAS THE BEATNIK BRAND

DDB caught some of the spirit of this (already booming) brand and wrote what could easily be described as

BEATNIK ADVERTISING

The advertising was pithy, downbeat, ironic, clever and subversive; a lot like the Beats. It could have played a role in translating the appeal of the car to the mainstream mood of the 1960s – making it "cool" (a word that also went mainstream, from its origin in cool jazz, the 1950s of Greenwich Village and San Francisco).

Similarly, the Nike brand evolved through a series of cultural ideas:

THE ATHLETE'S SHOE
THE JOGGING SHOE
THE URBAN GHETTO SHOE

As we saw in Chapter 1, Levi's is another interesting story of both cultural success and decline. According to commentators in the fashion industry, the brand's current woes in its once-thriving UK market can be understood as follows:

> "For a period in the late Nineties denim became unfashionable," said Louise Foster, of the fashion trade magazine *Draper's Record*. "501s – Levi's flagship brand – in particular suffered from the so-called 'Jeremy Clarkson effect', the association with men in middle youth. But when demand for denim returned Levi's found itself caught between cheap jeans and cooler, more expensive designer brands such as Diesel."[3]

That whole tragedy unfolded while the advertising went from strength to strength, with two of the company's most popular TV commercials – "Flat Eric" in 1999 (glove puppet and a rumbling techno track) and "Odyssey" in 2002 (two lovers leap through walls to escape what looks like a mental asylum, before running up trees to jump towards the moon).

So what gives? It appears it is possible to have some of the best ads in the world (judging by their success in international awards) and still be out of fashion. Levi's was short of a cultural idea – a reason for having a vital role in people's lives.

Rewind the tape to the 1980s. The advertising community's version says that the ads changed history:

> Kamen's "Launderette" was shown for the first time on Boxing Day 1985. Thought up by John Hegarty and Barbara Noakes of Bartle Bogle Hegarty, the ad campaign was designed to try and save Levi's flagging fortunes; the company was under attack from all sorts of other fashionable brands. In short, Levi's (which has been going since the 1850s) were becoming the sort of jeans worn by people's dads . . . Research showed that the intended target audience for Levi's 501s – 15- to 19-year-olds – saw the United States of the fifties and

> sixties as a cool time and place in history. James Dean, Elvis Presley and Sam Cooke all belonged to this mythical, wondrous world.[4]

That's not how I remember it. Secondhand Levi's were already the height of fashion before the campaign broke. You had to have ones with the right stitching to get into certain trendy clubs. I asked my friend Ted, a fashion anthropologist (curator of the *Streetstyle* exhibition at the V&A), whether Levi's had *really* started the whole craze for vintage American clothing:

> I do recall vast piles of retro jeans (esp from the USA) at retro shops like Flip in Covent Garden. If my memory is right this would have been late 70s/early 80s. The big thing wasn't just that they were retro but specifically that they were American. The same era when Ed's Easy Diner started. Certainly this pro-American retro thing had nothing to do with marketing and predated any such attempts. *American Graffiti* had something to do with it. As an American in the UK I was going back to the States with my first wife Lynn and we were hitting on my more eccentric relatives for their old clothes, in 1976. I remember on one such trip running into the guy who owned Flip at the airport and he was saying how he was spending his life flying back and forth to the US to buy up clothes from charity shops and bring them back to the UK.[5]

Volkswagen, Levi's and Nike are the brands that every agency would point to as shining examples of brand image. It looks like *brand bandwagon* would be a better statement of their actual role. It was the cultural ideas they represented that really mattered, and their success and decline rest not on the qualities of brand image advertising, but the broader context and reception of these ideas.

Where my brand definition (as cultural ideas) comes into its own is explaining how it is possible to use other means than advertising to get established.

eBay is a case in point. Its cultural idea was:

THE PEOPLE'S MARKET

Given that the internet was new and the media and public were hungry for success stories, eBay had all sorts of hooks and sub-ideas:

THE BUZZ ABOUT eBAY
COLLECTING
HOBBY BUSINESSES
SECONDHAND GOODS
BELONGING – BEING AN eBAYER
eBAY BEING ADDICTIVE
THE UNIQUE PROCESS (WATCHING, BUYITNOW ETC.)
eBAY LANGUAGE, e.g. *MINT*
STAR RATINGS
SELF-POLICING
WEIRD AUCTIONS (e.g. "GIRLFRIEND FOR A YEAR")
THE FASTEST-GROWING COMPANY ON EARTH

eBay is easy, albeit extensive, to describe as a culture – like a tribe, which has its own way of doing things. It would have to be reckoned one of the strongest brands on earth. Yet it does not fit into the old model, it hardly advertises, its graphic design is generic (it looks just like other web brands: Yahoo, Google etc.), its image or brand personality is hard to define (folksy?).

Another case in point is Red Bull. In the UK this brand was created through sampling at festivals and outside clubs, student bars and selective sponsorship, to become:

THE UNDERGROUND ENERGY DRINK

The ideas that contributed to this include:

THE PRODUCT "RUSH" (LIKE A DRUG)
SAMPLING FROM BRANDED JEEPS
ADVERTISING INSIDE CULT VIDEO GAME *WIPEOUT*
THE *STOLLY BOLLY* (RED BULL AND VODKA)
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION IN UNLIKELY PLACES, e.g. GARAGES
BEING ADOPTED BY RAVERS, STUDENTS (AND TRUCK DRIVERS)
SPREADING BY WORD OF MOUTH AND IMITATION

This whole book will develop the notion of brand as (made up of) cultural ideas. A key implication is that just as cultural ideas are diverse, so types of brand ingredient are diverse. A strong brand can be a community, a rumour, a habit, a quasi-religious or artistic experience, eroticised, cognitive . . . and many other things. There are different forms of brand. And if you accept that, you have a much wider palette of potential brand ideas to paint with.

2.2 Brand as Strategic Cultural Idea

There are many cultural ideas that appear to be "branded". People talk about branded politicians, celebrities, ailments and so on. I think this is valid insofar as they have been promoted deliberately; less so in the case where they are just accidental "hits".

A brand is a *strategic cultural idea*, that is, one with an intention behind it.

When Tony Blair named his policies *New Labour, New Britain* you could argue that this was applying the techniques of branding to politics; although thinking back to examples like the Bolshevik slogan *Land, Peace and Bread* in 1917, it would also be possible to argue that branding is a form of cultural propaganda.

Organic would also be a brand – promoting the programme of the Soil Association. If it had been called *chemical-free horticulture* perhaps it would be less successful?

But there are plenty of cultural ideas that, while resembling brands, do not appear (unless conspiracy theories are allowed) to be strategic:

THE Y2K BUG
FLU
WORK–LIFE BALANCE
THE CAREER WOMAN
NEW MAN
CASUAL FRIDAY
EMAIL
NEW AGE

Many brands have incorporated these ideas and thousands of others like them. In those contexts they are (part) brand ideas. But there are plenty of ideas in culture (thank God!) that have nothing to do with marketing or brands.

Strategic ideas don't have to be created by the brand owner. Many are spontaneously created out there in the market; for instance when a scene adopts the brand. The idea mentioned earlier of the vodka–Red Bull cocktail is probably an example. The names that became a core part of the Spice Girls brand (Sporty, Scary, Posh, Ginger, Baby) were thought up by a journalist covering the band, but were subsequently incorporated.

The other point to make about brand ideas being strategic is that they are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Good ideas start with the realisation of a problem to solve. And much mediocre brand marketing starts with the idea of "advertising the brand" as if it were a business objective in its own right.

The 1996 *Chuck Out Your Chintz* ad campaign was based on recognition of a bigger problem for IKEA. The brief the client originally gave us was to build the brand on classical lines: telling people about the Swedish furniture, the nice stores, the low prices. The bigger problem was that two-thirds of British people we surveyed said they did not like modern home design. IKEA could not succeed in its expansion plans if we did not tackle this problem. So we tackled this problem directly, aiming to change British taste. And custom-designed tracking research told us that (supported by the many journalists and designers who rallied behind the message) we had succeeded: two years later the split was one-third traditional vs two-thirds modern styles.

The recent campaign for Bud Light in Canada is another good example. The problem this brand faced was struggling to be seen as a "proper man's drink". The response was a sustained, imaginative campaign based on the idea of liberating men from domestic duties (so they could spend more time drinking with their mates)! An early TV commercial featured a *Monty Python*-style service whereby a Viking invasion of any family barbeque could be arranged. My favourite idea from the campaign was a range of greeting cards saying things like:

- “Sorry I missed our wedding”
- “Let’s make the 15th *our* Valentines day”

The campaign is a cultural idea. It worked in advertising, but it could just as easily have been a sketch from *Saturday Night Live*.

I don’t think it should be taken literally as chauvinist propaganda, nor measured by tracking levels of domestic absconding. The idea is to launch a *comic* idea, something the lads can enjoy sharing and talking about over a beer. It gives the brand social currency and gives men permission to drink a light beer.

As those two examples show, advertising can be a powerful way to launch an idea, just as it is a powerful way to promote a new movie or chart single. It doesn’t have to be “messaging” about the brand. *New Marketing* is not about avoiding using advertising; although it is so expensive that you do need a damned good strategic reason behind it.

2.3 Brand as a Cluster of Cultural Ideas

All successful cultural products tend to have a number of cultural ideas working for them. I see them as like molecules with a number of atoms. Before we move on to some examples of brands, let’s look at one of the biggest global entertainment hits of recent years: *Harry Potter*. I have sketched this out as a molecule to indicate what I think of as some of the key cultural ideas that have contributed to its success (see Figure 2.1).

Much of this molecule is – appropriately – about stories; mostly those written by the media. The book launches were great marketing events with overnight parties for kids in bookstores, leaks and build-ups, retailers stockpiling. This is the way in which major products like the PSP (handheld PlayStation) are launched. But it was nearly unprecedented within book publishing. The only other launch I have heard of that was anything like it (also greeted with a craze bordering on mass hysteria and also dealing with boarding schools) was the *St Trinian’s* series of cartoon books, which back in the 1950s staged “smash and grab” raids on bookshops by unruly young women dressed as schoolgirls.

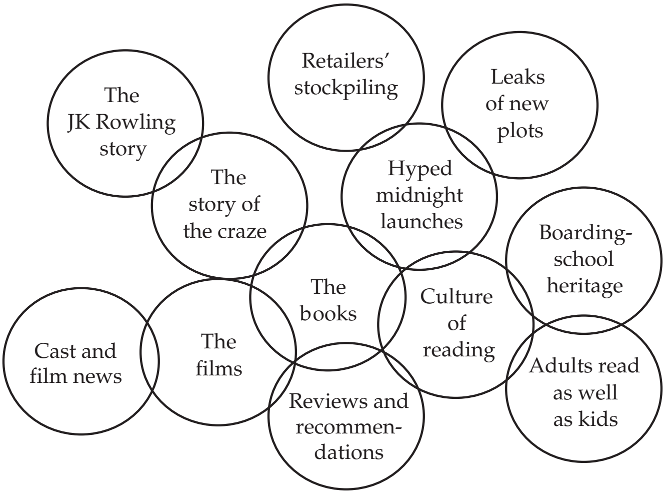

The JK Rowling story
Retailers' stockpiling
Leaks of new plots
The story of the craze
Hyped midnight launches
Boarding-school heritage
The books
Culture of reading
Cast and film news
The films
Adults read as well as kids
Reviews and recommen-dations

Figure 2.1 The *Harry Potter* brand molecule

The retail launch idea for the *Harry Potter* books added to the story of the craze: a hit is a hit (or becomes more of a hit) when everybody knows it is the new thing and wants to jump on the bandwagon. Is it all down to the quality of the books? Partly, of course, just as the iPod would not have been a hit without sensational product and software design.

In the case of a cultural product like a book or a movie, it is natural to produce cultural marketing. When you have an ordinary consumer product, you cannot just throw any ideas together. There has to be a relevant, credible fit – a bond between every element. IKEA has also done store sleepovers but for beds, where the reason for the event is crystal clear and credible.

It is possible to build links between prosaic brands and exciting cultural ideas, but it takes patient, gradual construction. An example of doing this well is Beck's: a traditional German beer, which developed a surprising relationship with modern British art. Beck's was first imported to the UK in 1984 and the company's strategy was to seed it in trendy bars. It could have gone down the route of establishing the beer as a quality product, being brewed under the German *Reinheitsgebot* (beer "purity" law) using only natural ingredients: barley, malt, hops, yeast and water. It could also have adopted a Stella – European heritage and tradition – image. But events took a different turn.

In 1985, by glorious coincidence, there was a "German Art in the 20th Century" exhibition at the Royal Academy, which Beck's sponsored, presumably feeling it would reinforce the company's German heritage and credentials. The show was a huge hit and must have worked well for Beck's too, because after that sponsoring contemporary art became its main platform. In 1987 it launched a special edition bottle designed by Gilbert and George, who called it *Art For All*. Since then, 22 limited edition bottles have been produced by artists including Tracy Emin, Yoko Ono and my own favourite by Jake and Dinos Chapman, which features a smiley face. Beck's went on to act as (free) drinks sponsor for exhibition openings, always a popular feature with exhibitor and guests alike. This got the company into the grass roots of the new BritArt scene, at events like Damien Hirst's first show at the White Cube gallery.

For the last six years Beck's has sponsored a contemporary arts award with the ICA. It makes less of a "statement" than the Turner Prize, but is reckoned more authentic. The *Guardian* described it as like walking around the artists' studios and seeing work in progress. The work is also exhibited as a "tour" at the CCA in Glasgow. The involvement of Beck's in the arts even extends to on-trade promotions: sponsoring a student art prize and film prize, the work being shown in Slug and Lettuce bars across the country.

Beck's and BritArt is such an established partnership that it feels natural, and it is easy to forget that this is a surprising connection – beer being thought of as lowbrow culture, the choice of "lager louts". It is as surprising as if Adidas sponsored the Royal Ballet (which I think it should look into, really!).

But once Beck's found a credible link or two – the German exhibition and throwing in free drink for openings – then it became a natural extension (see Figure 2.2).

I presented this case study to a big marketing department recently and the question was raised of whether the mainstream success of the brand has anything to do with its art sponsorship. Their view of marketing was that you "communicate" your brand values to a broad audience of people. Surely this only communicated to a tiny niche?

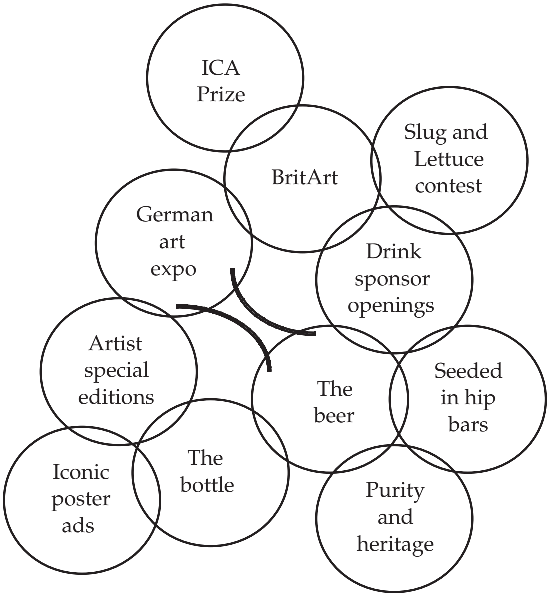

ICA Prize
Slug and Lettuce contest
BritArt
German art expo
Drink sponsor openings
Artist special editions
The beer
Seeded in hip bars
The bottle
Iconic poster ads
Purity and heritage

Figure 2.2 The Beck's Bier brand molecule

There will undoubtedly be people who drink Beck's who have no idea that it sponsors an ICA show or has done any of the things described above. There were several such people at my meeting. But most people do think of Beck's as a credible brand. The chances are that they adopted it when they met it in a venue where others were drinking it, or through word of mouth. The brand has "cachet" and one source of that was the ultra-cool art world insiders who first adopted it, influencing stylish people who go to art launches and then their friends and so on. It is the same as not knowing the full Red Bull (rave scene) story, or the full Levi's (gay fashion) story or the full Red Stripe (Rasta-punk) story. Buzz brands spread from person to person – over time it is common for the original community who adopted it to be lost and for the brand idea to become the craze itself. Having said that, I suspect a lot of hip people do know about Beck's and BritArt.

Brand as molecule presents a simple but powerful alternative to the view that branding is "like an onion". Seeing a brand as composed of layers, with a core "essence", is intrinsically static and conservative. I have found that drawing molecule diagrams allows a more dynamic, evolving view of brands and points to any number of natural extensions and directions.

To illustrate its application the following pages contain brand molecules for well-known brands. I will not comment on these models in any detail and I must stress they are just sketches. All of these brands are covered elsewhere in the book – but I would urge you to look up any of the ideas you are unfamiliar with on Google and/or draw up a similar molecule for the brands that you work with personally.

One example was donated to the book by Tony Manwaring, CEO of leading UK disability charity Scope. Tony was kind enough to read the book in draft form and to offer this example. I would encourage readers to

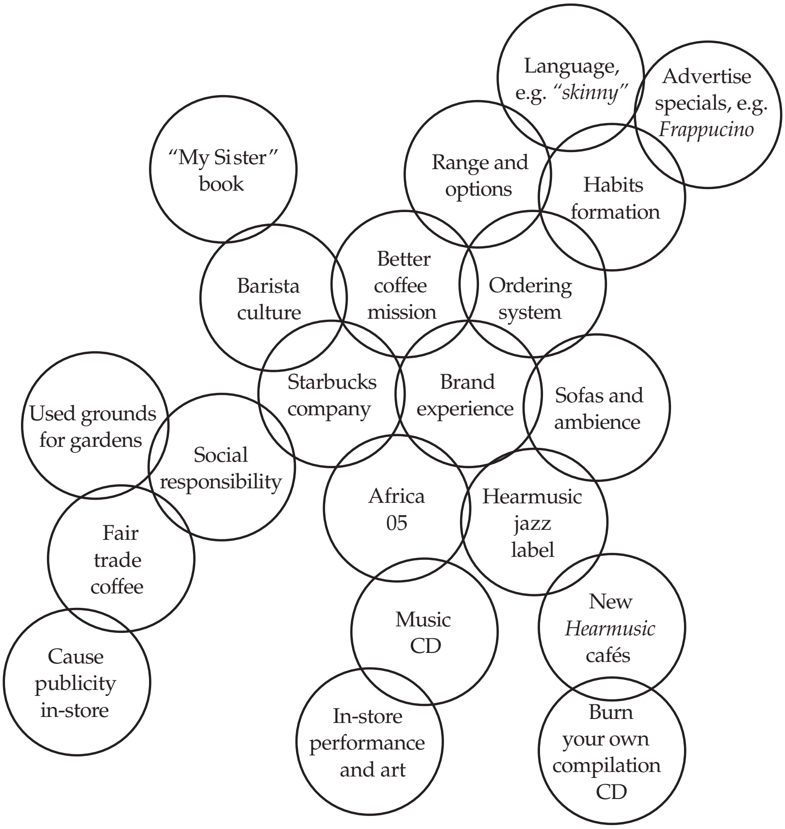

Language, e.g. *"skinny"*
Advertise specials, e.g. *Frappucino*
"My Sister" book
Range and options
Habits formation
Barista culture
Better coffee mission
Ordering system
Used grounds for gardens
Starbucks company
Brand experience
Sofas and ambience
Social responsibility
Africa 05
Hearmusic jazz label
Fair trade coffee
Music CD
New *Hearmusic* cafés
Cause publicity in-store
In-store performance and art
Burn your own compilation CD

Figure 2.3 Starbucks molecule

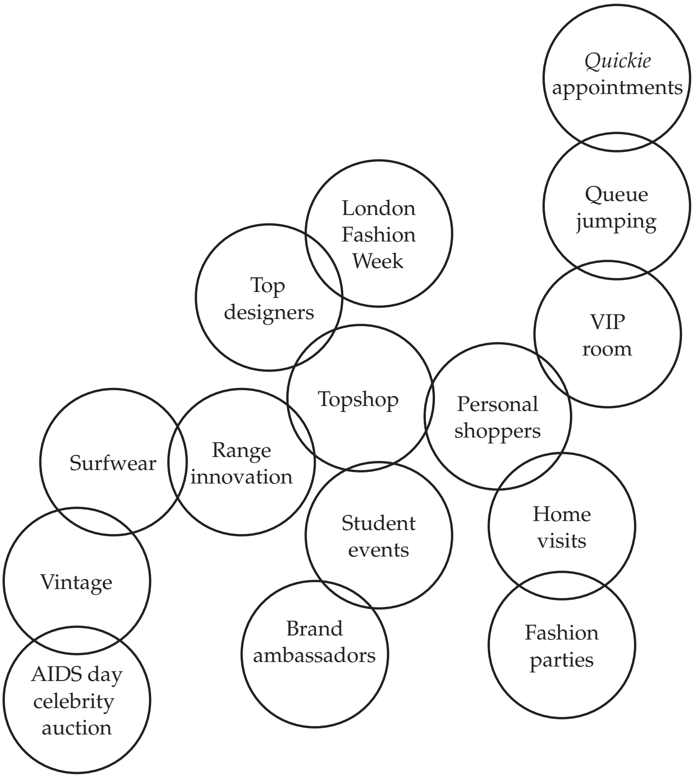

Quickie appointments
Queue jumping
London Fashion Week
Top designers
VIP room
Topshop
Personal shoppers
Surfwear
Range innovation
Home visits
Student events
Vintage
Brand ambassadors
Fashion parties
AIDS day celebrity auction

Figure 2.4 Topshop brand molecule

read up on the background to Scope, for instance *Disabilism* (subject of a report prepared for Scope by DEMOS), which is powerful agenda-setting campaigning.

The brand idea molecules do need credible links. But they don't need to be monotonously simple in endlessly trotting out the same idea. Consistency is overrated. Some years ago I wrote a document for IKEA on its brand, which contained the proposition:

ONLY LIARS NEED TO BE CONSISTENT

That headline was placed next to a photo of President Nixon!

In other words:

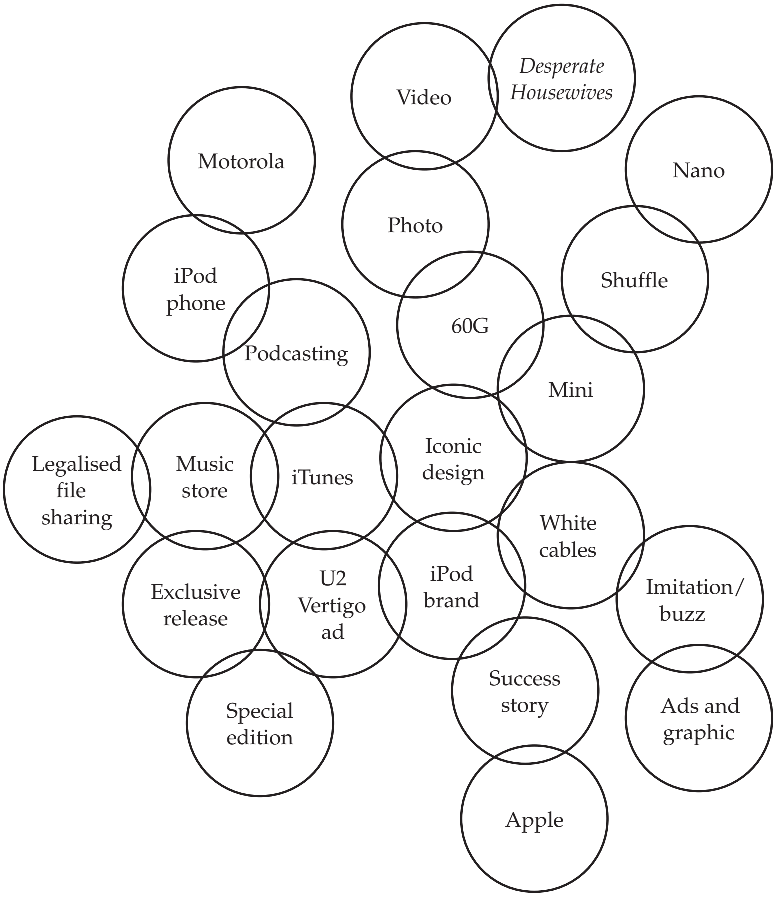

Video
Desperate Housewives
Motorola
Nano
Photo
iPod phone
Shuffle
60G
Podcasting
Mini
Legalised file sharing
Music store
iTunes
Iconic design
White cables
Exclusive release
U2 Vertigo ad
iPod brand
Imitation/ buzz
Success story
Special edition
Ads and graphic
Apple

Figure 2.5 iPod brand molecule

- Consistency is a product of messaging, selling, dissembling.
- It is a façade.
- Coherent companies need not fear variety.
- Consistency should come from strategy and values, not executional similarity.

There is a school of thought in "integrated" communications that says you have done a good job if you make your point-of-sale and direct marketing materials visually similar to your advertising. It is easy to see how

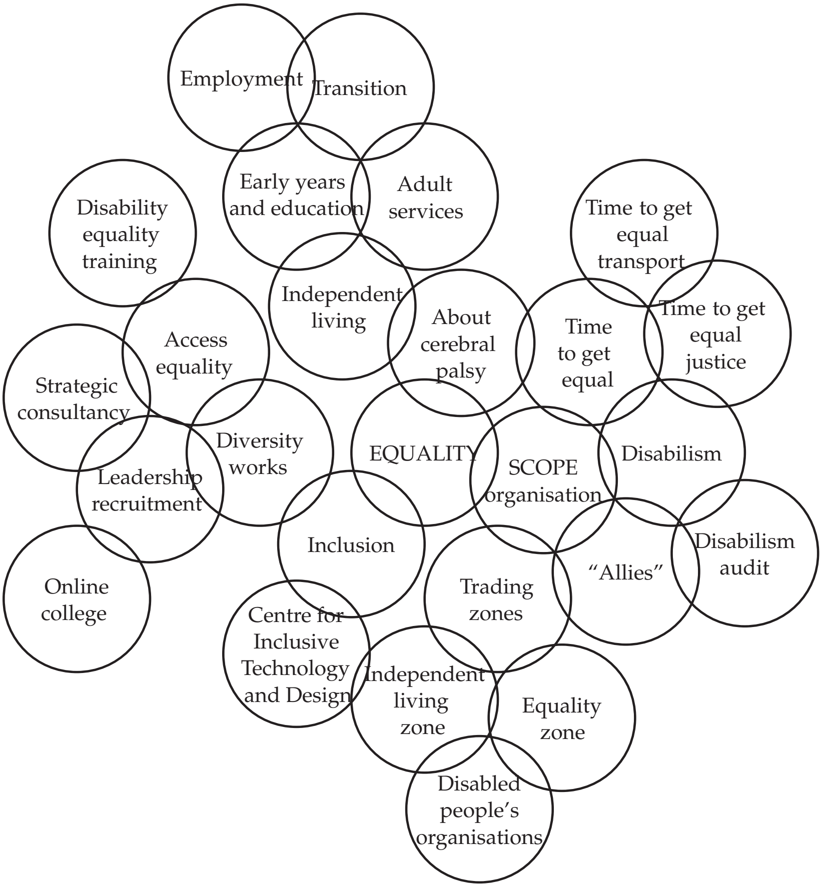

Employment
Transition
Early years and education
Adult services
Disability equality training
Time to get equal transport
Independent living
About cerebral palsy
Time to get equal
Time to get equal justice
Access equality
Strategic consultancy
Diversity works
EQUALITY
SCOPE organisation
Disabilism
Leadership recruitment
Inclusion
"Allies"
Disabilism audit
Online college
Trading zones
Centre for Inclusive Technology and Design
Independent living zone
Equality zone
Disabled people's organisations

Figure 2.6 Scope brand molecule

that would be easy to sell within a constrained corporate culture. And it may have a valid place, if the strategy is, for instance, to establish a new company in people's minds (the O2 advertising springs to mind). To the Pharisees of brand consistency, tidiness is an end itself. But the consistency creates an impression of something controlled, synthetic, one-dimensional if you are not careful. Perhaps that is fitting – it makes corporate marketing organisations look corporate!

A brand like Virgin that simply gets on with business will evolve. Where Virgin has stumbled it has usually been because its entry into a new market did not offer something better than what was already there, or it failed to find a place for it in people's lives. Virgin Rail struggled when it was just the Virgin brand on some old trains. Now that the service and trains are better, it seems to be doing well and makes a substantial contribution to the Virgin group (not least because it received £2.1 billion in subsidies).

There was nothing in the Apple brand that said it should do iPod. There was nothing in Google that pointed to Gmail, or its new internet telephony. If these services are great and find a place in our lives, then we will adjust our ideas of what Google is about.

What you lose, if you prize consistency over dynamism, is the freedom to pursue relevant cultural ideas and business opportunities. It is not something that has ever held Nike back, for instance:

- Inventing and capitalising on jogging.
- Doing clothes for aerobics (albeit getting into it late, because the company didn't like "pink shoes").
- Celebrity and team sponsorship, e.g. Brazil soccer.
- Entering new (potentially uncool) sports, e.g. golf.
- Theme park retailing, e.g. Niketown.
- Music marketing, e.g. releasing compilation CDs.
- Mass events, e.g. *Run London*.
- Making movies, e.g. Brazil street soccer film.
- Inventing weird products that work, e.g. the "barefoot" Nike Free range.
- Customisation: Nike iD stores and shoes.
- Guerrilla marketing, e.g. hijacking famous events.
- Nike women's campaign: *It's not the shape you are, it's the shape you're in*.
- Nike facilities for organising local soccer leagues.

Nike also does good advertising and two ads seldom look or feel the same. The company has a consistent *swoosh* logo and slogan. But these are signatures on a diverse body of work.

2.4 The Brand Innovation Imperative

Culture fades.

New cultural ideas fascinate.

In the last thirty years, technological, social and economic changes and their impacts on every aspect of lifestyle have set a rapid pace. But a flowing, fleeting progression of cultural ideas is evident throughout history. It seems like there is something essential and integral about this, that a changing culture is somehow part of human nature:

- *New* cultural ideas are more fascinating;
- vs *Familiar* cultural ideas become recessive, dull, taken for granted.

This is probably partly to do with evolution and neuroscience; our brains are attuned to subtle changes, anomalies and new situations. Even our senses work that way – a repeated sound level seems to get quieter over time. A small difference in a familiar visual scene stands out like a sore thumb. In evolutionary terms a changing situation bristles with danger: a rustle in the bushes, the birds falling quiet, a slight movement and change of coloration in the long grass, at the edge of your field of vision . . . those might be all the warnings you get of a predator about to pounce.

The very notion of "news" – the universal cultural need for constant updates on what has happened recently – seems related to this instinctual vigilance. Millward Brown, an advertising tracking company, found in a study in the early 1990s that advertisements that contain new news are ten times more recalled than those that do not contain new news. An item of real news points to the potential need to reevaluate, change our plans or outlook. But the issue seems to precede relevance: first of all we filter for new information, then we decide if it is relevant.

It is an interesting aside to note that new information is fascinating because it is dangerous (it may also signal an opportunity, but that isn't the first feeling that grips us when we hear a sound in a dark house and our hair stands on end!).

That is part of the story. But there is more than new information to the interest in new cultural ideas. Stanley Milgram conducted a series of famous experiments in the 1960s, to demonstrate the powerful effect that external social forces have on human behaviour:

> The subjects believed they were part of an experiment supposedly dealing with the relationship between punishment and learning. An experimenter – who used no coercive powers beyond a stern aura of mechanical and vacant-eyed efficiency – instructed participants to shock a learner by pressing a lever on a machine each time the learner made a mistake on a word-matching task. Each subsequent error led to an increase in the intensity of the shock in 15-volt increments, from 15 to 450 volts. In actuality, the shock box was a well-crafted prop and the learner an actor who did not actually get shocked. The result: A majority of the subjects continued to obey to the end – believing they were delivering 450 volt shocks – simply because the experimenter commanded them to.[6]

The experiments were about obedience, but this seemed to derive from a general drive to fit in. I think of it as a bit like going abroad. When you arrive in a foreign culture, the aliveness to every nuance has to do with trying to figure out how things are done around here. You may for instance look to other diners to figure out what to order, how to eat it (with fingers? Individually? Or sharing across the table . . . ?). This could be called the culture instinct. We seem as a species to be fascinated by how things are done these days/in these parts. It is actually hard to see how a shared culture could work if that were not the case, if individual patterns of thought, feeling, behaviour and artefact were not massively attuned to shared patterns.

When the cultural ideas change within a community, there are some who adopt the new ideas enthusiastically, while others will hang back, resist the change, want to stick with more traditional ideas. All sorts of factors determine who might fall into which group, for instance:

- Age: the older you are, the harder it is to adopt new ideas.
- Personality: some people like change, risk, adventure, rebellion more than others.
- Vested interests: those with least to lose and most to gain often favour new ideas.

- Generational: a new generation will often use new ideas to define its identity.
- Cultural: some regional cultures seem to welcome change more than others.

The reaction in the UK to the euro – a fear of loss of identity and traditional meaning – is an example of this conservatism. Something like that has been happening with this *New Marketing* idea itself. Some of us have leapt on it, along with all the new media and new channels open to marketing. Others have clung to the "brand image" paradigm, dominated by the advertising idea and the identity design.

There is another factor, which also explains why culture constantly evolves – it is in the nature of ideas and experience. A cultural idea is a combination of other pre-existing ideas. It makes a new connection in our mind. The experience of having an idea, or recognising the link that has been made in someone else's idea, is one of being energised. It is as if – in Freud's old model of cathexis, derived from electrostatics – energy that was bound up has been released. But over time the experience of repeated exposure to that idea is that it becomes less energising. A joke is not as funny on the second or third telling. A dangerous stunt loses its thrill when we have seen it before.

If you look into the history of great brands (rather than their current advertising), you often find big cultural ideas that propelled them onto a bigger stage.

One example is the *Guinness Book of Records*. The book was the result of an unresolved argument between the then Guinness managing director and his hunting partners over the fastest species of game bird. The annual books are actually just a selection from the much larger database of "official" records held by Guinness. A typical example of a Guinness World Record is the one set in June 2005 for the most Hula-Hoops to be spun by one individual simultaneously (which now stands at 100!). Record breaking has inspired decades of public enthusiasm, although this has occasionally had to be curbed, for instance in the case of records related to eating excessive (dangerous) amounts. The Guinness World Records also spawned TV shows and other cultural ideas. The British athlete twins (the McWhirter brothers) who ran this project and presented the TV programmes became household names in their own right. And the record attempts – successful or otherwise – made great television, full of drama and suspense. What people seem to love is that it documents a less official or elitist culture, with entries for things like the man with the biggest feet (size 29.5, apparently).

This idea is a surprising connection that (like Beck's and art) transcends what is generally a lowbrow category. Because of this idea, Guinness has had the scope to position itself as intelligent, different to other beers, and to be more extreme in its advertising ideas too. 1980s campaigns like *Pure Genius* relied on this groundwork.

New Marketing implies a constant commitment to this sort of brand innovation: the launching of new cultural ideas, which connect up with the existing "molecule" but add fresh interest, twists and connections. Two current Guinness initiatives are importing the liquid from Ireland (rather than brewing in the UK) and a return to the use of the Toucan – a remake (like a new release of an old movie) within its advertising. That's why I use the term *brand innovation* for this book: it is about constantly coming up with new ideas, to keep the brand fresh, relevant and dynamic.

It will be fairly obvious if you have a need for *brand innovation*: if you need to launch a brand, revive it, reposition it, update it, attract a new audience, justify your monopoly (e.g. a nationalised company) or simply keep it alive and vibrant. This only excludes coasting along as a "classic" and being under no pressure to grow or improve. Brands do go through phases like this, just as animals can enjoy a golden age when they are at the top of the evolutionary pile, with little need to adapt further. Two caveats:

- First, you would still need to be ready for changes in the context, when a classic brand can become a dinosaur (as Levi's has over the last eight years) and act fast to set the brand on a new course.
- Secondly, there are *very few* classics indeed that take up this anchor position as a fixed point of cultural reference, something an individual will want to keep (like a favourite toy that follows a child through their development) while everything around them changes.

I would guess there are usually fewer than 20 “anchor” brands for any one person. Few people in workshops – where I get people to reflect on own their personal list – have ever named more than ten. These brands are likely to have a long and significant place in that person’s life history, to have been passed on by a parent or to be associated with a significant event or transition, or to be a very stable habit. If they disappeared that person would be very upset. If they were not available at a store, the person would go to another store. If a competitor exists it might well be despised or ignored.

Far too many marketing people confuse brand share with brand loyalty. And far too many assume they are managing an enduring classic when actually they are presiding over an accident waiting to happen. This is a mistake that is all too easily exposed when somebody else does the brand innovation your category had been crying out for and leaves you for dust.

PG Tips thought of itself as an unassailable brand leader in the UK tea market, until in 1989 its rival Tetley launched a simple innovation – the round tea bag – which increased its brand share by 30% and took over market leader position. When in doubt, it is safer to innovate than wait for someone else to do it first!

To recap on some of the key points in this section on culture and innovation:

- New ideas fascinate, older ideas fade.
- New information seems to grab our attention.
- New news also brings a note of caution, danger and risk.
- We seem to have an in-built drive to adjust to changing cultural conditions.
- A constant question is: how are things done these days?
- New ideas often polarise, attracting supporters and conservative resistance.
- Cultural ideas can take brands onto a bigger stage, lifting them apart.
- But few brands can afford to coast, and even these need to be vigilant.

2.5 Hybrid Vigour: Brand Partnerships, Feuds, Leaps and Properties

Many of the examples I have already covered have shown how a brand is not about one consistent idea, but rather an ongoing string of innovations:

A BRAND IS A *CLUSTER* OF STRATEGIC CULTURAL IDEAS

This model has an interesting corollary. One type of idea that it supports (which traditional brand theory didn't allow for) is *brand marriages*, in a combination that creates surprise, energy and strategic benefit for both parties – like Sony Ericsson.

The U2/iPod commercial was a popular culture landmark of 2004. It was a cultural idea, which stood apart from the flow of advertising. The iPod advert was just one expression of a brand marriage that was to the extensive benefit of both parties.

What the deal brought to iPod was a high-impact cultural idea, which added to the growing iconic status of the brand. The advertising repeated the same device that Apple had used previously, of rich coloured backgrounds, characters in silhouette, and highlighting the standout white iPod cables. This in turn reinforced the idea of imitation, badge value, being more of a fashion item than a gadget.

But it was much more than an excuse for another good ad in the campaign. Apple had the exclusive right to sell tracks from the new U2 album *Vertigo* three weeks before they were available elsewhere. For U2 fans that would be a bit like Sky having an exclusive on Premiership Soccer (content being a key motivation to buy into platforms). It also created extensive media coverage and interest. And Apple launched a special limited edition U2 iPod, in black and red and signed by the band. Oh, and by the way, Apple also got one of the biggest rock bands in the world to appear in advertising, for free. Why? Because if you look at the whole deal from U2's point of view, they should almost have been paying Apple . . .

What the deal brought to U2 was a massive free promotional campaign (unaffordably large amounts of global advertising, from a record business perspective) for their new single and album, which propelled them straight to number one in the charts. It also warmed the world up for their *Vertigo* tour the following year, which is where bands make the real money these days. It was a credible link for the brand, the iPod being the latest in a line of high-tech stunts (like the enormous video and light show U2 put on in their *Zoo* tour). It confirmed U2's currency – that they are still, despite being in their 40s, a band of the moment – by association with the popular craze for iPods. They also got to profit share in sales of the iPod special edition – which was a great product, in that it came pre-loaded with the band's new album.

It is such a good deal it would be interesting to know how it came about. The rumour in the music industry is that Universal, U2's record label, had tried to get the band to sign a more traditional sponsorship deal with Vodafone; but that it was the band who insisted on going with iPod because it was way cooler. That makes the whole exercise feel more authentic. Of course, the rumour may itself be yet more clever marketing!

Marriages are fascinating. So are feuds.

One of Virgin's defining moments as a brand was the so-called dirty tricks feud with BA. It started in 1991 when Virgin moved its HQ from Heathrow to Gatwick, where BA was also based. There were allegations of BA poaching Virgin customers and tampering with confidential files. It was also claimed in Branson's evidence to the High Court that BA's PR people had been briefing the media and the City against Virgin. Richard Branson wrote an open letter to BA non-executive directors detailing these "sharp business practices". Fighting back, senior BA directors, including chairman Lord King, publicly expressed the view that Virgin was simply making these allegations for publicity purposes. BA ended up settling and paying legal costs, to the tune of £4 million. At the time of the dispute BA was making around £300 million while Virgin Atlantic was making an operating loss of £9 million. Whatever the material basis of the dispute it did function effectively, as BA had claimed, to make Branson and his airline look good: not only did it appeal to the public's sympathy (David vs Goliath) but it also made Virgin Atlantic seem like a much more significant operation than it really was at the time.

Stretching a brand into surprising but relevant markets can also provide a fascinating cultural idea to boost the brand – the Caterpillar boots strategy.

Caterpillar is an industrial equipment group, the name deriving from the continuous tread on vehicles like bulldozers. Its rugged boots look like they could be worn on a construction site and make an imprint similar to caterpillar tracks on vehicles. Caterpillar boots are sold in 152 countries worldwide. While they cannot rival the $30 billion industrial group they spun out of, it could be argued both have benefited from the association. It put the industrial conglomerate on the public culture map. And it made for a shoe brand with an unusual and compelling heritage.

Virgin, again, is a master of such brand leaps (brand extension sounds too continuous a term). While financial services, entertainment retailing and transport were natural extensions of the original music business, it is the wilder leaps that gave the brand sparkle – like Virgin Brides, launched in 1996 (cue: a picture of Richard Branson on the front cover of *The Sun* in a wedding dress). It was not a big commercial success, being scaled down today to a single store in Manchester selling apparel and accessories. But as a cultural idea to give a boost to the Virgin brand, it was up there with Branson's around-the-world balloon flights.

Another strategy that the molecule model of branding acknowledges and encourages is creating cultural properties attached to your brand. These are ideas that are not about you, but set a more public agenda, like IBM's *eBusiness*, IKEA's *Chuck Out Your Chintz* or Dove's *Campaign for Real Beauty*.

Nike wanted to encourage a stronger running culture in the UK. Compared to other countries fewer Britons go running and the market for running shoes was correspondingly soft. Because they wanted to reach a broader audience Nike went for a compromise between something that would feel a real achievement (like a marathon) and something that was achievable: a 10 km *Run London* event. People were not only encouraged to register but also to invite friends to take part with them through "viral" invitations, which they could customise with their own picture. The original marketing campaign was conducted under the slogan *I'll do it, if you do it*. The campaign in 2005 went further, with Nike encouraging people to *Run a Year*, that is, focusing on the preparation. Practice runs were held regularly at nine locations and communications focused on keeping going through the winter months.

It is a good example of taking an existing idea (the fun run/jogging with friends) to the next level by using new community media such as the web and viral emails. Around 43 000 people in London take part in three events annually and the scheme has been such a success that Nike has rolled it out to other world cities. Apart from selling a lot of running shoes, raising awareness and demonstrating brand leadership, it is refreshing to see a brand doing some good (helping people motivate themselves to keep fit) with its marketing budget.

2.6 The Equivalence of Brand Creation and Brand Communication

In the old model there were two very distinct phases:

- Developing (or redeveloping) the brand idea: product, identity design, naming, proposition testing etc.
- Launching (or relaunching) the brand through advertising ideas, PR ideas etc.

In big corporations this split is often institutionalised: a specialist new brand team would incubate new ideas, handing them over to the "regular" marketing team to be launched in the market. There are also different sorts of agencies that specialise in new brand development, brand strategy and so on – compared with the marketing communication agencies. It is rare for something authentic, vibrant and holistic to emerge from this process where brands get passed from department to department. Like children, brands seem to benefit from having continuity in the people who love and nurture them.

Maybe that is why many new power brands come from companies that do not structure their work on these departmental lines. A good example is Innocent smoothies, most of whose ideas were developed in-house (the company's founders couldn't afford fancy agencies when they were starting out). Looking at what they came up with it is clear that the product, the design, the company literature, the marketing – ranging from random acts of kindness, like offering people lifts in their minibus, to a hippy-style festival – are all cultural ideas. If it is all culture, why divide it into creation vs promotion?

There is a vital reason *not* to divide the development and promotion of brands in this way. It lends itself to dull, rationalised, stilted brands being given hyped-up (false) advertising and spin as compensation. The best place to put a cultural idea is into the brand experience itself.

For one thing, the brand experience *is* a cultural idea. Even if it is a packaged grocery product it is – in anthropological terms – an artefact. These are highly conventional in form, but are still cultural ideas. The cultural nature of these sorts of products becomes clearer when somebody breaks the usual rules; for instance Absolut with its clear designer bottle (in distinction to all of its competitors at the time that had paper labels). Much of Absolut's marketing consisted of helping people *see* this innovation – as if it were a work of art.

When the basic brand experience is richly cultural – as with Apple, BBC, Starbucks, Amazon, easyJet – and the means of amplifying that idea and attracting people to it are also cultural, then it is more apparent that brand creation and brand building become very similar, and should be continuous.

Take eBay. The primary offering – the eBay site – is something rather like an advertising medium. It is a place where goods are displayed and described. The medium is rich with cultural convention: the way eBay structures the experiences (*Items I'm Watching, BuyItNow, Power Seller*) and also the ways of writing and relating that the eBay community have developed themselves as customs. The PR is mostly made by some of the crazy products that have been auctioned on eBay: rare pieces of rock memorabilia, a girlfriend for a year (in Canada), even an entire Silicon Valley IT department – adding greatly to the idea that eBay is a sign of the times. For eBay, in other words, advertising and product have changed places. Advertising is the service itself, and product stories promote it.

2.7 A Shift from Targeting an Audience to Adoption

A key development in modern marketing is the shift:

- from targeting messages at passive audiences
- to ideas being adopted by (or co-created with) groups for whom they are relevant.

The notion of "target audience" is problematic: shooting messages at clumps of people like arrows and seeing which hit the target in tracking research. Within the old advertising paradigm it obviously made sense to ensure that ads for shaving foam were watched by men, and ads for sanitary protection by women. And media agencies spend quite a bit of time understanding not only who to target but when the audience might be more receptive to the messages.

But propositioning and targeting in this mass media averages way is still a low-percentage game, akin to sending millions of direct mail letters in the hope that a few people may open them and a fraction of those may respond. Because advertising is measured by awareness, recall and so on, ad agencies have developed advertising impact and memorability devices as their core creative competence. Shocking, catchy, entertaining, stunning . . . All to ensure that the packet of dry information about the product is delivered, or a packet of emotional added values.

The problem is that our screens and streets and lives are crowded with adverts aimed at the average audience and few of them have much meaning to us individually. Research by Sky recently found that fast-forwarded TV ads had almost the same tracking score responses as showing people the ads normal speed.[7] That research was done to argue that PVRs (hard disc-recorded TV where you can fast forward through the ads) would not reduce the effect of advertising as much as expected. But to my mind it says more about the shallow interest in and effect of advertising in the first place.

Not that ads can't be powerful. It is the way they are usually used to target audiences with propositions that sucks. Where the advertising is a cultural idea that transcends this confined space – when it sets a challenge or makes a broader statement – it becomes something that is discussed, shared, imitated and controversial that confers a currency on the brand: *this is the way these things are done these days*. There are many examples in this book.

But it is often easier to convey cultural importance by doing stuff in real life – especially today, when consumers are literate; they are used to perceiving a disconnect between the exaggerated appeals and imagery of ads and the humdrum experience of products.

Thinking about Who? is still important in marketing, but it is not about who to target, it is about who will adopt and use your ideas.

2.8 Establishing New Lifestyles

Advertising, design, PR and so on have often been used to sex up a boring, familiar product. These days the challenge is just as often to make a strange new product seem normal, to establish a place for it in the culture. The reason cultural ideas are so powerful is that *the way things are done these days* is the whole question for the brand. It is this type of marketing that is behind the successful adoption of many new brands that required people to get used to them, like eBay, Starbucks or YO! Sushi.

Often the question of *who* will adopt you and how the brand will fit into culture are linked – by ideas that synthesise these issues into platforms for the brand.

A typical new brand – which I read about the other day, launching in 2006 – is Sirco. This is based on a plant extract from tomatoes. What this ingredient does is inhibit blood clotting, which means that it can reduce the chance of heart attack and stroke. The parent company, Nutrinnovator, stated in its investor release.

> Whilst there are food products for the management of cholesterol, the directors . . . are currently unaware of any food product in the UK market that bears the on-label claim “helps to maintain a healthy heart and benefits circulation”.[8]

The functional foods or "neutraceuticals" sector has been growing fast recently, with one-a-day drinks becoming something of a standard: bioactive, five-a-day smoothies, cholesterol reducing. I haven't seen many details of the Sirco brand. I gather that the company will call the product ingredient Fruitflow and the juice flavours it will market the drink in will be blueberry and apple and orange. I also found a note on the clinical trial of the product in 2003, where researchers took the tomato extract and added it to orange juice.

Assuming the company takes a conventional approach, it will very likely end up with a brand brief along these lines.

Sirco:

- helps maintain a healthy heart and circulation;
- juices, with FruitFlow, small smoothie-style bottle, one-a-day;
- sensible precaution, maintaining your health, natural goodness.

The last point assumes that the product will be marketed to the general public, rather than actual heart patients (who would generally be taking other blood-thinning medicines already, for instance small doses of aspirin). According to the company's research, "heart health foods" are worth $3.6 billion worldwide. But that is perhaps a deceptive statistic, in that "heart health foods" will mostly be low-salt meals and so on.

This sort of (new, semi-medical) product has a poor record of responding to straightforward advertising messaging. Benecol in the USA was reported to have pulled back from a planned spend of $100 million in 2000, when it found that its initial investments on above-the-line advertising produced disappointing results (total sales of only $18 million in 1999).[9]

The real (cultural) issue for this launch is other one-a-day health drinks. It is not likely that your average health-concerned (i.e. usually middle-aged) member of the public will sit down to a liquid breakfast (the usual time for healthy products) consisting of a bioactive yoghurt drink, a fruit smoothie, a cholesterol-reducing yoghurt drink and then a Sirco. The company has to find a way to become part of people's daily habits. The most obvious option is going after a group whom the other health drinks have neglected.

Let's take a closer look at the "healthy one-a-day natural drink" category. What do the products signify, where do they fit in, what is their archaeology (i.e. relationship to traditional, possibly innate, ideas and cultural forms)? They seem to relate to a traditional cultural idea – the life-giving potion. Many myths and ancient customs revolve around the life-giving or transforming property of magical elixirs, brews and recipes. There are a number of conventional ideas that define this sort of cultural object: it should have a secret recipe, natural ingredients, have some active agent or principle. The potion would often come with a prescribed way of consuming it, even something as simple as the "Drink Me" on the bottle in *Alice in Wonderland*. If you were given a potion by an apothecary or shaman, it would come with an instruction – for instance to drink some once a day. This is why, in my view, cholesterol-reducing yoghurt drinks work in marketing terms, and cholesterol-reducing margarine (Benecol) was not so successful.

But being like a potion only makes Sirco one of a number of similar options. The other problematic cultural task is competing with the cholesterol bandwagon.

Flora Pro. Activ is probably the leading example of a cholesterol-related brand. The core principle of the brand is activity. Flora was already about fitting into an active, healthy lifestyle (healthy heart recipes, the Flora marathon, and so on). Flora Pro. Activ similarly has championed regimes like the *Fit Street Challenge*, recipes available online. The Flora Pro. Activ marketing reminds me of *Good Housekeeping* magazine: full of domestic bustle, efficient home routines, practical regimes and recipes (and a hint that underneath all this manic, tight-lipped domestic organisation is an unspoken mid-life terror of mortality?).

Flora Pro. Activ's latest idea seems a really good one: singer Lulu takes part in a "reality" ad campaign, in which she tries to reduce her cholesterol in just three weeks. This is a much bigger idea than some ads showing a celebrity trying the product. The ads – and the celebrity – are there to encourage others to give the three-week programme a go. Cynics will point out that this three-week programme consists of consuming lots of Flora Pro. Activ product and getting into the habit of using it regularly.

This is good marketing: it has strong cultural ideas that build on each other, it involves the audience, it tackles habits and has also generated a lot of news coverage – Lulu doing the rounds of chat shows, with a story to tell (she says she was really up for the campaign because her father died of a heart attack). She regards the crux of the campaign as being persuading people to get their cholesterol checked, which is good health information marketing of the sort the Central Office of Information would do. In fact, in the PR coverage of Lulu's three-week challenge, Flora is only mentioned in passing:

> **Lower your cholesterol like Lulu.** 1) Eat three portions of foods containing plant sterols and stanols – substances that help lower cholesterol – a day, such as foods from the Activ or Benecol ranges. These include margarine spreads, low-fat yoghurts, semi-skimmed milk and yoghurt drinks. (*Daily Mirror*, 28 June 2005)

One advantage Flora Pro. Activ has is that cholestrol is an established "agenda" in its own right: the campaign can start and end with getting cholesterol checked, reducing cholesterol and so on. That will be as self-evidently beneficial as if it was about weight reduction or giving up smoking.

Because Sirco started with a formulation, which was then squirted into orange juice (in case people thought it was odd), and because it actually is a *new* product and benefit on the market, it doesn't yet have a *cultural idea* to carry it. It doesn't have the cholesterol agenda or the five-a-day message (against cancer) that is helping smoothies.

One option is to set a comparable cultural agenda. This is what Pfizer did, according to my good friend Alex Wipperfurth (and you can read the full case study in his recent book, *Brand HiJack*). In order to create a market for its wonder drug Viagra, it first of all built a medical practitioner agenda around the idea of *erectile dysfunction* – a term Pfizer invented to explain the need for the product. The problem had previously been known as impotence and was seen as fairly hopeless.

But there are so many competing food and health agendas out there at the moment: calories/obesity, cholesterol, salt, additives, GM foods/organic, isotonic . . . It is difficult to imagine that inventing another one on its own would be sufficient to break through. We need to get the brand into circulation too!

I suspect that the name Sirco (a friendly and everyday-sounding reminder of "circulation") is too literal. It is like Innocent being called Fruito instead!

And to stand any chance of getting a cultural head of steam up behind (yet another) healthy one-a-day drink, it should probably start with a neglected corner of the market (people who don't already drink one-a-day) and work in. For instance:

- *Brand concept 1: Air Juice.* Start with long-haul airline passengers. The biggest group among these are "empty nesters", often aged 45–65. The jetset reality of their holiday habits matches the dreams and aspirations they grew up with, when it was all a lot more glamorous and inaccessible. Set up stylish branded juice bars – to sell the product mixed with a wider range of delicious fresh juices and smoothies – in major airports. Around 14 million long-haul flights are taken from the UK every year and awareness of deep vein thrombosis issues is fairly good after some high-profile deaths reported in the last few years. The bars could act as education centres for the overall health benefits as well as a launch campaign, which would itself make money and drive trial, while creating expansive/exotic cultural associations.
- *Brand concept 2: Sweetheart.* Market the product to the over-75s. It is about time there was some decent marketing activity aimed at the generation who grew up during the war and may well live to 100. These are the people most immediately at risk from strokes and circulatory problems. It might be nice to take the idea of sweethearts (i.e. people who are kind/people who are romantic) into social club dance events, charity and community schemes, linked with nostalgic music and celebrities.
- *Brand concept 3: Buster.* Market the product to men who don't take enough care of their health. It is men who generally have the worst diets and the greatest fears of heart disease, and all the "housewife"-type brands like Flora probably don't engage them very well. There are plenty of men living alone and it would be interesting to develop a cultural programme that spoke to them, just as Lulu speaks to "housewives". Perhaps another interesting variant of targeting unhealthy men would be marketing the product through food outlets like cafés that sell greasy

> breakfasts. They could sponsor additional healthy breakfast menu items, then offer PR and promotion support – an award scheme and so on. As the Buster title suggests, I see this taking a more male and tabloid approach; more Dennis Waterman than Lulu (you can always Google him if you were outside the UK in the 1970s; it would take too long to explain!).

Of course, all of this might be a bit too much bother for a neutraceutical company. In that case it would be better going after a partner (a Sony to its Ericsson) who can take this product to market on a cultural, not just a health information level.

By the time this is printed Sirco will have launched and I would encourage you to stick the brand name into Google and see how it got on. I may have totally misjudged the company's plans. I hope it surprises me – it does sound like a great product.

Summary of Chapter 2: A New Theory of Branding

I am introducing an alternative definition of a brand:

A BRAND IS A CLUSTER OF STRATEGIC CULTURAL IDEAS

Culture is a very diverse subject and there are over 200 definitions of what it is! Most definitions blur the boundaries between manifestations "out there" and ideas in people's heads. The old model of branding claimed to be about ideas in people's heads, but much of what it really described did include external manifestations like designs, famous personalities and product features. And it is based on outdated psychological theories, compared to the latest findings from cognitive neuroscience.

My definition can be usefully reapplied to case studies such as VW, eBay and Red Bull and provides a plausible alternative to the idea that brands are mysterious "essences" created by advertising ideas. The word "strategic" is in there to differentiate between brands and other sorts of spontaneous cultural ideas. Brands are after all just a small subset of culture. The key question is whether there was a strategic intent behind the idea. Sometimes brand ideas arise by accident, but in retrospect are seen to have played a strategic role.

The "cluster" concept is a radical departure from conventional theory, which often draws brands as concentric rings (i.e. unitary). I see brands as like molecules made up of ideas, which change over time as new ideas are added and old ones fade. To illustrate this I sketched a number of brand molecule examples. Consistency in the old model is about relating everything back to one brand statement. In the molecule view what is needed is coherence, which comes from credible links between ideas, overall strategic direction and also the organisation's values.

The properties of these molecules derive from the nature of cultural ideas. For instance, new ideas fascinate, older ideas fade; new information seems to grab our attention; new news can also bring a note of caution, danger and risk. We seem to have an in-built instinct to adjust to cultural conditions – a constant question being: how are things done these days? (or around here?) New ideas often polarise, attracting supporters and conservative resistance. But in general new ideas, especially those making surprising connections (like the *Guinness Book of Records*), tend to energise people and brands.

There are times in classic brands' history when they seem able to coast, being the established way of doing things. But there is a need for vigilance; for every Hoover there is a Dyson waiting around the corner. Constant innovation is often the safest course.

Because these brand molecules are about making new connections, one modern possibility is marriages (or feuds) between brands being integral, as with Sony Ericsson, U2/iPod and Virgin/BA. The model also draws no distinction between the ideas from which the brand is made and the ideas used to promote it. New brands are often called on to establish new lifestyles; a much more cultural task than stating their own features or creating an image. Choosing a consumer clique or context can be key, particularly in crowded markets, as a hypothetical brand exercise demonstrates (Sirco).

3

The Trouble with Trends

My *cultural ideas* approach to brands could be taken to mean that strategy should be decided by reading and applying cultural trends reports. I have seldom found this a good idea. It actually gets in the way; the task is to create trends and new connections, not to follow them. And another thing against trends, thus reported, is that they have dubious validity (even on their own terms) – they are dodgy cultural and social science. But trends seem to have a powerful appeal to marketers who feel a bit lost – particularly in large corporations, where trends can create an illusion of engagement with the consumer and also provide a rationale for proposed new campaigns.

The concept of a trend is a continuation of the messaging and positioning paradigm. The idea is to help marketers concoct messages that will appeal because they are "on trend". Given any real concern to engage with culture, marketers would not read trends ("the new street sport") but rather spend time understanding their customers as people (go and kick a ball around with them).

3.1 The Difference between Cultural Trends and STEPs

Society is changing very fast. It is common to list STEP changes at the start of any major business planning exercise:

- *Social*: e.g. longer working hours, less time with family.
- *Technological*: e.g. launch of 3G phones makes it possible to use the phone as your bank/payment device.
- *Economic*: e.g. higher disposable incomes.
- *Political*: e.g. shift to a more conservative, protectionist agenda.

The trouble with these tangible, measurable changes is that they are often poor predictors of how people will *react*.

For instance, disposable income has grown steeply in the last ten years, but economic confidence has faltered, so that luxury goods (and most high street retailers) are struggling this year in the UK, while saving seems to be back on the agenda. It is possible to *explain* shifting patterns of consumer behaviour and attitude, but they seem impossible to *predict*. Culture is too fickle, too complex, too consensual and too irrational.

3.2 Real Trends

Real trends are those ideas or artefacts that people *agree* are growing in acceptance.

They can be concepts – almost like brands in themselves – that spread and are seen to be spreading. The latter point is vital: the confidence of knowing that many others are adopting these ideas gives them currency, as *the way things are done nowadays*. One example is *work–life balance*. You could argue this is a response to longer working hours, to more enlightened management theories, to the power of the individual (knowledge workers) or a comforting illusion. Certainly it has a certain degree of "fit" or relevance, like any new tradition. Although experts in the field argue that it is a terrible concept (in implying that work is all bad, life is all good and they exist in a direct tradeoff). But it is an idea that has spread, taken hold, become jargon, which the media group stories around, which people prioritise because it is "thinkable", which boards feel they should address and so on. It is not a mysterious hidden cause, it is a very visible agenda.

You do not need a trends agency to tell you what these real trends have been recently. The list includes *new age*, *geek*, *organic*, *retro* and *girl power*.

You should be able to locate most of them in any Sunday paper. Brands that are signs of the times can take on this sort of status too: for instance the iPod, Viagra, Mini. Again you do not need a trends researcher to tell you (as I read in a design magazine) that the iPod represents a move to *emotional minimalism*. All they are really saying is the iPod is "in" – unless they are also reporting an explicit agenda among producers (like the ones that the fashion designers seem to agree behind closed doors before they produce their near-identical ranges!).

Even if you have catalogued these real trends, there is little mileage in jumping on the bandwagon once they are well accepted. They don't last. And most of the benefit seems to go to the first movers. On the other hand, there is everything to be gained from trying to set and articulate such an agenda – for instance as IBM did with *e-Business*. This is a specific and deliberate brand strategy, which I will cover later (in Section II: 2A).

3.3 Made-up Trends

Modernism put forward the idea of society as an orderly progression. The underlying model for everything was scientific progress. Human culture was seen as evolving in a uniform direction (higher, more advanced, "that's progress" etc.)

Few sociologists and historians agree with that view today. Instead we have postmodernism, seeing society as chaotic, creative, unpredictable, impossible to "read" or even see from some universal, powerful, "outside" perspective. It is not that postmodernists don't have theories too. But they are provisional, based on the shifting and mercurial properties of language. In postmodernism meaning is lost in translation.

The idea of cultural trends is modernist and out of step with today's culture. There is a huge corporate market for the certainty and relief from anxiety that these trends can bring. But they are made up and often misleading.

Researchers and forecasters make up trends by lumping together disparate developments under general themes. There's nothing too wrong with that – except when they claim that these developments are being caused by the same "underlying" trend. Similarity is not evidence of an invisible shared cause.

We live in a society where dieting and overindulgence, the cultures of emaciation and obesity, co-exist. People are contradictory as well, showing a tendency to veer between such extremes (Christmas excesses, January detox) and there is a huge middle ground of creative compromise. A trend report will necessarily point to one (or both) extreme(s) and suggest they are growing.

It is only valid to claim that an extreme will lead on to more general change, if that extreme is subject to adoption and diffusion. This can work in markets where innovations start as expensive and/or difficult to "get" but later become more mainstream and accessible. Understanding how that sort of diffusion works is a key strategic theme in modern marketing. But it has little to do with underlying causal trends, much more to do with patterns of adoption.

The Copenhagen Institute strikes me as talking more sense than most, but when it introduces an idea like *Adventures for Sale*,[1] what it is claiming is that a new underlying cultural trend is driving the growth of specific markets.

What I would argue instead is that examples of the same timeless need are being satisfied in different markets. It is possible to launch an entirely new sort of "adventure" and there are many examples of this in the last 40 years: from bungee jumping to computer games to ethical safaris. But that does not mean that the need for or interest in adventures is necessarily an "underlying trend". People have dreamed of adventures in all ages – it is what most myths are about.

These "trends" strike me as an example of what philosopher Michel Foucault described as "explanatory fiction". What Foucault said was that if you could do fine without an explanatory cause, it probably does not exist.

Another problem is that trend thinking focuses our minds on "averages" rather than diversity. It creates a narrative about an "average society" in which an average household is going through certain changes, for reasons that seem understandable, when you look at its average circumstances. It is like watching a sitcom. To say we are all "trending" in one direction can be misleading. For instance, the gap between haves and have-nots is widening.

To generalise – to the extent the Henley Centre did at the start of the 1990s, when it described the decade ahead as *Caring, Sharing* – seems simplistic (as well as wrong – it was a greedy, selfish decade if anything, on average). The Henley Centre was perhaps impressed by the events of 1989 when successive ecological and manmade disasters, plus the Berlin Wall coming down, made it feel like we were living through huge apocalyptic changes. Even when there is a simple obvious trend in STEP terms (e.g. the world is falling apart) it is not safe to predict that there will be one reaction, or even a general direction of change. Short term there were swings towards green politics, but that didn't last.

This is not to deny that we are living through a lot of change, but rather to deny that the change is usefully expressed in a series of "trends". The developments speak for themselves. Some developments (for instance familiarity with technology, or awareness of ecological issues) may accelerate the acceptance of others. But there is no reason to assume that a general attitude shift is at the centre of anything, or that developments would descend from a "trend".

Whatever the regularities of globalisation, you will probably find most of the diversity of human possibility within your own postcode, from ritual violence (e.g. gangs) to monastic order (e.g. a yoga class), from hedonistic individualism (e.g. a nightclub) to communes (e.g. a Weight Watchers group), from statist bureaucracy (e.g. a hospital) to freewheeling entrepreneurialism (e.g. corner shops). How could you summarise this into "trends"? And what use would it be?

Let's look at the most famous "trend" idea from the 1990s, introduced by the famous *Popcorn Report*[2]. Like all Faith Popcorn's pronouncements, it is well packaged:

- A catchy name: Cocooning.
- A picture of change in "the average household"; the idea being that folk (in the US, in the 1990s) would turn away from a hostile, crime-infested society "outside" and spend more time and more money on home comforts and security systems.
- Supporting data: statistics about fear of crime, spending on gadgets and takeaway meals, the ageing population (who will go out less).

- The effect on markets: growth in gourmet takeaway, consumer electronics, creature comforts and security systems.

Cocooning was generally accepted within the marketing community and media. And yet it turned out to be *un*true (not just not true, but the opposite). Studies of time use concluded that Americans spent less time at home, and more time at the office and in their car. By the end of the decade, far from feeling snug, they were all rallying behind the idea of having more work–life balance! Crime rates fell – something Faith Popcorn had not predicted, with the most dramatic change happening in her native New York.

Cocooning is a basic human drive; you could just as easily present it as timeless, as the legacy of cave-dwelling ancestors, or the early experience of an infant being held and their anxieties contained. I think this trait (not any trend) may partly explain why Starbucks is successful: it offered a home from home, a retreat and respite from the relentless merry-go-round of working and shopping. Starbucks is opening three new stores a day, so it must be doing something right! Because cocooning was presented as a literal trend to do with the home, it actually missed this valid point about the real human tendency underneath. But that would not have been "news". And hence you couldn't sell it in your annual trend report as a new development.

Many great businesses have been started out of an appreciation of a basic human trait or problem or situation. Discovery Channel was a response to the founder's perception (generally shared) that there was never anything decent to watch on TV. There was no "news". No trend. Rather, just something missing.

There is a further problem with trends, which is that I have generally found that they lead to bad innovation ideas and strategies. The thinking is simply too linear and too narrow.

In a humorous aside in his novel *Cryptonomicon*,[3] Neal Stephenson presented a template for the "perfect business plan", which included the suggestion that it should be supported by three trends:

- One that was so obvious anyone would agree with it.
- One that was lateral, but obvious in retrospect.

- One that was so mad and counterintuitive that it inspired the thought that the authors of the plan must be onto something utterly new.

Most businesses pay heed to trends within their marketplace and ignore any "mad" ones, which seem less relevant. Whereas what is needed most is insight into *what is missing* from your market. Trends reports can also stop you from thinking. They present answers before you have properly struggled to find better questions. Usually trend reports are used within big corporations, alongside processes like brainstorming, to go through the motions and be seen to be doing the right thing, to justify decisions.

Even when you do succeed in creating your own trend, you cannot afford (as my mother says) to sit on your laurels. Fashion is a tough market that demonstrates the need for constant innovation. No matter how strong your brand is, several bad seasons will send you racing towards the red.

FCUK (French Connection UK) was one of the most vibrant names on the high street in the 1990s, but consensus is that its buying lost its way. I saw the ad agency TBWA presenting FCUK at an international conference as a glorious case study – which it was in its day, but the timing was lousy as FCUK had just issued a profits warning, and profits indeed fell 69% in 2005. The brand had become fixed by the success of its FCUK campaign. It built up a following based on the T-shirts with the *FCUK Fashion* slogans. But the world has moved on and it now looks behind the times (producing clothes that were popular five or ten years ago). As a result, and in some desperation, the company is ditching its *FCUK* slogan. It was good while it lasted, but it is far too long since the company innovated. And there is a moral in here somewhere about keeping your brand flexible, moving with the times.

Summary of Chapter 3: The Trouble with Trends

While my whole approach to brands is based on cultural ideas, I have seldom found that reading cultural trend reports is a good starting point.

I do think there is merit, particularly when developing brand and business strategy, in understanding STEP changes (social, technological, economic and political). But while these changes are often simple and directional, the cultural response is mercurial: hard to read, let alone predict.

The cultural trends I think of as *real* are those that become media stories, talking points and industry agendas. You do not need trend reports to study these, you will find most of them in the weekend newspapers. Some brands assume a similar “sign of the times” status, either by association with these ideas (Body Shop) or as artefacts in themselves (iPod).

The trends industry does report on STEP changes and real fashions, but sets greater store by spotting (i.e. inventing and naming) cultural trends. These group together disparate real phenomena such as successful companies or entertainment properties and posit that there is an underlying cause for the phenomenon. This is an explanatory fiction.

At best, the phenomena may all draw on a basic human need such as adventure or security. But there is nothing new about these needs and the trends merely tell us that they are being satisfied in some new markets and contexts. Some of these “trends” – as predictions – are subsequently seen to be factually incorrect; not surprising, as the future is unpredictable.

The trouble with trends is that they often stop people from appreciating the diversity as well as the deeper structures of human nature. They tend to close down thinking and lead to linear ideas, which seldom work. At least that is my experience. The problem may also be that the sort of company that makes heavy use of trend reports tends to be out of touch with customers as people and far from creative with its marketing.

4

Strategy: Finding a Cultural Logic

Using the molecule approach to brands has a danger: it could just lead to a ragbag of ideas, which doesn't add up to anything. What you need to direct your ideas and choices is a very tightly defined strategic direction.

Marketing strategy is usually devised out of commercial logic. Objectives have been set from the point of view of what the company lacks or desires. They have been framed in competitive terms: improving share or repositioning (relative to others in the category). They have been defined in terms of beliefs: a value proposition, image or other means of differentiation. Or they have been framed in terms of shifts in consumer behaviour: increased loyalty, frequency, new customer segments, occasions.

Any marketing plan *must* have a business case. But that is just the starting point. In my experience, what leads to more effective marketing – and is capable of building a coherent molecule – is translating this commercial logic into a *cultural logic*.

Here are a few examples from projects I have worked on in recent years:

- Heidrick & Struggles as *the business of character*: the cultural logic being that what holds the executive search industry back (compared to other high-level professional services) is the prejudice that it lacks integrity and moral fibre, is composed of fast-talking lightweights with big contact lists, who do little for their exorbitant fees, who tempt people away from their existing jobs, who are just in it for a fast buck. The strategy responded to the development of leadership coaching and assessment services, and also reflected the skills of judgement and insight that are central to finding the right person. The molecule we constructed included replacing the corporate art with photographic portraits of successful British women, putting stencils on the office windows explaining who the statues on the front of the Royal Academy were, sending biographies to business leaders as corporate gifts (a kind of book club), running events that addressed *Business of Character* debates and so on.

- IKEA as *the biggest thing to hit North America since the Japanese car*. This involved taking the marketing plans and style of engagement to a different (more cultural and public) level, in preparation for opening 50 new stores. One example idea that spun off this strategy was developing the stores' educational role in changing the way that Americans live at home: *home discovery centres*.
- *It's not a nightclub, it's a way of life*: helping Ministry of Sound expand into new lifestyle markets, like fitness, bars, hotels, gadgets and financial services. This was based on the insight that while dance music and clubbing have declined since their peak in the 1990s, the brand offers a blend of hedonism, quality and aspiration that is relevant across a whole range of markets outside entertainment. A cornerstone of this strategy was developing a quantitative study of 18–34 year olds, to identify "our segment" (which we call *The Moderns*) and analyse key lifestyle markets like mobile, finance, holidays, drinks etc. for this group. Any new idea must appeal to this group and also be *sexy*, *stylish and sociable* or it isn't us. At times we have had to develop new products (e.g. a fixed £100 credit limit *Safe Card* designed for nights out) in order to meet these criteria.

All of my experience tells me that marketing plans live or die on whether you find a disciplined definition of what needs to be achieved in cultural terms. But I have to admit that getting to and agreeing such a direction is often the hardest part of any project.

I don't think there are any shortcuts or magic bullets. It is not a case of knowing that there are five models and picking one, even if there probably are some broad categories. I think of strategy as something very particular to one context, one company, one moment. Even if your strategy is reasonably generic, getting to your own tight formulation of that strategy is essential in order to develop marketing ideas. There is something about sharing a strong conviction that is important too; it is much more than an intellectual exercise, it is about committing to a course.

There are, however, a number of general perspectives and approaches that I do find helpful in devising a strategy. These are the sorts of tools I fall back on when I get stuck.

4.1 Problem Finding

What is the one cultural factor, above all others, that is holding this business back?

The answer we found when I first worked with IKEA in the UK was that too few people liked modern design (only about a third). IKEA had been fine so far (albeit not spectacularly successful) with stores in trendy metropolitan areas. But it was likely to really struggle in its new catchment areas like Nottingham and Thurrocks, where Margaret Thatcher, Laura Ashley and chintzy floral curtains were still very popular.

So we set a simple strategy: change British taste. This resulted in the *Chuck Out Your Chintz* campaign, which succeeded in doubling IKEA's sales through existing stores, as well as paving the way for expansion.

4.2 Finding a Third Way

I went to see WH Smith a few years ago. It had a fairly typical problem on the high street, being stuck between:

- specialist book and music stores like Waterstones and HMV, which were leisure destinations, with a great vibe and the sorts of products that are bought as self-gifts; and
- supermarkets, which were heavily discounting anything in the book, music and movie charts and relying on their store traffic to drive newsagent sales, as well as the new cut-price online competition like Amazon.

WH Smith had a ragbag of product lines, including stationery, entertainment, newspapers and magazines, and greeting cards. It had just suffered its worst Christmas on record, after it got killed (from all sides) by heavier discounting on key Christmas gift books, DVDs and CDs, which it did not respond to in time.

Unfortunately (in my view) the company had leapt straight into a store concept design project that made cosmetic changes without necessarily addressing the cultural logic for the retailer's continuing existence! I believe that the concept store and the strategy (and some of the senior management) were subsequently dropped, in favour of more aggressive discounting. There were several bids by private equity firms to buy the company, but it was defended by the discovery of a huge pensions deficit liability.

What WH Smith seems to lack is a third way, something between the supermarket and bookstore/music store models: a reason to exist and a place in people's lives. The view I had gone in to see the company with, which I titled *From WHS to WHY?*, was all about developing and tapping into the lifelong learning market. That would involve some reorganisation in terms of what the shores stocked, but would be more about what the company built around it. For instance, it could have built an Oprah-style reading club. I'm not saying this was necessarily the answer. Others I considered including going back to the company's roots (originally it was a chain of newsagents based in railway stations) and thinking about being *everything for the commuter*. What I am saying is that WH Smith needed a strategy that established a third way, a reason for the company to exist between a rock and a hard place.

4.3 A Bigger Context or Market

The thing that really helped on the Heidrick & Struggles project was thinking about other professional service firms: lawyers, management consultants and so on.

We talked a lot about this in early meetings on the strategy and the question was: why are they so respected by their clients when we are not? We went as a team to see Goldman Sachs to learn about how it managed its reputation and brand.

Once we had this perspective a lot of other things fell into place. The *Business of Character* became a story that weaved together issues like corporate governance (Enron), "fat cat" salaries/respect for leaders, shareholder revolts over appointments and so on. There was a clear role for somebody to step in and present a more grounded, professional alternative to the ego-driven old search firm model. And it created energy, umbrage, a sense of injustice, which was motivating. Nobody wants to work in a context where clients and the media don't fully respect them.

4.4 Outside-In Thinking

As well as a broader market context, it is often helpful to think of a broader cultural context. What do we sit alongside or form part of in people's lives? Starbucks is not just a coffee shop, it is a respite from shopping or the office. That's why it needs to be so snug. Extra olive oil is not just an ingredient, it is a commitment to a (new yuppy, rocket salad, yoga class, Tuscan holiday . . .) way of life. It goes with children called Joshua and Emily who are being coached to get them into a better secondary school, with shelves full of books by celebrity chefs, with eating pasta rather than chips as comfort food. It is an emblem of new middle-class living. £10 a bottle? Pah! Haven't they got anything a bit more special?

I ran a workshop once on toothpaste and we came to the simple conclusion that as well as being a hygiene/health precaution (to prevent tooth decay), we were also part of people's beauty regimes. That's acknowledged by products, for instance whitening toothpastes. But not by brands. Where is the equivalent of top cosmetics or haircare brand marketing, for instance the range fronted by a famous supermodel or actress?

4.5 Brand Archaeology

Good strategies do not spring from nowhere; they have to fit. The same strategy that transformed IKEA's fortunes in the UK would have been a disaster for MFI. The latter company just didn't have the right characteristics. It is often only in retrospect, when you have defined a strategy, that you find it seems like the company's destiny, bringing together many threads from its past history. But I do see a lot of agency teams going completely wrong because they have not bothered to excavate and explore the brand archaeology. They come in with stuff that fits the agency creative ethos, the lifestyles and tastes of the creatives and so on, with scant regard for the client's distinct voice.

Some of the external proposals I see for Ministry of Sound (a situation where I m effectively the "client") just aren't us. They are too wet, too complicated and so on. It's not that hard to get Ministry: a handful of our CDs called things like *The Annual*, *F*** Me I'm Famous*, *Clubbers Guide* tells you most of what you need to know.

Ministry suits creative ideas, which are tight, tough, simple, cheeky, aspirational, arrogant but accessible and so on. Like calling our new bar chain Minibar. An external agency had had a go at this naming brief and came in with ideas including Jericho, Bonobo and Morphos. What were they thinking?

4.6 Brand Renaissance

Sometimes a glorious past, now almost forgotten, can hold the seeds of a new strategy – like the Renaissance rediscovering classical culture and philosophy and reapplying it to a new humanism in art, science and society. One of the later sections looks at an executional version of this idea, the brand *remake* – for instance the VW Bug, Sony Ericsson Walkman Phone, Mini etc. But it need not just be a stylistic revival. It is also possible to unearth and repurpose an old strategy.

An example I worked on in 2005 was The Co-operative Bank. This organisation has an incredible history as part of the co-operative movement. The bank grew out of facilities offered to co-operative shopkeepers and businesses. It rediscovered this heitage in the 1990s and became one of the world's leading proponents of corporate social responsibility, backed up by a comprehensive ethical investment policy. The research and strategy project I did for the bank suggested there was potential to dive back into this heritage again and go even further – in creating co-operative customer banking, for instance local (virtual) branches being run with customer democracy, putting stuff back into the local community, involving people in citizenship. All of that is only possible now the internet is established in most households. A service that has just launched with co-operation built in is Zopa (launched by one of the founders of Egg), where people deposit and borrow money in a system that is something like eBay for personal finance.

A common formula for a renaissance is making an old strategy interactive: how can we now *do* what we previously only talked about?

4.7 What Is the Other Side of the Story?

The cultures around markets are often a bit one-sided. The stronger they are, the more one-sided they can be. Strategies based on the other side of the story are often quite explosive, radical, confrontational and sensational.

The culture of fashion and beauty excluded *real women*, which created the entry point for Dove. I worked on a buzz campaign for Amazon where the foundational insight was that quite a few (younger, childless, busy) people *actually don't like Christmas*.

Seeing cultures as made out of stories leads on to the idea of . . .

4.8 Strategy as Scripting

I find the notion of brand personality quite outmoded, but often return to the idea of company and strategy as story. When I first met the head of strategy at Arthur Andersen, which was going through a divorce at the time with Accenture, I brought along a photo of Charles and Diana as my presentation. The point was that divorce tends to polarise people's views of the two parties: which was the boring partner and so on, whereas previously they had been thought of as a unit, or at least a mixed bag.

Putting things in such simple human terms is often helpful, even if the analogy isn't perfect. It is well worth reading into the structure of stories, the way they are constructed. Many of the brand ideas in this book can be found in story architecture too, like *the magical helper* (U2 and iPod). I often present early strategic ideas *as* stories – like newspaper articles from the future, describing what has been achieved – a tactic I picked up from Andy Law at St Luke's.

4.9 What Is Lacking?

If you do read into storycraft the first thing you will discover is that stories are driven by a *lack*. As one scriptwriting coach put it, make sure every character is lacking something, even if they just need a glass of water! Every fairy tale tends to start with a loss, theft or other form of lack. The child is an orphan. The treasure has been stolen. The princess has fallen into a century-long sleep. The boy has no fear . . .

I think being driven by some sort of lack is also pretty true of brands. It is especially helpful to think along these lines when you have a mid-life brand – which apparently has most of what it needs but just feels a bit stuck. There is an opportunity to discover something still lacking to chase after again.

I went through that process of enquiry with IKEA in Germany, the company's second most established market (after Sweden). We came up with a new strategy under the heading *Life isn't working*. People's lives, relationships, gadgets and so on are letting them down on a daily basis. Quality of life and happiness are actually worse than they were a generation ago. In East Germany people were looking back wistfully to the easy life under communism (full of picnics with friends from the factory, full employment, little envy or pressure). IKEA might have become established as a supplier of home furnishings, but there was endless potential to help people with the life lived on their chairs. It fitted the IKEA mission – *to improve the everyday life of the majority of people* – but took it beyond having a nice kitchen, to having nice family mealtimes too. One way IKEA could help out is personal organisation: we waste hours every day looking for car keys, forgetting to phone the nursery when its office is open, missing the bank . . .

4.10 The Cultural RNA

I am in the early stages of working on an IBM brief with my friends at PlanB. We have yet to thrash out the strategy, but I am starting to have a hunch about it that (being only based on public information) I can probably share here. The product is called the iSeries and it is proven in independent studies to be almost faultlessly reliable as a server. So much so that the total cost of ownership is lower and it is common for IT professionals who work with this system to have little to do all day. It is a tried-and-tested solution, the same architecture has been in use since the early 1980s and all IBM has done is added faster processors. It means that if you upgrade you just plug a new box in.

However, this is the undiscovered secret of the market – most people have the latest new-fangled Wintel platform and new software version, which means they are forever debugging, rebooting, upgrading and generally wasting time. But that's the way everybody thinks things are done, whereas iSeries is seen as old-fashioned: the people who know how to run these systems are often in their fifties. There is nothing in here for *Wired* magazine to get excited about. My hunch is we need to graft our story onto a piece of cultural logic that is accepted in many other fields than IT: the *classic design that can't be bettered*. It's been 30 years and the jumbo jet is still going strong. The pick-up truck has changed shape a little since the 1930s but basically isn't all that different. Tables have had four legs for millennia. Faster computing – fine, bring it on – but let's not have to change our whole wardrobe every time someone invents a new button!

I need to do some consumer research around these issues, but my guess is that the sorts of people who install and run these systems will be the kinds of stubborn, introverted people who think new-fangled anything is never going to work, conservatives with a small *c*, practical people who just want something that gets the job done and who think that a lot of so-called progress is hype, nonsense and hot air. There are all sorts of ideas you could build a molecule out of, based on this. For instance, I quite like the idea of stockpiling and seeding jokes about *new-fangled IT* (making it a new "Belgium").

This probably won't be our exact strategy in a few weeks' time. It is just to illustrate how a logic from another part of culture (in this case the tried-and-tested classic design – aka "don't reinvent the wheel") can be grafted on.

4.11 What Are We Here to Do?

Corporate vision and values exercises seem to have fallen slightly out of fashion. Too many big companies were sold this universal panacea by consultants, tried it in a simplistic way, stuck statements on the wall, sat back and waited for the magic to happen – and then were disappointed by the results.

But I think there is still merit in having a well-formed point of view on what – in cultural terms – this enterprise exists *to get done*. What is the point of this business besides making money? What will change as a result of us existing? What is our place in the history books? What will employees be most proud of?

The best mission statement I have ever seen is the one from *Star Trek*. Yes, they did have a quite exciting mission to start from. But also they had better writers:

> Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the *Starship Enterprise*, her five-year mission to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilization, to boldly go where no man has gone before.[1]

One of the teams at St Luke's used to organise their work for clients around trying to find and communicate a *cultural mission*. I'm not sure it is really necessary to tell people your mission, but it can still be the coherent idea behind your molecule. Starbucks was invented to teach America to enjoy better coffee. IKEA was founded to bring styles that only the rich could afford to the many.

There is the potential to achieve more of your mission through interactive, educational or community media. I saw a paper on branding a while back, which concluded with the inspired thought that these days Coca-Cola really could *teach the world to sing*. It would certainly be an advance on yet more adverts showing a Coca-Cola personality hugging people on the street and giving them a free drink. Why not make the world *feel good* for real, if that is what you are here for? Spread the *love*, don't just advertise it.

4.12 Busting the Tradeoff in Your Market

It is almost a law of market development that breakthrough ideas come from overcoming a former tradeoff: luxury made affordable and accessible; home convenience meals that taste like a restaurant; fast cars with good fuel economy.

Messaging is not the point here (like those ads for Red Mountain instant coffee that used to claim it offered "ground coffee taste without the grind"). I mean product inventions that really deliver – like the original Golf GTi being affordable but very fast.

There can be tradeoffs that are down to *cultural* blocks as well as product economics, technology or design. A cultural tradeoff often concerns things you aren't supposed to do, for instance things that are seen as "not for people like us" (even if in other circumstances you would probably benefit from or enjoy them). One such tradeoff that has been a hotbed of brand and media innovation is *male grooming*. Men generally do want to be attractive. But when I was growing up, even wearing aftershave was distinctly suspect, let alone moisturisers or hair products!

I worked last year with the new leadership team of a global firm that had an interesting internal cultural tradeoff: that lawyers were *not supposed to* behave like business people – they had joined a profession. Given their strategic need to inject some new businesslike practices, in areas like entrepreneurialism, client service and teamwork, this was going to have to be unpicked somehow.

4.13 Model a Distant Parallel

This is one of the regular features of how I work. I am lucky enough (and old enough) to have worked in enough markets to build up a general knowledge of many different models and approaches. Understanding how political campaigning sets an agenda helped me advise BT on coherence and getting more out of its disparate consumer campaigns. It comes down to simple measures like having a "theme of the month" and hammering that in every contact, PR interview, advert and so on. But it is more than coordination. Having worked on a Labour election campaign in the past I had a sense of a kind of authoritarian discipline that seemed to be lacking at BT.

4.14 Information Saturation

Most communication strategies are pretty thin. Somebody has an idea – which is often either conventional or plain silly – and then justifies it with five bullet points of "evidence" plucked from the air, one of which is probably something they read in a cultural trends report or *New Yorker* article a while back.

Let's be honest, we've all done it. There is something quite satisfying in just dashing something off – whatever is the first thing we think of. Of course, it often comes unstuck.

Strategise in haste, repent at leisure!

I for one rely on working with people who will challenge me. Luckily I do work with plenty of people who are quite happy to take me on if I have been lazy!

This thin strategy syndrome may come from the fact that we planning types are often skimmers (intuitive, extrovert, thinking – in Myers-Briggs terms). We put a quick spin on things and move on to the next client brief. Or we skim a few chapters, think we have read the whole book and come to an – "improved" – view of what it should have said! (Usually what we thought before we read it.)

Over the years I have come to see this whole approach as dilettante and reproachable. These days with Google (let alone focus groups, trade visits and what have you) there really is no excuse for strategies that are only as deep as the paper they are written on. Hunches are good, difference is essential, but it must be informed and shaped by much richer exposure to everything and anything you could possibly know about X. If you can't be bothered to read up, a better route anyway is talking to enough people. How many agencies would go to the bother of interviewing senior executives – plus key technologists, industry analysts etc. – in a new client company? That's the standard start point of any management consultancy project and the consultants even get paid for doing it.

Conversely, being in the process of forming a strategy helps you actually accelerate your learning. You are motivated, actively fitting and checking new information with existing mental models. I was about two weeks into working on something recently when I realised I had not properly understood the "product". The client in question was Gala, which is launching a *bingo on TV* station. What I hadn't realised was that you would only ever be about three minutes from the next bingo game – which put paid to a whole raft of ideas about what we could add to the programming. Thrashing through all of this with the production company has helped us invent some joint ideas, which will both promote and populate the channel (literally populating it, in the case of our "search for a presenter" idea).

4.15 Deconstruction, Reconstruction

I am not usually confident of a strategy until I have got stuck first. Maybe it is just that you need a bit of pain to fall in love with an idea (it's the serotonin)? But I suspect it is also down to the need to disassemble, then reassemble – to form your own point of view.

What French philosopher Descartes recommended (his method) was to break any complex problem into chunks and think through each in turn, starting with the easiest. It is easy to do and certainly a way past the sort of snow blindness you get if you stare straight at the whole thing and try to think of "the answer". The chunks will be pretty obvious, things like:

- What problem or issue do we solve in people's lives?
- Who is our core audience and what are they like?
- Who else could we appeal to?
- What is the everyday life lived around our product?

- Where do we fit into people's daily habits now?
- Where (and how) else could the product or service fit in?
- What STEP changes has the market yet to adapt to?
- If competitors seem to be following a trend, should we reinterpret it, challenge it or rise above it?
- What are the value proposition and business model?
- What alternatives would be possible/competitive/profitable?
- Analysing the whole experience into a chain, where are the weakest links?
- What are the ethical dilemmas and issues?
- How do people "buy" our products and services?
- How does that fit into a stage-by-stage deliberation and decision process?
- When/where are key relevant opportunities to interact?

The key once you have got into this level of detail is to get yourself out again!

Either find bigger strategic ideas that could integrate all of this disparate stuff. *The business of character* for Heidricks had that quality – a satisfying clunking into place of all sorts of disaparate issues, debates, internal and external events.

Or find one thing that is head and shoulders more important. One of my first ever strategic tasks was analysing the stock cube market. The marketing director (of Oxo) took one look through the whole report, which ran to over 100 pages of what was mostly (rather appropriately) pie charts, and said it was obvious; we had to launch a *vegetable cube*. That's where we were losing share to Knorr, because of health, vegetarianism and cooking styles. We did and it was a success.

4.16 Demolish the "Ad in Your Head"

Most bad briefs and bad processes are down to preconceptions. It is fatal to think you know what the answer should look like before you have properly asked any questions. Yet not knowing the answer can be very anxiety provoking and all sorts of people have their own reason (e.g. glory) for wanting to be the one that predetermines it.

I have found a successful workshop exercise to defeat this tendency. I get people to sketch what the answer in their head looks like. Often it all comes from a similar (predictable, conventional) territory. I then give them a picture torn from a magazine at random, which is in a different direction, and tell them to use that to develop new ideas from. It almost doesn't matter what that direction is – it is simply about being liberated from the inner voice that presided over every idea and said: *that doesn't look like what I'm expecting.*

Of course, most strategy isn't done in workshops and it is much harder to defeat our own preconceptions. I think it is partly about cultivating a value system, for yourself or a team you work with, where not knowing is okay – actually more exciting.

4.17 Rekindle Your Curiosity

I am much more curious than I was 20 years ago, when I was mostly operating under the pressure of trying to look like I knew what I was doing. I know I probably *should* know by now, that it would be more impressive, that my books would be more definitive, my conference speeches would feel more actionable. But since I actually spend most of my time working on problems and ideas, curiosity is my best friend and the idea of being an "expert" in advance of properly doing that work is just a recipe for disaster (or a job with "executive head of" in the title!).

4.18 Bring the Strategy to a Point of Focus

There is something beautiful about a well-honed strategy. It comes down to the words chosen being just so. *The business of character* felt like a proper direction, compared with something along the lines of "we are going to set the standards in the executive search industry on professionalism, core competences like judgement and integrity".

In the old model of branding you could leave that to your creative department. Writing a brief where the proposition was too snazzy would look like you were trying to do their job for them. But if you are about to build a brand molecule out of diverse elements, you need what my friend Alex W. calls a brand mantra. It doesn't have to be about the brand, it is just as often about what you are setting out to do. It just needs to be focused, relevant and sure to bring business success as well as cultural change.

Summary of Chapter 4: Strategy: Finding a Cultural Logic

We have looked at a variety of answers (18 in total) to a simple question: how do you come up with a strategic focus, so that your molecule has a purpose and coherence, rather than being just an assemblage of nice ideas?

In keeping with brands being defined as *clusters of cultural ideas*, I find it is better to state your strategy in terms of a *cultural logic*. This makes it clearer what sorts of ideas to develop, choose and revise. It also makes it easier to explain the campaign to everyone involved at every stage – from product manager to PR consultant. It makes tracking research and evaluation simpler to devise. And it roots your ideas in the customer world. It is always possible to supplement this by saying what the commercial logic is too. I am not saying marketing should not drive the business – I am just saying marketing that works in this way is often devised from the outside in, rather than working outwards from brand share targets and spreadsheets.

SECTION
II

A TYPOLOGY OF BRAND IDEAS

Building Your Molecule: 32 Brand Elements

How do you create and develop brands?

I have already suggested that they could be seen as like a molecule, with new cultural ideas being attached to the existing ones. And that you need a definite strategy. You could think of strategy as the *purpose* of the molecule (haemoglobin isn't just a tangled mess of carbon, hydrogen and other elements, it transports oxygen around the blood). If you don't have tight strategy then the danger is you might create a free-associating mess of unconnected ideas. Some companies do find coherence implicitly, for instance companies that do most of their brand ideas in house (or have a long, intimate and deep relationship with others who do the ideas) and have a strong sense of direction without it being spelled out as a brand strategy per se. There needs to be focus and direction.

But where do you get the ideas?

A simple answer is this:

1. Work out which sorts of ideas your market already uses.
2. Compare that with a longer list of ideas that other markets have used.
3. Find new ideas, sparked by "exotic imports" that your market hasn't used before.

To assist you in this, I have set out a list of 32 types of brand idea. I am also producing a brand tarot pack, which you will be able to buy so that – if you are similar to me and you like to play with your hands – you can have a workshop-style tool to play with as you do this. You will find all the details at www.brandtarot.com.

The molecule model says that brands are made out of cultural ideas. Culture is fabulously abundant, like a teeming jungle. Not only are there millions of individual species in this ecology of ideas, but there are very different genera too, classes or types of culture that are different from each other. These general headings are the kind of area we will be looking at in this section. They exist because "culture" is a diverse term encompassing all sorts of things, for instance:

- Symbols, words, images, things with meaning.
- Arts and entertainment, experiences and the resulting feelings/ideas.
- Lifestyle practices, customs, habits.
- Artefacts, designs, manmade objects.
- Technologies, tools, media etc. as extensions of ability.
- Patterns of belonging, allegiance, identity.
- Values, belief systems, knowledge.
- Institutions, organisations, structures, rules.
- Economic activity and exchange.
- Conventions, fashions, modes and tropes.
- Relationships: couples, families, relatives, colleagues.
- Status, hierarchy, aspirations.
- Life stages, development, learning.
- Religion, spirituality, sacredness and reverence.
- Politics, citizenship, class and other divisions.
- Norms, beliefs, conventions and common sense.

In the old model of branding everything cultural was reduced to one heading: "added values". These were mostly about a social class-based identity, being the "right drink" for a male, middle-class, middle-aged, middle manager (probably blended Scotch).

Today social identities are more pick and mix. The same middle-aged manager might be an eco-protestor, community police officer, football coach, be studying for a second or third career and so on. We feel less need to conform to type, life is less predictable, people have a greater range of self-expression and seem more able to compartmentalise different parts of their lives and different identities.

What is obvious from that long list of types of culture is that there are many more types of cultural idea than identity ("this brand is for this sort of person, to reflect and reinforce their station in life"). This section sets out 32 types of cultural ideas that have been attached to brands to good effect. This list is neither definitive nor exhaustive. In developing this book I have veered between lists as short as 7 and as long as 98 headings. Coming out with 32 headings was a process of trial and error – ensuring that the ideas under each heading seemed to go together, that they genuinely did seem to tap a distinct part of cultural life, that there was more to any heading than one narrow idea that had been repeated in a few settings, and so on.

The value in having this catalogue of headings and examples is that they may inspire new applications in your market. It seems that many breakthrough ideas are a remake of ideas that have already worked in other categories. A lot of lingerie advertising over the years had been sexy, and even some chocolate advertising, but Häagen-Dazs was the first to use this type of eroticised idea for ice cream, certainly in the UK.

Does it matter if a different category has used a similar idea? Apparently it doesn't. Innocent smoothies are a virtual carbon copy of the ideas behind Ben & Jerry's ice cream:

- Founded by old friends.
- Producing high-minded statements and manifestos.
- Hippy values, packaging, language.
- All natural ingredients.
- Measuring ingredients in "chunks" or "apples".
- Expensive, premium.
- Backing charities and having a social conscience.
- Holding a Woodstock-style music festival.

The one big difference (and it is a big difference) with Innocent's products are their health benefits. If they had both been ice creams or frozen yoghurts then it would have looked like a ripoff. But because they are in different categories – i.e. different categories in people's minds, not just different markets – there seems to be very little confusion or drawback.

It is similar with Accenture using Tiger Woods to make Nike-style advertising (*Go on, be a Tiger*). It seems to work. Especially as there is a credible link: that Accenture had sponsored golf for many years (since long before Nike got into the sport). I know management consultants who like this advertising and I suspect their clients do too. It makes something a bit more heroic and exciting out of what in reality often concerns projects with titles like "enterprise-wide software systems implementation"!

I am not suggesting that the only way to come up with an idea is to copy someone else's. These two examples are rare in being so close in form to the originals. Rather, if there are 32 of these categories, and your competitors are only using 8 of them, there are often opportunities that have been missed among the other 24. I have used this approach on projects and it has proved helpful. For instance, in a workshop with product marketing people from The Co-operative Bank, we looked at other types of retailing (clothes shops, internet auctions and so on) and asked: "Are there any ideas they are using that we could adapt?" We quickly came up with a list of about six strong contenders that we would not have necessarily thought of otherwise. And an example of that style of thinking that has already launched is HSBC running a January sale.

To adopt those sorts of ideas, you need a different approach than "messaging". Many of these cultural ideas do not "say" anything explicitly. They involve people, who will come to their own conclusions. The underlying message of establishing a cultural idea that really does stand apart from your category is one of *currency*. People could have got that idea through joining a community, seeing the product being worn, talking to enthusiasts, taking part in an experience . . . What the idea tells people is that your brand is a living tradition: *the way things are done these days*.

Chapter Structure

The 32 cultural ideas we will be exploring in this section are wide-ranging, but I have used a common structure, so they can be compared and referenced more easily.

Cultural Heading

Brands are usually made up of a mixture of different ideas. But it is possible to categorise these into types of idea: spectacular ideas, faith ideas and so on.

General Description of This Cultural Territory, with Nonbrand Examples

None of these types of cultural idea (unlike the idea of "advertising" or "design") is restricted to brand building. They were already features in our own and other historical cultures. They seem to point to a shared human nature. Understanding the ideas on this level, the insight behind them, why people seem to find them compelling, how they seem to work makes this more than just a list of brand ideas. And it also makes the whole exercise of working on marketing campaigns more interesting: every project shines a torch on a slightly different aspect of human nature. These sections draw on several decades that I have spent conducting focus groups and consorting with anthropologists, psychoanalysts, cognitive psychologists and anybody else I thought could put the question of how brands worked in some sort of context.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Earlier in the book I suggested that the tasks of coming up with new brands and promoting existing ones both came down to this question of a cultural idea.

Successful new brands often put a cultural idea into the product. This anticipates and responds to something in everyday life – as if they had read our minds. Like Gary Hamel's example of *table-ready salad*, which is the latest in a series of products whose idea is *restaurant food at home*.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

I have also made sure to highlight one example of the idea used to promote an existing brand; in these cases you can see the importance of there being a credible link.

Other Instructive Examples

As the heading says, I have included other briefer examples, to explore the same cultural idea from different angles and in different settings. As Ingvar Kamprad, IKEA founder, once wrote: "Nothing succeeds like a good example." The best way to come up with ideas is often absorbing lots of inspiring examples.

A Periodic Table for Brand Ideas

In initial drafts of the book I had all the types of idea set out as a long list. Several readers pointed out that this could be a bit overwhelming and suggested that some sort of structure or grouping might be helpful.

Such a structure could only ever be provisional. There is no reason I know of in theory to assume that there is any underlying "order" in culture. As a street map it would always be more like London than New York – something evolved not designed. Theories that do assume that there is some underlying logic tend to be simplistic, reductive and misleading (like the idea of the "selfish gene", which has a hard time explaining altruism or anything frivolous and unconcerned with survival or mating chances).

However, much to my surprise, there did prove to be quite a simple and intuitive way of dividing the ideas under different headings, both in the type of cultural idea being described and also in the "scale" of the idea. Rather pleasingly, given all the stuff on building a brand molecule, this turns out to be something like a periodic table – an idea I am sure most readers will remember from school chemistry lessons.

	(A) Personal	(B) Immediate	(C) Partisan	(D) Official
New traditions	1A. Habits *Nando's* *Häagen-Dazs*	1B. Spectacular *Sephora* *Selfridges*	1C. Leadership *Chanel* *Apple*	1D. Organisation *Pret a Manger* *Honda*
Belief systems	2A. Cognitive *Dyson* *IBM*	2B. Appreciation *Nespresso* *Johnnie Walker*	2C. Faith *Nurofen* *McKinsey*	2D. Atlas *Lonely Planet* *HSBC*
Time	3A. Regression *Mini* *Gorillaz*	3B. Now *Zara* *Budweiser*	3C. Nostalgia *Nigo* *VW Bug*	3D. Calendar *National Lottery* *Penguin 70*
Herd instincts	4A. Initiation *Alpha Course* *Fitness First*	4B. Crowds *C4 Cricket* *Fruitstock*	4C. Clans *Fast Company* *Harley*	4D. Crazes *Gmail* *iPod*
Connecting	5A. Co-author *Wikipedia* *HP*	5B. Socialising *Friends Reunited* *LEGO*	5C. Cooperative *Craigslist* *Biomat*	5D. Local *Saturn* *Guinness*
Luxury	6A. Concierge *Ocado* *Top Shop*	6B. Plenty *Waterstone's* *Hennessey*	6C. Exclusive *Beautifulpeople* *Amex Black*	6D. Exotic *YO! Sushi* *Virgin Atlantic*
Provocative	7A. Erotic *Coco de Mer* *Scruffs*	7B. Cathartic *KFC* *Pepperami*	7C. Scandal *Club 18–30* *Big Brother*	7D. Radical *Innocent* *Persil*
Control	8A. Personalised *Trailfinders* *Nike iD*	8B. In Control *Blackberry* *Barclaycalm*	8C. Competition *Pop Idol* *Accenture*	8D. Grading *eBay* *Economist*

Figure II.1 The periodic table – a typology of cultural ideas

The headings may not mean too much at this stage (although the brand examples listed will give some indication of the sorts of thing I mean), but to start with the overall structure and then work into the detail, Figure II.1 is the periodic table in all its glory.

I will deal with headings for each row of this table (1. New traditions, 2. Belief systems . . .) as well as the individual types of idea under each heading (in row 1: A. Habits, B. Spectaculars . . .) in the chapters that follow.

But it is probably worth saying something now about the columns I see these, just as in the real periodic table of elements, as saying something about the "scale" of the idea. It wasn't always easy to divide up the ideas in this way and there are several decisions that are certainly contestable, but it surprised me how well it works in nearly all cases. Perhaps because most cultural ideas do seem to roughly fall into four "spheres":

A. *Personal*: ideas that are entertained in a very individual and idiosyncratic way, for instance personal fantasies, fascinations, preferences and interactive products such as customisation and self-publishing.
B. *Immediate*: ideas that are experienced and felt in the here and now – be they aesthetic experiences, sporting events, social interactions (and the flow of conversation). These often have a social context, for instance being in a public space, rather than being private like those in the first row.
C. *Partisan*: social ideas that are "bigger" than anything we experience individually. They often have to do with identity and allegiance; for instance clans, taking sides, belonging to an elite. This level reminds me a bit of traditional village life in that the types of idea tend to be quite "anthropological".
D. *Official*: these are the "biggest", most institutional forms of culture – something "given" rather than chosen. This is more like the cultural life of a nation – its public forms – rather than individual or social choices. This is also the level at which the effects of globalisation are most seen.

All these realms coexist and also play a distinct role in our lives.

This book is about marketing to adults and there is no doubt that we progress in developmental terms to being more involved in the bigger layers – throughout adult life, as well as in childhood. Concern with "the species" and wider issues of legacy, ethics and "the big picture" often only come to people in the middle of life – a stage that Eric Erikson called *generativity*.[1] It is a subject well worth reading up on, incidentally, if you do any marketing to the over-45s. I have found it very useful on several projects with this age group and it is a great antidote to the view that ageing is all negative (marketing to the "greys").

It is an interesting aside that modern brands – as molecules drawn from ideas in many different parts of this table – often work on all of these levels at once. One thing that makes old-school brand campaigns (i.e. a monotonously repetitive advertising idea, usually) seem so outmoded is that they are *one-dimensional.* Brands like Nike draw their vigour from the fact that they work at all levels of culture: we may have a personal take on them (we might have designed our own pair of iD shoes), be involved in powerful immediate experiences (like sports tournaments or *Run London* events), be drawn into tribal allegiances (to different sports, teams or role models) and also have a view on the company, which we feel has a character as an organisation, whose towns we can visit.

1

New Traditions

The word tradition can be taken to mean all of our shared culture. And that was what I had in mind when I wrote my first book and gave *new traditions* pride of place, describing the role of brands in a condition of postmodern uncertainty as *ideas to live by*.

The ideas in this section take "traditions" in a more narrow sense of aspects of culture that are deeply *conventional* and resemble traditional customs and forms.

- 1A. *Habit ideas* explores the way in which certain retail venues and brand interactions programme our behaviour and become part of our daily routines. Brands like Starbucks rely on the fact that people like me are used to starting the day with them.
- 1B. *Spectacular ideas* explores brand experiences that have a sense of awe, magic and wonder about them – like the sacred festivals of traditional societies – and that often introduce us to different ways of life; almost like visiting the traditions of another country (perhaps a "magical kingdom" like Disneyland, which is a classic example).
- 1C. *Leadership ideas* explores the role of leading figures, the lynchpin of traditional cultures, to whom in extreme examples (like personality cults) we cede authority. The leaders of companies (current or historical) can take up this role and be an important part of the brand, as can leading designers and creative directors.

Table II.1 New traditions

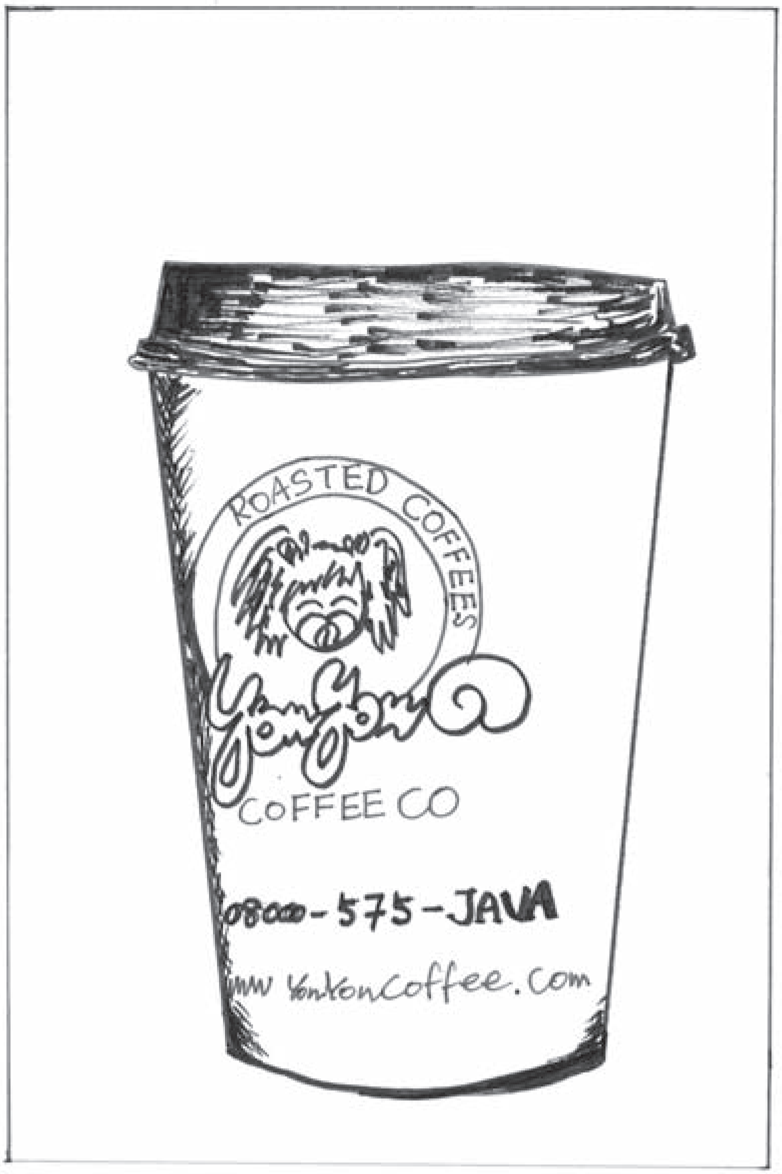
1A. Habits	1B. Spectacular	1C. Leadership	1D. Organisation
Nando's	*Sephora*	*Chanel*	*Pret a Manger*
Häagen-Dazs	*Selfridges*	*Apple*	*Honda*

- 1D. *Organisation ideas* explores the part that a company or organisation often plays in the brand molecule, taking the place of traditional institutions in people's lives. It has been suggested that we are much more aware of the company behind each brand these days. It also seems more common to have a company name that is the brand name as well. Ideas about the company can direct our thoughts on what the brand will be "good at" as well as questions about the company's values.

Because these ideas relate to traditional forms of culture they tend to be very enduring, central parts of the brand molecule and what can be added is often determined by these elements. So it seemed a good place to start.

1A. Habit Ideas

All human societies have customs, which shape the way that people go about a large part of their everyday life. They partly relate to circumstance, setting and need – for instance river folk tend to pay more attention to hygiene than prairie hunters (you don't pollute your own river, but you can leave a rubbish tip if you are striking camp and moving on). There are innate forms: all societies have burial rituals, ancestor myths, incest taboos, beliefs about weather and so on. But they are also subject to invention, elaboration, random creative variation. Anything cultural involving a process or format has the potential to set up a distinctive set of habits. If they come to form part of our daily routines they are ingrained, and are much harder to shift than "preferences", which are a conscious choice. I worked with BBC2 and one of the key lessons from research about its brand was that its scheduling was key: the way it would jump from a youth programme to a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1A. HABIT

gardening programme and so on. You never knew what was around the next corner, whereas most other TV channels flow and expect viewers to stay put all night. BBC2 created different sorts of viewing habits to other stations.

Habits marketing strategies have become a mainstay of my work. They seem to work particularly well for those with a retail outlet, things you interact with (including media), things you eat or otherwise have occasions for. And actually if you think about it, that probably accounts for about half of what we buy! Habits marketing seems to rest on a brave, stubborn or accidental determination to create a different world for customers. Often cultural imports from places where they do things slightly differently can be strongly habit forming, as can new media experiences where we have to learn the ropes. It is all related to what I called *reality design* in my last book – changing the experience and context. Ideally these changes will not just be stylistic, but will offer practical advantages: being able to sleep better on a flight (BA), being able to choose unfamiliar food more easily (YO! Sushi), being able to listen to more varied music playlists (iPod Shuffle).

The key features that *habit brands* share in common are:

- a unique format, design, structure or process;
- frequency of experience, familiarity;
- an underlying fit or utility;
- being part of people's everyday routines;
- being in areas of life where customs are important, e.g. food rituals.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

At Nando's, the African love of fried chicken (the chain originates in South Africa) is combined with Portuguese Piri-Piri hot sauces handed down via Mozambique. It offers fresh natural quality and tastes. It has an exotic, eccentric but informal style of presentation, for instance in the cartoon graphics and language, used on the menus.

A key thing about this brand is that it also has a different take on the standard restaurant format. You order at the counter first and then your meal is brought to your table; meanwhile it is up to you to collect your Piri-Piri sauces. And as a result it seems like a restaurant, not a fast-food joint. A friend of mine is so hooked that his company website included, in the information section, the distance to its nearest Nando's in paces.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Häagen-Dazs has succeeded in owning an occasion: the video-at-home night in. It established this not through advertising but through a long-running commitment to being in the right place at the right time, with distribution in Blockbusters, sponsoring major movie releases like *Bridget Jones's Diary* and running "perfect night in" competitions.

Going after an occasion like this is a key habits strategy; other examples include KitKat/Diet Coke going after work breaks, O2 doing a text happy hour (the after-work occasion), Cobra Beer owning the curry meal and so on.

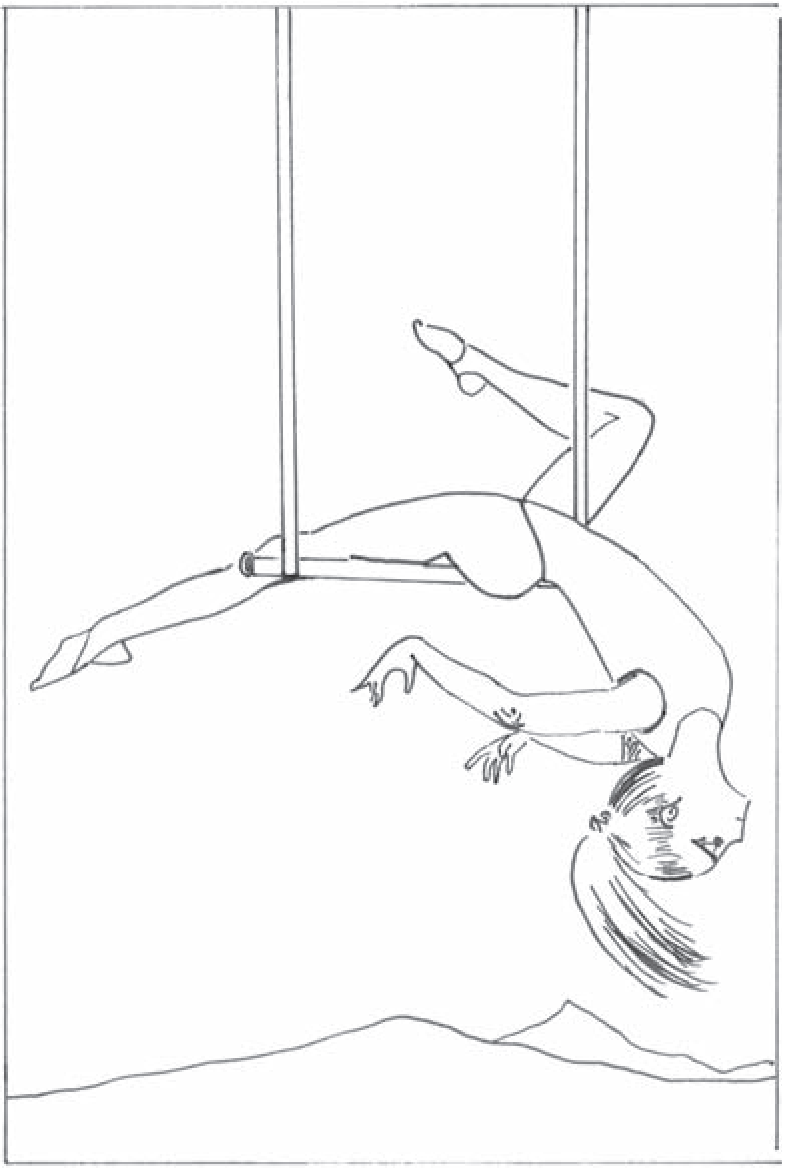
Other Instructive Examples

World of Warcraft is played across the internet with kingdom-sized hoards of other players (represented by avatar characters that players control) in a realistic graphical environment. It is what is known as a MMORPG (massive multiplayer online role-playing game). It has extensive fantasy environments that you can explore in lush detail. You custom make your own character and ascend through levels gaining more powers and talents. And the game has its own currency, with intense interest in China where players were raiding the game for gold (often scavenging by grabbing the loot from others' kills) and then reselling it. There are reports of characters, currency and property changing hands for large sums in such games. For instance, an Australian gamer is reported to have bought a virtual island within the Project Entropia game for $26 500. As well as being a habits brand in its own right, it made for an interesting extension to another brand that relies on daily routines: Coca-Cola sponsored the official launch of World of Warcraft in China. It created amazing replicas of some of the game environments in real life and shot an epic TV commercial featuring top Chinese girl band SHE; they transform into animated characters to battle an ogre (their manager) and win a treasure chest full of iCoke as their reward. This is another example of an iPod–U2 style brand marriage.

IKEA stores are described by many as like visiting another country or a theme park. The extent to which they have their own customs, routes, foods, names for things and so on is a key part of the experience. It is part of what makes an IKEA trip a bit like tourism: a day out for the family rather than just a shopping run. Habits include noting products for collection downstairs, the set path followed and eating Swedish meatballs. People often develop their own habits around this format too; for instance, I met quite a few people in research groups who made separate scouting missions before the main buying and collecting day. And there was even a lesbian action group in the States called DYKEA, which organised its activities around IKEA shopping trips.

1B. Spectacular Ideas

The classic spectacle brand is Disneyland. This is an eighth wonder of postmodernism (and I can highly recommend Umberto Eco's essay on hyperreality,[1] in which he concludes that Disneyland exists to make the rest of America seem real!). But it is also an idea with deeply traditional roots. All societies have made a distinction between the sacred and the profane. Certain places, people, rituals and objects have been treated with a sense of awe and reverence. In Native American culture, which often had no formal system of religious worship, it was the wilds of nature that elicited these feelings. Societies often developed spectacles – festivals, processions, ritual enactments, carnivals, impressive buildings or natural structures – to produce this sense of awe and involvement in the scheme of things. Modern spectacles – from cathedral-like architecture to certain forms of entertainment, show or festival – seem descended from these forms of culture.



1B. SPECTACULAR

Ideas that fit into this category produce an attitude of reverence: a sense of magic, elevation and apartness from the rest of "ordinary" culture and specialness. Many galleries and museums, such as the Guggenheim in Bilbao and the British Museum, with its new covered courtyard, use the architecture of the building as a framing "temple" – and these spectacular settings are almost more of a draw than the exhibitions. The Tate Modern is the most popular tourist destination in London (from a standing start only four years ago). It is built around an enormous hall, once housing a turbine, which has been used for some amazing installations; for instance one that projected a huge burning sun-like disc at the far end of the hall. The current exhibit is made out of towering cityscapes of white plastic boxes, which apparently represent a moment in Rachel Whiteread's life when she was moving both house and studio. The Tate Modern is gallery-as-brand and feels very much a product of the "New Britain" project in the late 1990s, celebrating new British art.

Spectacular branding has long been a tactic employed by institutions and powerful individuals to legitimise themselves. One such historical episode was the Medici sponsoring of the Renaissance. As bankers (in medieval biblical terms, guilty of usury) working under the watchful disapproval of the church, it made sense to pour money into the new humanism in philosophy, art and science. It was as natural and effective a strategy as placing a daughter (Catherine de Medici) on the throne of France. In contrast with other less subtle forms of propaganda, art is seductive, placing you alongside current tastes and enthusiasms, making the view of the world you want to sell attractive and grand. The lavish ceremonial culture of the British monarchy was a fairly recent invention, on the part of Victorian politicians like Disraeli, in response to Queen Victoria's withdrawal from public life and an attempt to "sell" the idea of monarchy to an increasingly republican general public.

The qualities that *spectacle brands* share are:

- immersing people in a richly detailed setting;
- making it larger than life, prompting childlike wonder;
- otherness cues: culture, food, characters, clothes, language, space design;
- having laws, rules, restrictions, conventions – as if it were a "kingdom";

- stylising, removing from real life, make different/apart;
- a dramatic entrance or façade.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Sephora is a fragrance and cosmetics retailer that applied these principles to its basic brand. Founded in France in 1969, and acquired by LVMH in 1997, this chain has expanded rapidly into markets like the USA where it now has over 100 stores. There are small-scale adaptations of the basic formula and in any scale it looks stunning, with black-and-white interiors and products out on shelves (rather than behind glass as in department stores, forcing you to deal with salespeople). The larger stores are truly spectacular, combining black marble, lush red carpets, floor-to-ceiling mirrors, atmospheric lighting. The flagship store in the Champs Elysée in Paris was designed by architect Gerard Barrau and, at around ten years old, still feels like another of the eight wonders of modern consumerism. The feeling is of something like a temple to beauty, but with the glitz of a modern hotel lobby. This sense of reverence well suits a company selling brands like Chanel, which also draw on the idea of being iconic (quasi-religious).

In contrast to its lush decor, the concept of this store is one of a radical democracy, freedom and choice, where you can browse for hours trying things for yourself. If the company had made the stores look functional, this democracy would have run the danger of feeling less special (like a bigger Superdrug). The grandeur is strategic, combining with the merchandising idea to make the customer feel like royalty. It is a common type of strategy that I call *compensation*: introducing a cultural idea to overturn a potential weakness. Another example is Bud Light, which combines a lighter-tasting (and hence less manly) beer with some of the most chauvinist, albeit entertaining, advertising of recent years.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

The 2005 spring promotion at Selfridges was *Vegas Supernova*. Attractions included a spectacular entrance provided by window displays from artist

David La Chapelle, neon lights, showgirls, celebrities Jade Jagger and Pamela Anderson, a wedding chapel, a cocktail lounge, a world record number of Elvis impersonators, limited-edition Vegas-themed products from designers, singer Liberace's costumes and his white Cadillac car encrusted with rhinestones, as well as Vegas-themed displays from fashion to food. This event followed on from successful events in previous years, covering Brazil, Bollywood and Tokyo.

Reporting the Vegas event, the *Financial Times* (16 April 2005) described Selfridges as "retail world leader in creating the retail store as theme park". And all of the Selfridges promotions have been carefully angled towards fantasy and escapism: the cutism (*kawaiii*) of Tokyo, the film industry of Bombay . . . I am not suggesting that Vegas itself is a quasi-religious experience, but putting on a festival devoted to exotic imports is. The Mandan (a Great Plains tribe) held a religious festival where rare white buffalo hides, often traded over a great distance with other tribes, held pride of place. Liberace's white Cadillac is arguably similar here! And in the West End of London, which has been having a difficult decade, Selfridges could be argued as creating a kind of pilgrimage through these events.

Other Instructive Examples

Paperchase (in its flagship London store) manages to elevate stationery to an art form. Niketown and the new Apple Stores are also spectacular retailers.

The Saatchi gallery and collection elevated this (stylish and aggressive upstart) ad agency into a different league than the rest of the industry. The difference between the Saatchi collection and, say, BP (which must spend orders of magnitude more in arts sponsorship, grants etc.) is that Charles Saatchi was a modern Medici: being at the heart of a new movement in Brit Art, with a large hand in shaping it. Conversely, the sort of art that the Saatchis collected through the 1980s, like the famous works by Damien Hirst, was born out of the same age and values as their advertising: graphic, often shocking, yet seductively beautiful. What this connection did was legitimise the Saatchis and made them a household name, a leading British business (whereas the ad industry as a whole was not taken nearly so seriously, being seen as vulgar and not entirely to be trusted).

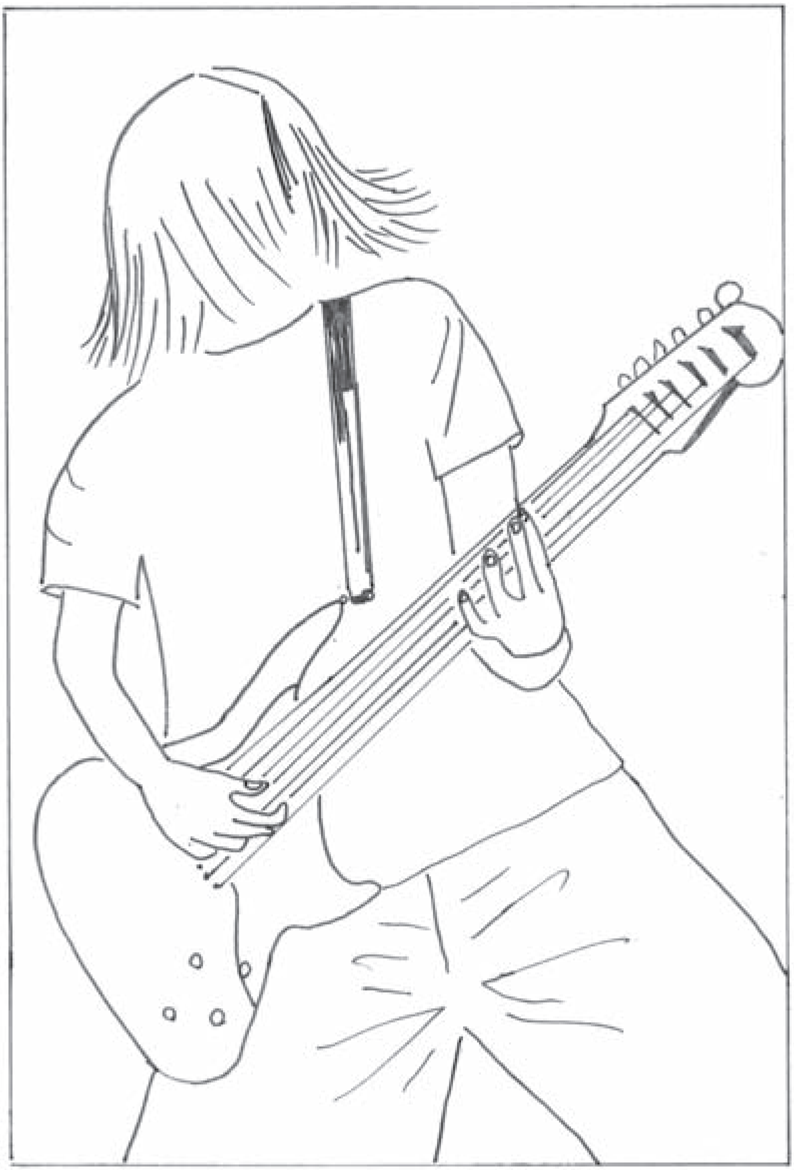
The Cirque du Soleil took an existing formula and updated it for an audience who grew up on modern adventure movies, combining it with anarchic modern street entertainment, and taking out the animals. The shows are truly spectacular. The latest, called *Ka*, involves pitched battles, martial arts and giant puppets and cost $165 million to stage (more than all 36 Broadway shows added together). On the other hand, the ticket prices are high and the circus group makes $600 million a year. The point worth bearing in mind when planning a spectacular event is that these days it has to be pretty amazing.

Nevertheless it does seem possible to create a Mecca, treating a particular type of product with great reverence for relatively little money. An example would be the Carluccio delicatessen, which probably sells the most expensive mushrooms in London. But with Carluccio there is another ingredient, the visionary founder . . .

1C. Leadership Ideas

There is no aspect of culture more traditional than the special figure of the leader. Appropriately enough, iconic brands (a term derived from objects of religious worship) can often be traced back to the personality cult of leaders with strong creative visions. These visions are often slightly crazy or avant garde, out of kilter with the status quo. There is a sort of inspired madness that seems to go with being a creative visionary or entrepreneur. Iconic designs are often associated with visionary designers.

The leader's story – their rise, battles, departures and returns – is often a key hook that people identify with. These stories are archetypal: David and Goliath (Richard Branson), the prodigal son (Steve Jobs), Romulus and Remus (Bill Gates and Paul Allen). And that must be a strain for the recipients of all these projections – how can you keep level headed when you are the object of worship and a lightning rod for such primal emotions? There are many prominent examples of such visionary leaders being either



1C. LEADERSHIP

expelled or leading their companies into peril; perhaps that goes with the territory too.

Being associated with big personalities makes a company appear to have a broader place in history. That can add a great deal of authority and weight. It can also be a burden, as was perhaps the case at The Body Shop. The showdown came in 2001 when Anita Roddick accused the company of becoming "a dysfunctional coffin" since it had gone public and started running itself primarily for financial results. The sales and operating profits have improved since Roddick left. But most people I have talked to in the branding world feel it is a dead brand, propped up by legacy distribution and customer habits. Time will tell whether being a company with "nice" products is enough; it also used to have a beating heart. And even if it coasts successfully for a while, nobody should forget that the only reason it got to be a globally recognised brand was Anita Roddick's passion.

The qualities that *personality brands* share are:

- a creative, visionary, passionate, slightly crazy leader (e.g. Ingvar Kamprad at IKEA);
- or a creative person who is responsible for the wild ideas (e.g. Tom Ford at Gucci);
- That person's mythology, often archetypal (e.g. Coco Chanel was an orphan);
- a cult of the personality, unquestioned authority;
- dictatorship: strong instructions or pronouncements;
- a distinct and (in conventional terms) odd creative vision and output;
- playing with taboos, categories, distinctions;
- a unique and instantly identifiable range, the product of a single mind and taste (not a false executional consistency, but a deep-seated identity).

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Fashion giant Chanel has a strong awareness of its own tradition, stories and culture. Anybody working at Chanel has to go through an induction to ensure that they "get" this heritage. Its marketing reflects this heritage, my favourite being the wonderful TV ads for Chanel No 5, like the Vanessa Paradis *Little Red Riding Hood* spots. The whole Chanel brand is carefully groomed and controlled, right down to the clunk of the cosmetics packaging and the cut of its couture. It looks effortless, but it took a lot of effort to build this business. Coco Chanel hated being called a genius because it implied luck not hard work. In its heyday the company was a trailblazing entrepreneur as well as a fashion house. Chanel No 5 was the first perfume to be sold worldwide.

All of that is in stark contrast to Chanel's origins. Coco Chanel was a revolutionary, visionary, charismatic founder. She had no formal training. She famously dressed in men's clothing and could claim more credit than any for a shift from the corsetry that dominated women's fashion, to a looser, simpler and much more comfortable elegance. And she improvised. During the First World War, when materials were scarce, Coco started using jersey, previously a fabric used only for men's underpants. She was literally outrageous.

One reason the Chanel brand has remained strong must be its ability to attract new visionaries, notably Karl Lagerfeld. His autumn/winter show in 2004 was a direct homage to the original spirit of androgyny, inspired by a 1920s photo of Coco Chanel in men's breeches and a tweed jacket. Lagerfeld took this theme to a new extreme by using men as some of the models for his womenswear range.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Apple is everyone's favourite example of a successful company in 2005, with the runaway success of the iPod. But let's remember that the whole turnaround started with the return of the co-founder Steve Jobs, initially for a salary of $1, in 1997. On his return, Jobs immediately streamlined the product range down to just the G3. A year later, Apple launched the iMac (to replace the older, cheap range of Performa products). In design terms this was like no other computer and heralded a new age when Apple would be known as much for its cute, minimalist design as its computer power.

How much of the turnaround was down to genuine leadership skills and strategic genius – and how much down to a newfound self-belief and passion, great products and design, bold launches and development? Hard to say. But Apple must be one of the few companies whose customer base could be called fans, and whose CEO's announcements are watched by millions by streaming webcast. Steve Jobs is definitely a *big* factor in the company's success.

Other Instructive Examples

The Virgin brand is unusual in its brand-stretching strategy, which some feel may have gone a bridge too far in the case of Virgin Cola (which flopped in the States) or Virgin Rail (in its early years of poor trains and service records). But it is above all a visionary brand, and might as well be called Branson Enterprises. Richard Branson represents an eccentric, entrepreneurial and anti-establishment streak in British culture.

Many great businesses have towering leaders who are larger than life, inspiring followers, investors and consumers alike. One question that arises from this is how to "follow that" when the leader dies or retires. Disney seemed to take advantage, after Walt, of the opportunity to evolve and raise its game; whereas Coca-Cola has never seemed the same since it suddenly and tragically lost its visionary CEO Roberto Goizueta. The Atkins empire, originator of a worldwide diet craze only a few years ago, declared bankruptcy less than three years after the death of founder Dr Atkins.

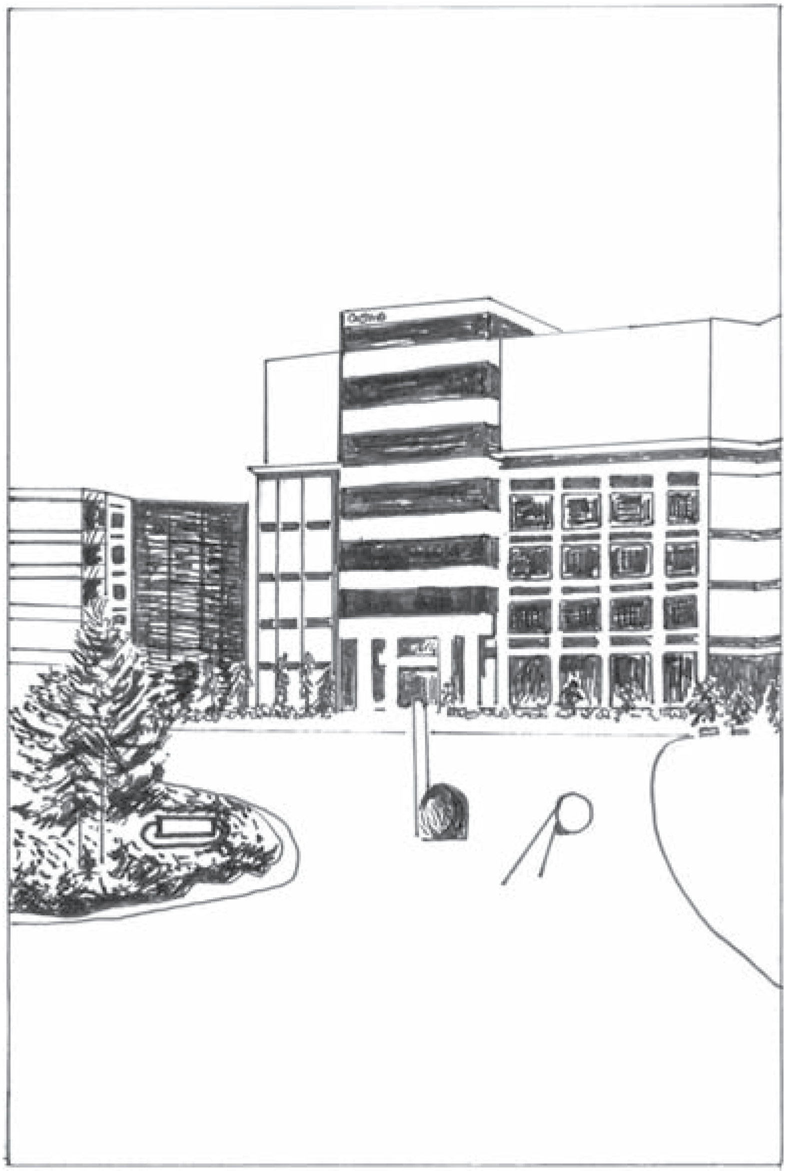
Fashion retailer Hennes & Mauritz has pursued a strategy of partnerships with visionary designers (the latest being Stella McCartney). Puma has followed a similar course, within its successful *Sportslifestyle* strategy. Most sports brands have found the fashionability of their brands confusing. For many years Nike refused to acknowledge it, sticking doggedly to sports in its marketing, afraid that if it yielded to the insight that most of its shoes and clothes were bought as street fashion, then perhaps it could also go out of fashion. Puma has faced the facts of sports apparel. It has partnered with famous designers like Philippe Starck and photographers like Jürgen Teller. Its concept stores are minimalist, cool, and full of visitors from Japan buying the latest products in different colours. Some of the designs, such as the shoes fastened with wraparound strips of Velcro and elastic or the elasticated all-in-one shoes, seem like they would not be particularly good to run or play sport in (mine are also slippery in the wet, which is not a great feature in a running shoe). But who cares, when they are cool?

1D. Organisation Ideas

There is an academic theory of brands that suggests that the typical brand progresses through six stages.[2] The first four stages reflect classical brand theory and depict a progression from product and direct response through to iconic brands. The last two stages reflect a further theory that was also doing the rounds in the agency world in early 1990s. It was about two key developments:

- A recognition (for instance in research groups) that people were seeing the company behind the brand and this was a key component in people's decisions and attitudes.
- Growing interest in corporate ethics (externally) and vision and values (internally).

In the network society (where I can find out pretty much everything about your company on Google in five minutes) arguably you can no longer keep brand image and company reality separate. The whole notion of branding seemed to be like a "special effect", where generations unused to successive dazzling forms of media advertising would take what they saw as approximating to cultural truth. Today I think a key distinction that consumers I meet in groups are able to make is between the advertising agency and its client; hiring BBH doesn't make you cool, necessarily, it just makes your ads pleasant. Another form of literacy, related to this, is being able to separate and think about the company behind the brand. Even "classical" image brands like Nike have many touchpoints – the stores, the stories in the newspapers, sporting events – where people encounter an organisation and not



1D. ORGANISATION

just a shoe. I just stuck the word "Nike" into Google and the sixth site listed was the *Boycott Nike Home Page*!

Another reason companies are eclipsing brands is that so many more of the powerful brands now are also the name of the company; in media, services, retail and IT, this is the norm. They cause the "made-up" brand names of fmcg to look outmoded. That may be part of the problem for grocery brands facing stiff opposition from the own-label brands like Tesco Finest. Supermarkets like Waitrose may actually be stronger brands than the manufacturer brands they stock!

When deciding as a potential customer whether to give your business to a company, the key question is something like: "What are they good for?" This is a combination of two thoughts: "What are they good at?" and "What will that do for me?" The benefit does not have to be rational. Apple is good at design and its products make customers feel cool. The Toyota Prius is good for the planet and owners feel righteous. Some have made a positive feature of the company in their molecule, inviting customers beyond the façade of consumer-only branding and sharing the operating philosophy of the company: how we think, how we do things, why we do them and so on. This is not an entirely new strategy, for instance the classic Avis "*We Try Harder*". It is just that in an age when Bob Lutz, General Motors chairman, can write a regular blog, the ability of companies to take people backstage has obviously come on a bit!

Features that *company brands* share in common are:

- they let people see past the brand to the company;
- (ideally) authenticity, honesty, transparency;
- ideas that internal and external audiences can get involved in;
- agenda setting, taking a lead on issues or key PR stories.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Pret a Manger: the founding idea for this company 20 years ago was to update the sandwich, providing fresh, nutritious food on the go. The founders did not come from the catering trade and made their process up as they went along. They now have hundreds of outlets and thousands of staff. And it still has the refreshing feel of a handmade company.

The company believes in two main principles: taste (the customer experience) and staff (employee happiness). *Fortune* rated it one of the top 10 companies to work for in Europe. The reason I know so much about Pret (apart from the fact that a friend of mine used to work there) is that its marketing is mostly about how and why it does things. For instance, the other day while I enjoyed a Pret latte, I read a message on the card cup telling me in some detail about how the company services its espresso machines. It helps that its taste policies involve organic this and fresh grown that – so it does have a good story to tell. And the restaurants are full of notices like "our mission". It is a company that is proud of how it does things and takes you on something like a "factory tour" every time you visit – in contrast with the many brands designed to hide the ugly reality, substituting a "Mr Kipling" façade for the truth of mass production.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Honda has addressed not the corporate workings of the company but its engineering philosophy, with adverts like *Grrr* (for diesel) and *Cog* (for the Accord), which are pieces of filmic art and have won many awards. However, it should be noted that the company does make a fascinating subject:

> [Satoshi Toshida] said Honda wished to communicate its unique corporate culture throughout key, high-growth Asian markets. Toshida added that "for Honda, striving to turn our dreams for our customers into reality – to make the impossible, possible – is part of our corporate DNA. It's what our founder, Soichiro Honda, called our Challenging Spirit." By linking the campaign's "We love challenges" theme to Honda's global "The Power of Dreams" corporate slogan, Honda hopes to demonstrate how its leadership in cutting-edge technologies such as ASIMO, the world's first humanoid robot, and fuel cell

> vehicles brings multiple benefits to the everyday products bought by its millions of customers.[3]

The company's website features historical inventions such as the first ever car navigation system (using gyroscope, not satellite) and a prototype four-wheel-steering system. It ought to be making documentaries not ads, if you ask me. Meanwhile, any agency that can't do interesting advertising – or create interesting brand experiences, exhibitions and so on – for a company like that should be shot! But I will admit, those Honda ads are about as good as advertising gets and it's no surprise that they come from the same agency that has produced 30 years of incredible television work for Nike, Wieden & Kennedy.

Other Instructive Examples

IBM's *Deep Blue* chess match is still one of my favourite examples of modern marketing, making history as well as the news when Deep Blue won the rematch. It was a very precise symbol: the most powerful computer company in the world (emphasising its difference from cheap copies) but also a personal, human, engaging enterprise (not the faceless corporation satirised in *2001* as HAL, which is "IBM" shifted along one letter in each initial). The IBM "autobiography", written by former CEO Lou Gerstner, is well worth a read too. It demonstrates how internal and external communications can play a vital role in company change. And it is also a great story.

When Anders Dahlvig took over as IKEA President he had a very quiet first year, deliberately keeping a low profile and getting things fixed in the management structure, supply chain and organisation. But at the end of that year he staged a piece of internal communications so far out it almost could have gone into the spectacular section: the "all our profits go to co-workers day". IKEA had experienced a long run of strong business growth and profit, so it was high time for some sort of bonus. But this scheme was much more than that. Like *Deep Blue* it was a very strategic move. Dahlvig's whole project was about getting the entire workforce to take control of the company. Rather than trying to replace or supersede the firm's visionary founder, he wanted to use the transition to get people at all levels running the company. What could have said that better than giving the profits (which formerly went straight to the private owners) to the workers? And the idea caught on externally as well. Members of the public in some markets (like Germany) actually saved up their purchases for that day, so that the money would go to the staff.

2

Belief Systems

Because of a commitment to emotional (i.e. entertaining) advertising, information has often been portrayed as a poor relation of "proper" branding. Information is seen by agencies as the product spec that may change with successive models, while the brand will play a more enduring role in establishing and maintaining preference. Nothing could be further from the truth in reality.

Basic assumptions (based on information and beliefs), customer learning and development, systems of knowledge like science and guiding people through the unknown are among the most powerful approaches to branding, because they are foundations that everything else is built on.

- 2A. *Cognitive ideas* is about the distinctions and basic choices that people make, before they get into the details (including subtle differences in image). How we categorise a market, what we judge important, what contexts these brands fit into and so on all have to do with deeper patterns of knowledge, belief and information.
- 2B. *Appreciation ideas* looks at a common strategy – educating the customer in order to develop the market. Obviously it tends to work best in markets where the appreciation is underdeveloped and/or where it is possible to be an aficionado; but this list includes not just fine foods and wines, but also topics like playing poker.
- 2C. *Faith ideas*. Many of our decisions are guided by expert systems and their proponents, in which we trust. In a world where 10% of adults

Table II.2 Belief systems

2A. Cognitive	2B. Appreciation	2C. Faith	2D. Atlas
Dyson	*Nespresso*	*Nurofen*	*Lonely Planet*
IBM	*Johnnie Walker*	*McKinsey*	*HSBC*

tried the Atkins diet and most seem to consult horoscopes, it is premature to say we no longer trust in authorities; although our faith in government and public institutions is another story.

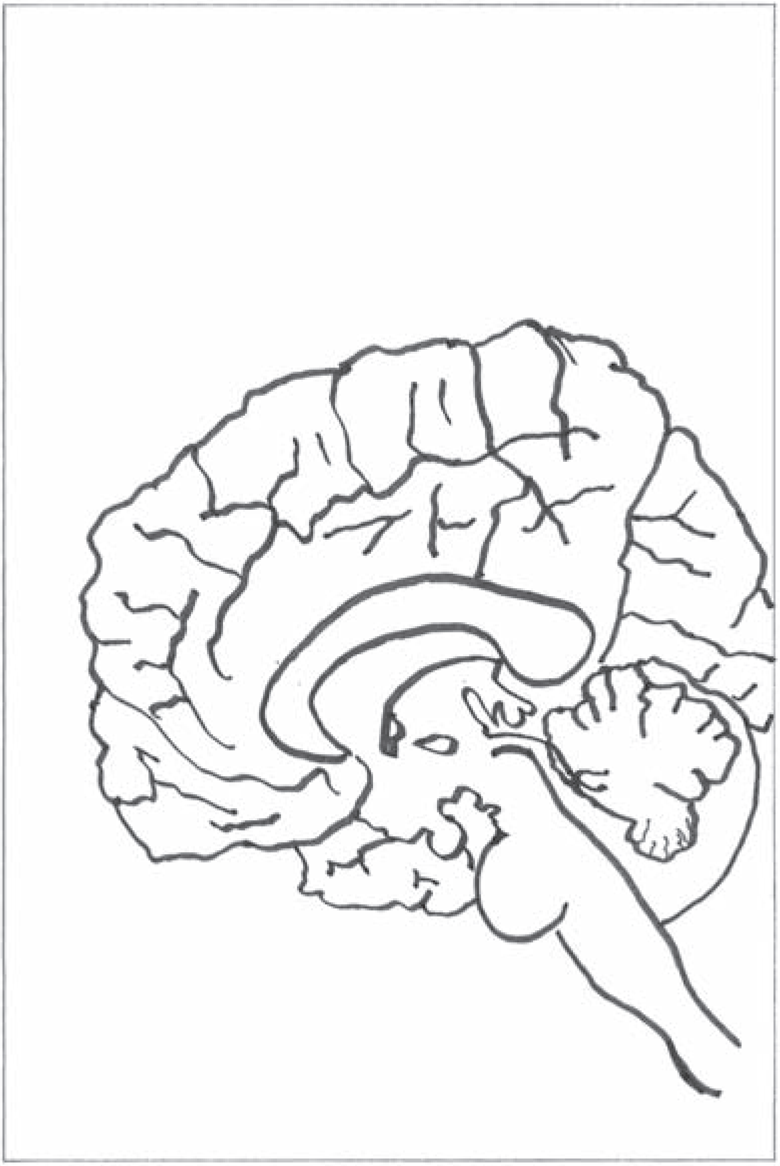
- 2D. *Atlas ideas*, covers devices that help us head off on adventurous journeys of discovery; travel guides being the obvious example, but extending to HSBC's coaching on foreign etiquette, the development of Google and the branding of internet search services. We rely on official guides whenever we venture into the unknown.

2A. Cognitive Ideas

Range Rover, Golf GTi, Renault Espace and Toyota hybrid are all exemplars – leading examples of a type of car. Psychological tests have shown that we ascribe a special status to the main example we can think of in a given category. This explains all sorts of everyday phenomena, like why we tend to want the champions to win again, and why we favour brands that own the generic term for their category, like Hoover. It also gets the brand in at the ground level of decision making – at the time when people decide what *type* of car to buy, before they consider what make.

Another cognitive factor is what criteria we give weighting to. If I want a mid-priced family car that is "dark green", then the Toyota Prius (at this moment) is the only alternative. If I weigh that criterion less heavily compared to other factors, I would look at a diesel or a supermini car as "light green" alternatives.

A third factor is what might be called cognitive convenience. Things that are easy to remember, easy to apply, that give us rules of thumb, that fit fairly easily with existing schemas (bodies of knowledge) and so on, have an



2A. COGNITIVE

inbuilt advantage. The advice to eat "five a day" fruit and vegetables is an example. Recent research from the United States has questioned whether "five a day" actually does have a general effect on the incidence of cancer. And the advice is also open to questions, such as "What is a serving?" But the power of this information campaign is its utterly simple and actionable form. It is difficult to ignore the advice because it is so definite. And we already knew that fruit and vegetables were good for us, so the instruction is intuitively plausible.

The fourth type of cognitive branding deals with the balance of risk and reward. Ideas that have a huge downside risk should you ignore them, and an intuitive plausibility, are very compelling. You wouldn't want to bet against them, the downside should you lose is too steep. It feels like playing Russian roulette. Of course, you have no idea if the gun is really loaded. An example was the Y2K bug. This played on deep-seated cultural fears about both the millennium and computers taking over. It was an intuitive and yet as it turns out unfounded idea. As a piece of information branding it had everything: an emotive threat, with deep cultural roots, a story-based scenario (hospitals, nuclear power stations . . .), technophobia of the sort expressed by the film *2001*, a countdown, evangelists and prophets of doom. It was even snappy. The Y2K bug was not a brand, but it was a brand-like cultural idea, which many brands (such as Accenture) made a lot of money out of. If a general and more benign principle were to be extracted from this it would be the power of predictions.

The qualities that *cognitive brands* share are:

- simplicity;
- seeming like fact, not conjecture;
- addressing beliefs and assumptions;
- being the main example of something, either a historical first, or different enough to establish a new category of your own;
- hogging the limelight, e.g. being the one the media always refer to;
- changing the rules or criteria people choose by;
- being definitive: a definite date, amount etc.;
- being intuitive: fitting with common knowledge;
- encapsulation: snappy, easy to remember and repeat;

- high visibility and repetition (on the basis that there's no smoke without fire).

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

How do you compete in a category with such a strong exemplar as Hoover? One answer is to invent a new category. James Dyson was an inventor who already had a track record in ideas like wheelbarrows with the big plastic balls in place of wheels. According to his website, the idea for his vacuum cleaner started with noticing how vacuum cleaners with bags lost suction as they got clogged with dust. Dyson actually pitched the idea for the bagless vacuum cleaner to Hoover and the other major players and they all rejected it. These incumbants made millions from selling replacement hoover bags – why do away with all that revenue? It would be like producing a printer that did not need new ink cartridges. Hoover probably wished in retrospect that it had licensed the technology, purely in order to bury it! In the end Dyson patented it and launched the product himself. Within two years it was the UK's bestselling vacuum cleaner and is now recognised internationally as a design classic.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

IBM installed itself as the leader in a new category that it had defined – *eBusiness*. That was a bit like inventing its own problem – another Y2K bug – and then marketing the cure. Certainly most ads for *eBusiness* suggested there were problems – for instance in systems integration – that only IBM could solve.

IBM has a history of being the conformist brand. As its famous ad from the 1960s said: "Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM". It was associated with "company men" in blue suits, arrogance and bureaucracy. The corporate values expected of leading companies changed and the market shifted from mainframe to PC. IBM was caught out (leader in a category seen as heading for extinction) and was in crisis by the early 1990s.

The shift that IBM made in the mid to late 1990s is one of the great turnaround stories. And what is interesting from a brand point of view is it deftly managed to shift from one type of conformism (corporate) to another (change agent, i.e. following consultancy fads). Its new mantra – *eBusiness* – hitched the company to the new economy bandwagon, which millions of formerly corporate managers were chasing after. This is an established form of branding for consultancies: create a branded fad like *reengineering* or *the war for talent*. And it is interesting that IBM has effectively become a consultancy, both literally buying PWC, but also more generally shifting its focus from kit to solutions.

Other Instructive Examples

Changing the physical design of the product seems to be a good way of challenging a dominant brand leader, perhaps because this also creates a separate category in people's minds: round tea bags (Tetley), credit cards with a different shape (MINT), friendly looking computers (iMac) all created new (sub)categories and exemplars.

Lastminute.com took the concept of a travel "bucket shop" and – by marrying it with the dotcom boom that was glamorous at the time – gave it a stronger idea, making it seem smart rather than cheap.

Intel seems like a special kind of exemplar because it is a piggyback ride. The reason Intel is so prominent is that it is the main chip used in branded PCs (and it will be replacing the Motorola chips used in Apple computers soon too). With so many PC brands to choose from, whether it contains an Intel Pentium 4 becomes a prime factor in the decision. So Intel benefits the branded PC companies and in turn gets to be seen as the one essential component, a must have. In biology this is called a symbiotic relationship. In future, with business models being more and more based on partnership, this kind of *Intel Inside* logic will be increasingly important. At Ministry of Sound we are pitching a hotel chain, a mobile operator and several others with the thought of adding a kind of lifestyle Intel factor.

What internet commentators call "first-mover advantage" is really similar to the Hoover case. Because the internet (or, more strictly, the World Wide

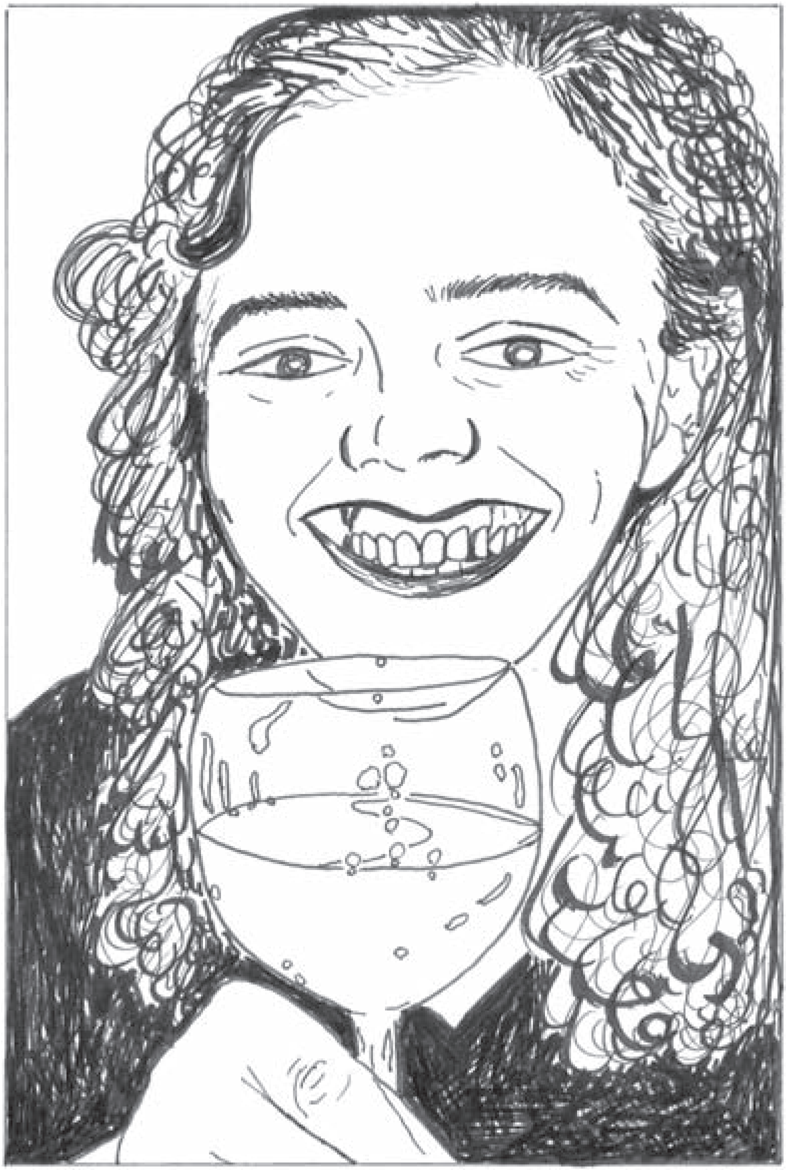
Web) was new, there was the chance for a few companies to become the leading examples. Amazon is not the actual word that people use for "internet shop", but it is the main place we think of going, for books, CDs and many other items.

London's congestion charge involved several questions: where is the charging zone, how should I pay, what will happen if I don't? All of this was communicated effectively so that compliance from day one was high. A decision, which I think helped considerably, was to brand the initiative, with that distinctive red "C". This helped the whole thing seem very real and tangible, as opposed to the vaguer categories of parking zones, speed cameras and so on that characterised previous traffic initiatives. It made the information definitive. If there may be less work in future designing new brand image identities, I think there will be plenty more work designing information concepts, like the "C" zone.

2B. Appreciation Ideas

The best strategy in today's fast-changing context is often to develop customers and hence develop the market. Education is a broad term for this, which is meant to imply much more than the sort of rote learning we were dragged through at school. In my last book, *After Image*, I described a shift from image marketing to knowledge marketing. Here I will just pick up on one of the key strands. Knowledge marketing is nothing new, it is as old as the *McKinsey Quarterly*, the *Conran Book of Home Design* and so on. But a combination of the prevailing culture, the knowledge-intensive needs of the new leading markets (retail, services, media, technology) and the new media tools available – e.g. customer relationship management and eLearning – mean that it is booming. And because it was relatively unexplored, it is still somewhat virgin territory for exciting marketing campaigns.

This section is about a specific type of cultural learning – *appreciation*. Certain brands and entertainment products have always enjoyed special status as reflecting educated tastes. There is a difference between things that are valuable simply because they are rare and expensive (e.g. gold) and those that it takes a certain amount of refinement and education to appreciate



2B. APPRECIATION

(e.g. caviar, opera, avant-garde art). Connoisseurship is traditionally associated with expensive products like brandy, but can equally be associated with record collecting or being a total geek. The internet has proved a treasure trove for such knowledge-intensive fields. My own passion for collecting and playing obscure modular analogue synthesisers – which I must share with only a few thousand people in the world – is amply served with an abundance of newsgroups, hobby sites and branded retailer and manufacturer resources.

The qualities that *appreciation brands* share in common are:

- giving people a first-hand account of what they can expect;
- education as a service (rather than informing people about your own products);
- great research to find "hidden gems";
- integrity: unbiased, authoritative, trustworthy;
- being close to the ground, human, approachable;
- implicit knowledge, demonstration in use;
- key terms, nuggets, bits of wisdom;
- simple guides to key topics;
- entertainment, involvement, stories: not just a list of facts or instructions;
- user experts, peer-to-peer mentoring, ambassadors.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Nescafé has revolutionised its business model for high-end coffee drinkers (i.e. yuppies with designer kitchens and expensive tastes) with Nespresso. The hub is an expensive and attractive range of machines, which only take Nespresso capsules (those little foil tubs of pre-packed coffee used in swanky offices). The advantage of this for Nescafé is that by selling the machines it captures a loyal customer for the lifetime of that machine. It is estimated that its average customer spends about £800 a year on coffee refills. But Nespresso is much more than a tied delivery system, it is a coffee appreciation club. It produces many varieties (around 20 currently) of coffee, and rich education materials for each. It is one of the best examples of a CRM system developing a customer base (the education stuff is really well done). Just as with wine merchants Oddbins, the customer end benefit is being able to tell your dinner guests all about what they are consuming. And for Nescafé that has an additional payoff, in that you are advertising the system when you do this – and word of mouth accounts for a high proportion of new sales.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Lucy – Ministry of Sound marketing supremo – recently went to a whisky tasting at a private members' club. It was hosted by Johnnie Walker and Lucy did not have to sneak in, she is the company's prime target audience. The venue was not a stuffy old gentleman's club, but the trendy Hospital in London's Covent Garden, and all the people there were media professionals (and similar) in their twenties and early thirties. Johnnie Walker's mentoring programme (as the company calls it) is a long-running success story. The objective is to educate a new generation of aspirational drinkers in the merits and appreciation of its premium brands: black and gold label. Due to the success of this scheme parent company Diageo has extended it to other premium brands such as Grey Goose vodka. The sorts of people the company is aiming at are stylish, upscale, professional and would like to see themselves as *Sex & the City* types (sorry Lucy!). The mentoring programme started with *Journey of Taste* events with a lecture and tasting format, including a short film and scratch-and-sniff cards. The company also now holds free-form events, where the brand ambassadors bring drinks to the tables – for instance, encouraging guests to try gold-label whisky with chocolate truffles – but still manage to impart plenty of whisky lore and education.

The result? In the late 1990s the situation had looked dire. The average age of a whisky drinker in the UK had gone up by one year, every year since 1974. In other words, existing whisky lovers were growing older and the category was failing to engage successive younger generations. It was caught out by the generation gap and became an "old man's drink". The category was literally dying off in most international markets (except in Spain, where young men adopted J&B Rare as *the* drink for some reason). Now the Johnnie Walker brand is growing at a modest but gratifying rate of 5% per year, thanks largely to its success in attracting younger drinkers and selling the premium and anniversary labels. It was helped by a shift in the drinking culture in the States, towards cigar bars and connoisseur drinks – but it could all too easily have missed that train.

Other Instructive Examples

Oddbins aimed to make wine appreciation accessible to the ordinary person in the high street. It has won the UK off licence of the year award 12 times. What Oddbins does is less like a lecture (although it does hold tastings) and more like Google: knowledge on demand. There are handwritten notes beneath each wine commenting on everything from what food it goes with, what it tastes like, through to quirky comments about the bottler or area it comes from. There are helpful, knowledgeable and down-to-earth staff on hand, who generally seem to enjoy working there. For people who cannot be bothered to learn about wine and can't be doing with the snobbery that surrounds it, it is a very accessible and helpful service. The design is great too, with the classic Ralph Steadman illustrations and the studied scruffiness.

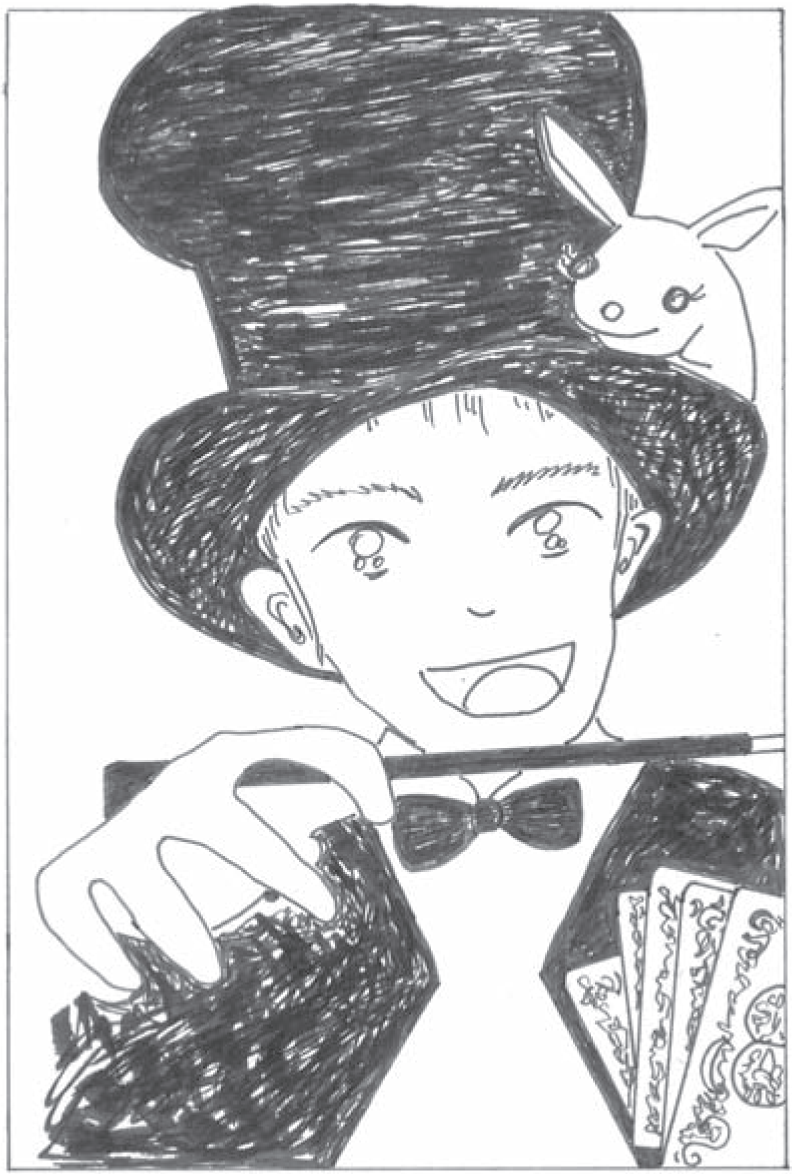
Partypoker.com is facing questions at the moment about whether the company is worth what it floated for, but its marketing has certainly been interesting. It is fairly straightforward, but what I have in mind is its TV programme sponsorship of *Poker Den*. This is a curiously compelling show, often running late into the night, where professional poker players compete using real cash for a pot of £50 000. It is perfect education and market development fodder for anyone who does play poker online and potentially a recruitment vehicle for those who have only ever dabbled. The rules of poker are fairly straightforward but what the shows reveal, and the commentators follow, is tactics: bluffing, raising, reading other players. And it also introduces you to the game being played and thought about at the highest level; something to aspire to and develop towards, like watching Tiger Woods play golf. Gambling does make great television and I suspect that these television shows make great marketing for gambling too. As well as imparting know-how, being on TV would tend to normalise, legitimise and popularise the industry.

I really like F Magazine, a website styled like a magazine (you can even turn the pages). As well as reviews it brings you sample tracks from albums, video and art, independent of genre. It was very kind to the latest Ministry of Sound CD (*F*** Me I'm Famous*), which helps, of course! The site's main revenue is from advertising and it has an unusual policy of advertising by invitation only – it chooses ads it really likes (the two I saw on the site today were for Nike and Mini) and invites them to buy space. Being able to embed content within reviews is fascinating, fusing shopping and style media (yes, Amazon does this, but it is not exactly like a glossy, spiky magazine, is it?). The *F* in F Magazine is for "filter" and the site aims to help people choose the best stuff out there. That's not what the *F* in the Ministry album title stands for, by the way!

There were already book clubs, places where people could meet to discuss the same book that everyone read in advance. The difference with the Oprah Book Club is that a major TV chat show was used to encourage more people to read. Oprah's club was launched in 1996 with the stated aim of getting Americans to read more. Oprah dropped the book club for a while when the workload became too great, but relaunched it in 2003. The first book she picked – *East of Eden* (originally published in 1952 and with the slow, steady sales of a classic novel) – shot to number 2 in the Amazon chart and the publisher had to reprint an extra 600 000 copies to keep pace with demand. You could hardly have invented a more powerful marketing campaign for the book trade.

2C. Faith Ideas

Much has been made of the fact that we no longer trust experts and authorities, but I think this is misleading; a good example of "trend" thinking gone slightly wrong. While we have lost some faith in official spokespeople (legitimately, as we have been spun to too often), we still do absolutely put our faith in scientific or other knowledge systems and their expert proponents.



2C. FAITH

Many people have shifted to alternative (i.e. traditional, archaic, natural) health professionals and schools of thought. But in either case it is about putting your faith in experts and systems whose details are beyond your own knowledge. I don't see any sign of this tendency receding: 10% of adults tried the Atkins diet, as we have already seen.

Science is a modern phenomenon. But putting your faith in an arcane, expert system of knowledge – be it shamanism or ayurveda – is much older. These systems are often to do with curing, situations involving risk or threat and the desire for a solution. A parallel persistent example is horoscopes. Despite the fact that modern science gives little credence to astrology, many read these avidly and they seem to answer a psychological need. New-fangled examples include the many health regimes, such as detoxing.

The qualities that *faith brands* share in common are:

- the system: a body of knowledge, regime, process and cure (which should be a "black box", i.e. difficult to understand if you are not an expert);
- . . . translated into intuitive, "populist" ideas, e.g. McKinsey's *War for Talent*;
- . . . which have psychological (not necessarily empirical) validity: they "feel right";
- believers, experts, evangelists and converts;
- education materials: informative books, magazines and websites;
- official institutions and credentials;
- black-and-white certainty: a stark distinction between this theory and alternatives.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Nurofen (or ibuprofen, its active ingredient) was the first new painkiller and anti-inflammatory drug for a generation. It has slight advantages in certain uses over aspirin and paracetamol, being described in clinical notes as being better, for instance, with menstrual pains and postdental operation pain. Nurofen is a brand name used by Boots the chemist to market this drug over the counter. It was a Boots research company that first discovered the drug, so it can fairly claim to be "the original".

The advertising and marketing for Nurofen has all been about "targeting pain". I am not sure whether this is scientifically exact, in saying that it actually does anything different than other analgesics. But the concept of concentrated effects in the region of pain does fit with the experience of pain (which is located and draws your attention constantly back to that location) and also gives people an intuitive "system" idea to have faith in. And let's not forget that this faith itself is an important component of medical efficacy. A classic study showed that named-brand aspirin tablets were twice as effective in relieving perceived pain as the same tablets unbranded.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

McKinsey is one of a number of management consultancies that behave like faith healers, offering expert consultants, diagnoses, prescriptions. McKinsey has a certain mystique. This faith in the brand is efficacious: when managers justify a proposal to a board and the board to shareholders, the McKinsey stamp of approval gives weight and credibility. The mystique is hard to pinpoint: the firm has famous alumni, a defining rigour, is hard to get into as an employee (it rigorously tests the IQ and aptitude of all recruits) and it has advanced knowledge management systems, which ensure that anyone you meet at McKinsey seems up to the minute on any given field. All these parts look good, but I am sure that the key is something more general and pervasive. I suspect that the mystique may instead be born out of a *habit of excellence* – winning the best assignments, the best people, the best plaudits . . . in a virtuous circle – breeding a sense of confidence and success, like that of the All Blacks or Brazilian football team. Even when it has a bad season (as McKinsey did in the late 1990s), you expect it to bounce back.

McKinsey pays particular attention to knowledge publishing, the *McKinsey Quarterly* being styled like an academic journal. The firm's pronouncements in this journal, such as the 1997 report on the *War for*

Talent, can become powerful cultural ideas in their own right – like doctors proclaiming a new ailment, for which of course the consultants will have a prescribed treatment. In this case the prescription is five imperatives and they satisfy the Nurofen test, in being fairly intuitive and hard to dismiss:

- Embrace a talent mindset.
- Craft a winning employee value proposition.
- Rebuild your recruiting strategy.
- Weave development into your organisation.
- Differentiate and affirm your people.[1]

Other Instructive Examples

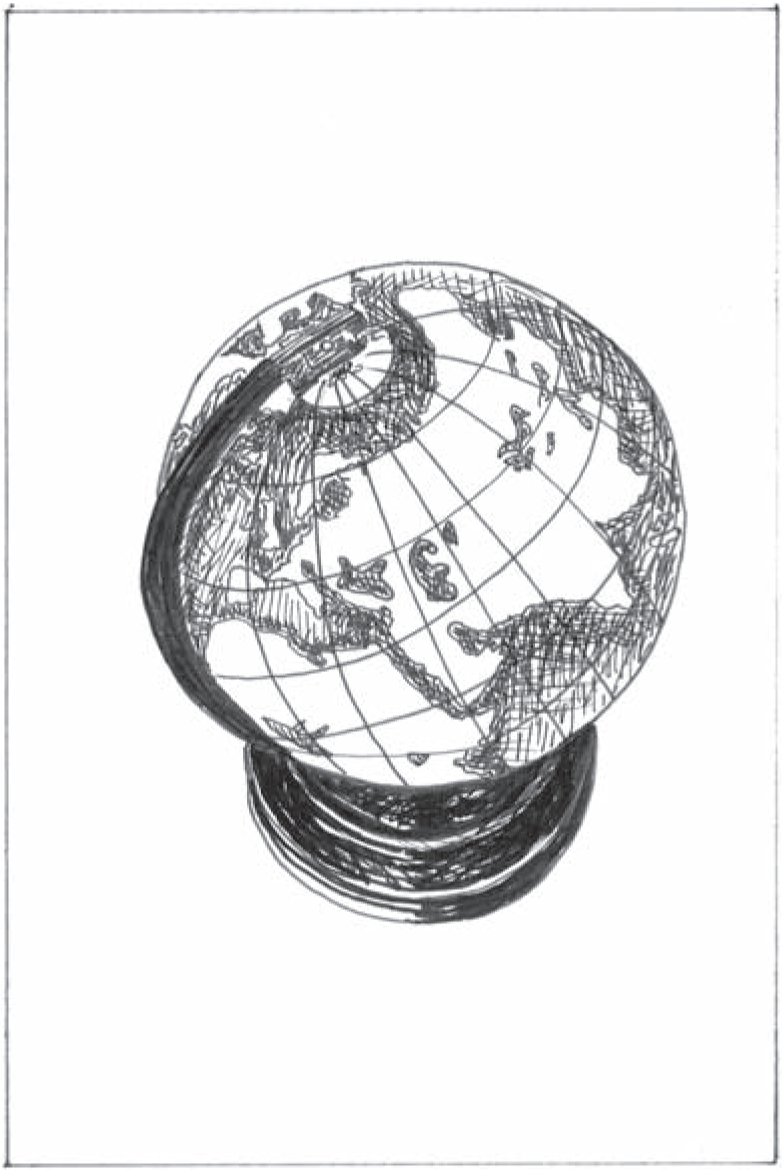
The Atkins diet emphasised a "scientific" system, simple to follow albeit hard to understand in technical terms: low carbohydrate. This was counterintuitive and wholly distinctive compared with the many preceding diets that had relied on cutting fat. And thus it seemed like an "advance" – giving hope to all these whose previous diets may have failed.

There are numerous other faith brands in diverse markets, like cosmetics (e.g. anti-ageing treatments), wellbeing (e.g. ayurvedic treatments), child rearing (e.g. organic baby food), self-help (e.g. "the rules" of dating). I am not saying that any or all of these don't work – I am merely suggesting that they are bought on trust, out of faith in a system.

2D. Atlas Ideas

"Travel broadens the mind." And conversely, knowledge broadens your travel. Both tap into an urge to expand your horizons, to have new experiences, to explore.

The love of open landscapes and the curiosity that drives exploration are universal, and like any genetic trait seem to produce a spectrum of tendencies, with characters like Sir Ranulph Fiennes at one end of the spectrum and the Discovery Channel couch potato at the other. Brands have



2D. ATLAS

made ample use of Discovery culture – the rugged outdoorsy Land Rover or mountain bike – which add a certain mystique to a humdrum urban journey. And there are literal exploration brands, like Kuoni. But the brands that interest me more are those that educate people and prepare them for broader horizons. This is mostly because the same model applies well to other parts of life than literal travel.

Features that *exploration brands* share in common are:

- learning in context, close to the ground and experience;
- implicit knowledge, accounts by people who walked the same path;
- fascination, incredible facts, beyond general knowledge;
- a medium that allows people to explore, find out for themselves;
- involvement, interaction, following your own interests;
- drama, involvement, entertainment.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Guides (people or published content) impart local knowledge, so that those in a place or situation for the first time can find their way around. It is a simple and indispensable cultural form, as old as exploration. It makes for strong brands; exotic, authoritative, helpful. In a time when we constantly encounter new situations, and when knowledge is continually updated, being a guide is a powerful brand role. It encompasses the many introductory guides written to help people learn about things like computer software, parenting and major world developments. Guides stand apart from both news and textbooks in being practical, for newcomers, experiential. They are "step by step".

Lonely Planet was founded in the mid-1970s by a couple – Tony and Maureen Wheeler – who had backpacked from the UK to Australia. Their first book, *Across Asia on the Cheap*, was written and produced around their kitchen table; hand collated and stapled. Lonely Planet now has 150 authors, publishes over 650 guides and its website receives 3 million hits a day. The guides have kept their emphasis on independent travel and hippy values, giving straight-talking information, without being pompous or biased. The group's website says that it wants to enable everyone "to travel with awareness, respect and care". It claims to provide a guide to every nation on earth, and outsells its nearest competitor in the UK twice over. Lonely Planet branched out in 2000, beyond travel guides into covering world cuisines. Its range of 18 books won an award for being the Best Food Book Series at a world cookbook awards in 2003. Lonely Planet has also won many awards for its travel writing and books.

The Rough Guide series is a competitor to Lonely Planet, producing a comparable range of travel guidebooks aimed at the independent young traveller, as well as a wide range of other media products including TV programming. The fascinating development in this range has been producing other sorts of guides than travel. For instance:

- *The Rough Guide to Pregnancy.*
- *The Rough Guide to Islam.*
- *The Rough Guide to Divorce.*
- *The Rough Guide to the iPod.*

This places Rough Guide in a strong position within factual publishing in general, and is a prime example of a lifelong learning business.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

HSBC grew by acquisition to become the second largest retail bank in the world, behind Citibank. It has 31 million customers worldwide and counting. The full name is the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. HSBC became famous within the marketing services industry for conducting a pitch between four agency holding groups, including WPP which won the account. But HSBC had already hit on the central thought: *Never underestimate the power of local knowledge*. A typical advertisement in the campaign features an American businessperson discovering to his cost that in Japan when you hit a hole in one, you are expected to buy your golfing companions expensive gifts. Compared with other bank advertising, it is both more impressive (being global in scope) and more human and fascinating.

The idea is uniquely right for HSBC, as it is one of the only banks that is seen as "foreign" everywhere (others are seen as American, Japanese etc.). And it tallies with a consumer view that is: no matter how big a bank gets (and size is reassuring in an unstable world), people also want it to adapt to local cultures and treat customers like real people. The idea has been successfully adapted to over 70 markets (and numerous languages) across the world and I have to admit that this is an example where it is hard to imagine other media choices than advertising pulling everything together. It is interesting modern marketing, which happens to use TV advertising. The idea is a proper brand idea, rather than an ad idea. It has spun off successfully into other forms, including informative programming on CNBC about world cultural issues, like ageing populations.

Other Instructive Examples

Discovery Network was founded by John Hendrix, a fundraiser for an American university, who figured that his love of documentaries (which were in scarce supply on American television) could represent a large and unsatisfied audience. Discovery now has nine channels, addressing issues as diverse as space exploration, nature, health, airplanes and policing. The thread running through all this content is a rather nerdish, male preoccupation with what makes things tick. And the majority of the Discovery Network's audience are men.

Discovery programming walks the line between education and entertainment, finding gripping stories (like *Forensic Detectives*), events (like the opening of an ancient Egyptian tomb) and characters (like the astronauts). Other channels, notably the BBC, are good at "big" documentaries too, but Discovery is a destination for people hooked on finding things out and has one of the most loyal followings in TV.

Safari, Explorer and Netscape – the brand names say it all, as the metaphor of geography and exploration was transferred to the World Wide Web, in web browser software.

But the most powerful atlas brand today is probably Google. It is Google we consult before taking any step into the unknown. And the Google Earth project (a detailed satellite photo atlas of the world online) is an extraordinary reinforcement of this brand position, as well as a great service. It is literally the new atlas and probably the most stunning thing to happen in new media for some time (Wikipedia being perhaps the other contender?). As a colleague told me when he phoned, excited at seeing Google Earth for the first time: "I can see the chair on my porch at our house in Connecticut."

An example of how atlas branding could be applied came up on a side-project, working with Iris for The Co-operative Bank. The bank needed to sell mortgages in a difficult market. There were at least 7000 competitive products. Its own was unlikely to be the cheapest. And first-time buyers had all but disappeared from the market. The strategy we developed was to target *first-time behaviours* instead, for instance people moving abroad, people contributing to a child's mortgage, people moving in together and so on. The idea would be to provide these people with access to information, case studies, chat forums, seminars and so on and thus engage them earlier in the decision process. And then to tailor products specifically to their needs, with bundled insurance, legal advice and other benefits.

3

Time

Time is a huge subject in culture and correspondingly makes a powerful starting point for all sorts of brand ideas. Not physical time (whatever is tracked by an atomic clock) but cultural time: the division of time into units, eras, life stages, cycles and so on. If you think about it, the whole notion of cultural tradition is a time-based idea; handed down through the ages or generations.

In theory I would have expected there to be a whole class of "future" ideas to go with the past, childhood and here-and-now ones. But funnily enough, apart from occasional corporate adverts there aren't many. We have cultural ideas about the future like sci-fi, but these are very much today's ideas (like *Blade Runner*): a genre, like adventure or romance. Maybe I missed something, but it is almost like there is no *real* concept of future in culture. I have picked out four areas to do with cultural time that do seem associated with lots of strong brand ideas, but there is probably a whole book to be written on brands and time (some other time, perhaps!).

- 3A. *Regressive ideas*. Regression is a clinical term in psychotherapy for going back to a former state, perhaps reliving a trauma or particularly vivid experience. I am using it in a looser sense for regaining access to a childish view of the world. Certain visual triggers seem to prompt this regression: little Mini cars (that look like toy cars), cartoonish faces . . .
- 3B. *Now ideas* – experiential ideas that make people feel up to the minute. There is a tyranny of the present: updates, constant changes,

Table II.3 Time

3A. Regression	3B. Now	3C. Nostalgia	3D. Calendar
Mini	*Zara*	*Nigo*	*National Lottery*
Gorillaz	*Budweiser*	*VW Bug*	*Penguin 70*

keeping up, news flashes, freshness and so on, creating an immediate sense of urgency and connection.

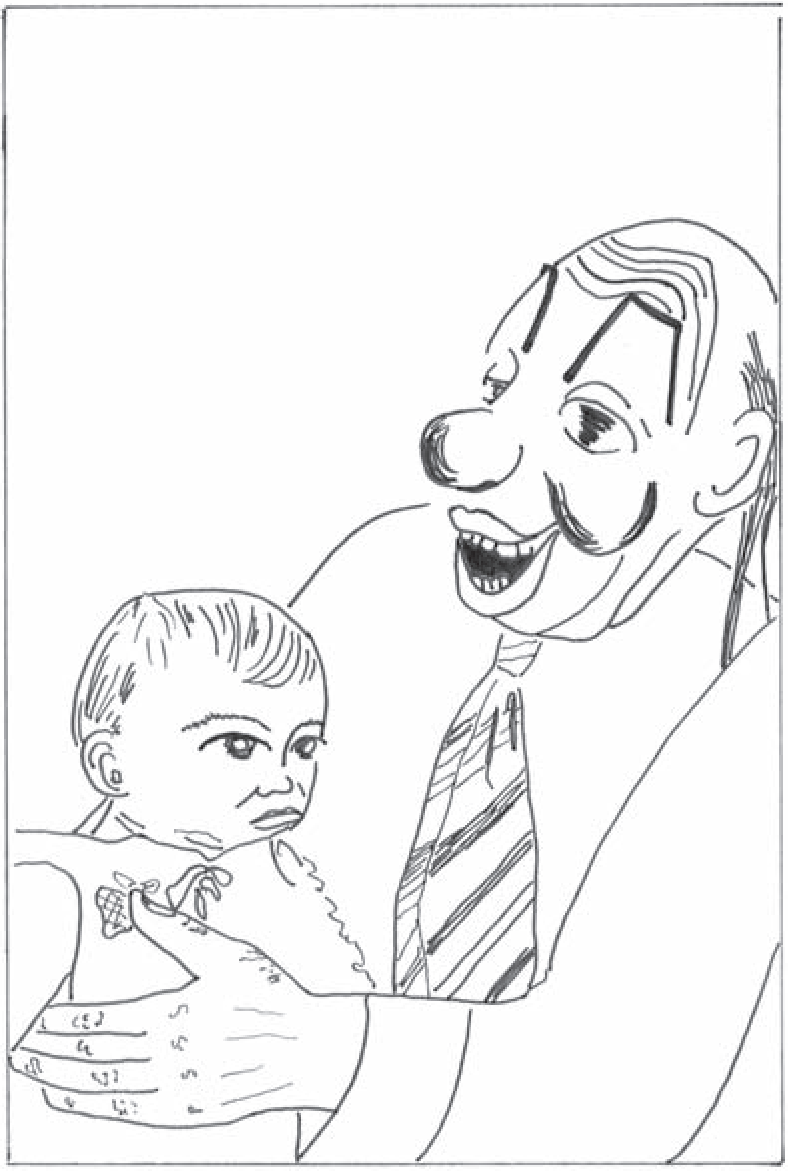
- 3C. *Nostalgia ideas*. Culture is a storehouse of current and past ideas – like a gigantic shared archive. By nostalgia I really mean a broader class of past ideas; ongoing heritage, "cute" ideas stuck in a timewarp, and remakes/remixes (nostalgic ideas reinterpreted for the present). This is the time equivalent of homesickness and is capable of creating cliques based on different orientations or age groups. 70s disco anyone?
- 3D. *Calendar ideas* – brands that become significant through association with official time, like 20th Century Fox and Penguin 70.

3A. Regressive Ideas

If you think back to your childhood, you will remember how important play was – and that there were a huge variety of *ways to play*: in different settings, at different ages, with different dynamics, solitary and in groups, and also for different genders (at least stereotypically). And it is easy to see that many of these have adult counterparts.

A few examples:

- Caring for dolls and cuddly toys as if they were babies (Tamagotchi).
- Construction and puzzle games (Rubik's cube).
- Role playing and adventure games: pirates, cowboys etc. (Mini).
- Dressing up, fantasies, e.g. playing the princess (Gwen Stefani).



3A. REGRESSION

Play seems to be a universal human activity, associated with learning, releasing or working through feelings – and sheer pleasure. Like singing and dancing, it seems to be its own reward and one definition of play (as opposed to other more industrious activities) is that *it has no exterior purpose*. It could be seen as an active counterpart to entertainment, where doing things replaces watching others doing them. From this point of view, the psychology of play is highly relevant to subjects like interactivity too. It is possible that play (like dreaming) has a vital role in helping us to handle information flows and the bombardment that we face every day. People describe play as helping them unwind and distinguish between things that help them do this (e.g. absorbing hobbies) and things that don't (e.g. shopping). My guess would be that the amount of time spent "playing" by adults is increasing, despite longer working hours. Brands that allow us extra playtime – i.e. ones that we can play with (as opposed to ones that just project a playful image) – seem to do best.

Play takes you into a world of imagination – a virtual "third space" of suspension of reality, where ideas can be invented and stories lived through – and certain forms of media, notably cartoon animation, seem to tap straight into this space too. As Walt used to say: "Disney starts and ends with a mouse." And the earliest examples of human art, in cave drawings, are arguably character cartoons; allowing people to step back from everyday life and to stylise it – creating symbolism out of everyday scenes. Characters are our representatives in stories, daydreams and fantasies. But in the new media universe we seem to have a more direct connection: in video games, avatars, personal icons, virtual pets, collectable toys and cards. A fascination in culture at the moment is this joining between us/reality and character/fiction.

The qualities that *regressive brands* share in common are:

- they tap into an archetypal form of play, as observed in children's games;
- or they use triggers; like the visual exaggeration used in cartoons;
- interactivity: the audience is active at least imaginatively;
- playful feelings and themes: release, freedom, creativity;
- oddness, fantasy, stepping out of literal realism, "through the looking glass";

- pleasure, being self-contained, not for any purpose;
- repetition, learning, ongoing involvement.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

The Mini has inbuilt playfulness. There are cultural supports to this idea, like the scenes from *The Italian Job* (both the original and the remake) where the cars are the star. Or the fact that this is the car that used to be driven by Peter Sellers and members of the Beatles and current-model owners include Madonna. But the main idea in this brand is the car itself, the nearest thing to a toy on wheels. It looks great parked on the street, with its distinctive livery and range of fun styling kits. Plus it is a thrilling car (low to the road, great on turns) to drive, especially in its more macho and souped-up Mini Cooper variant.

The UK advertising for this car is very playful. The first campaign presented *Mini Adventures*, the second a spoof challenge to *Make Sure It's a Real Mini*. But I suspect this is only window dressing. The advertising is appropriate to the brand, but I wonder what, if anything, it is adding. Perhaps reassurance for those who otherwise might have felt the Mini was slightly too bold for them? In the USA, the launch was achieved through marketing stunts rather than TV advertising and it has sold well.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

The pop group Gorillaz combines the entertainment of MTV-style cartoons with credible musician Damon Albarn of Blur. The cartoons and the music are a postmodern collage – sci-fi, hip-hop, anime, horror themes, kitsch. The animator, Jamie Hewlett, was the creator of *Tank Girl*, a cult classic. Gorillaz was the bestselling British pop band globally in 2004 and may be part of a broader shift: from the single to the video (as downloaded onto a mobile device) as the new unit of pop music.

Looking to more traditional mythology you could think of these characters as little gods: Sometimes anarchic like the Crazy Frog, sometimes heroic like *The Incredibles*, always larger than life, as they seem to represent little parcels of human nature in a purer form.

Other Examples

Gwen Stefani is the woman who brought us “What You Waiting For?” and “Hollaback Girl”, two of the catchiest pop songs of 2005 and two of the best videos too. Is she a brand? Arguably yes, as a pop singer with a well-defined and packaged act. Definitely yes, when you remember she also has a fashion range, LAMB, selling clothes and shoes, and holding a show at New York Fashion Week. Steffani’s new Harajuku Lovers range, inspired by Tokyo street fashion, includes stationery, hats, baby clothes, cellphone accessories and handbags.

The idea that drives both Stefani’s clothing and her music is a return to childhood; her inspiration, according to interviews, being the music of the 1980s she danced to at Disneyland when she sneaked in as a teenager. Steffani took singsong themes (like “If I Were a Rich Man” and the cheerleaders’ chant of “Hollaback Girl”) and worked with cutting-edge producers like Pharrell Williams and Andre 3000. As well as the tunes (which are very catchy), the show she puts on sells the whole lifestyle: the strange Japanese dancers in schoolgirl costumes, the dressing up. The effect is like if an MTV-scale budget had been given to a 9 year old.

Nintendogs are a cross between a Tamagotchi and a Sony AIBO: a virtual pet dog. The game (which is described by users as not a game) is an eloquent example of how cultural patterns of feeling can transfer to the digital realm. It is a reassertion of Nintendo’s strength as a childish cute brand, compared with the darker adolescent PlayStation.

The Nintendogs game was invented by Shigeru Miyamoto, also responsible for Zelda, Donkey Kong and Mario. The combination of artificial intelligence, realistic graphics, touch screen and voice recognition are enough to take the game into new territory: the feeling of a real relationship. If you pass another owner and both your dogs are in bark mode, then they will yap at each other, thanks to wireless technology. With *Nintendogs* you can name, care for, teach and develop a relationship with your virtual pet. Thanks to this game, a huge hit in Japan, Nintendo DS is outselling the much-hyped Sony PSP by a factor of two to one. The game has apparently attracted a whole audience who were not into games and it will be interesting to see over time whether the naive, childish, fun world of Nintendo might be regaining ground previously lost to darker PlayStation games.

3B. Now Ideas

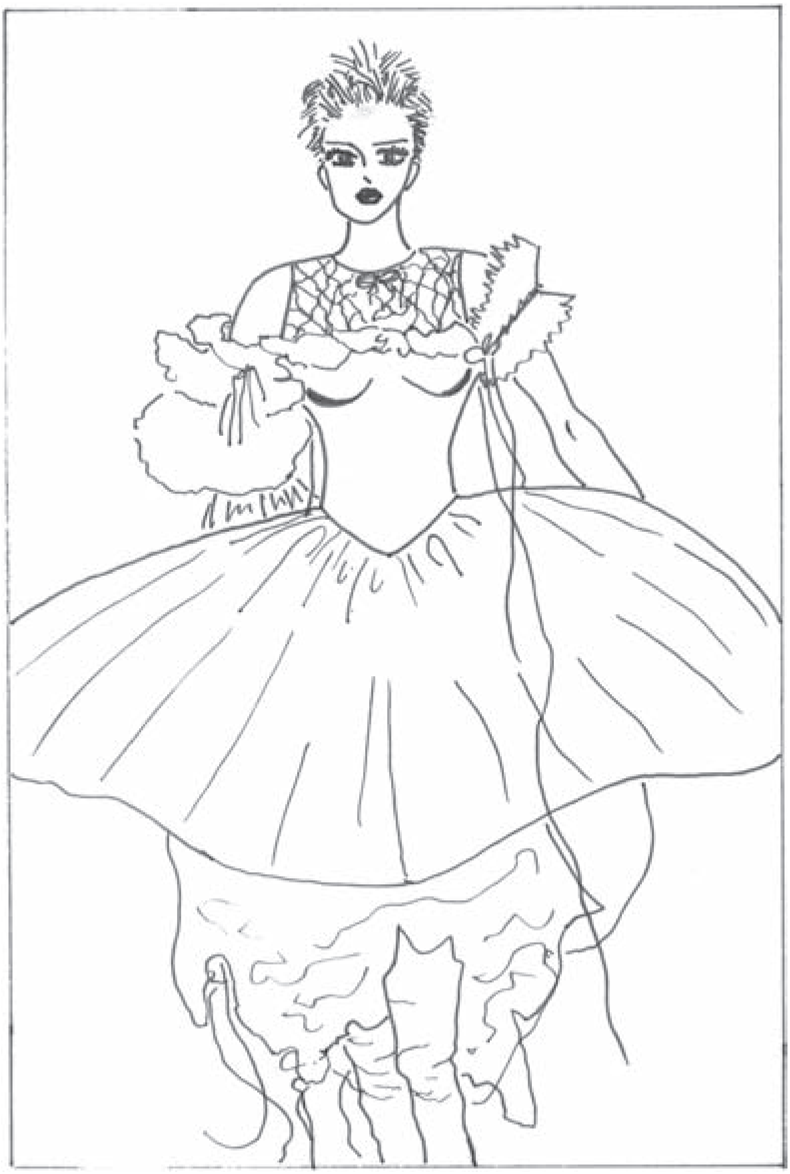
The funny thing about our concept of time is it excludes a big hole in the middle called "now". Cultural time is historical time, scheduled time, planning time. *Now* is a window of time for consciousness during which direct experience, remembering and thinking all take place. This is one of our most compelling psychological experiences.

Culture has an inbuilt timescale, with a special value accorded to things that are now – designs, fashions, public figures, events. Keeping up with now culture is an imperative. To fall behind is to age and decline. When you watch archive footage of past events, it looks like a foreign country, in that most of what is featured lacks that quality of immediate attachment that *now* things have.

The appeal of the latest – the latest style, the latest car model, the latest gadget – always had an uneasy relationship with branding theory and yet is patently a core driver of markets. In classical brand theory, the appealing personality of brands is enduring, unchanging. Innovation is seen as something you do to the "product" and is secondary, something to keep people interested in the brand. But cultural artefacts do change over time, as each generation of producers and consumers put their own stamp on things. And brands must keep up, even if that means they need to evolve.

The qualities that *now brands* share in common are:

- innovation, real news: tangibly new and different;
- making the launch of this news an event; or better ongoing events, to keep it now;



3B. NOW

- making the new version more "modern" (or postmodern – a remix);
- understanding that meaningful tweaks are often worth more than technological leaps;
- being part of people's lives regularly and refreshing things every time they meet you;
- focusing attention on your superior now qualities or abilities.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core idea

Zara is the freshest fashion on the high street. This Spanish clothing retailer is part of the Inditex group. The unique thing about its model is its ability to respond fast in season. Only 50–60% of its production is planned in advance, with the remaining stock being manufactured in response to the latest fashions and demands from the market. In one famous instance, Zara was able to change the main theme in its stores from equestrian styles to black clothing within two weeks of the 9/11 attacks in the USA. Zara was voted international retailer of the year in 2002, and is still expanding globally at a rate of one new store every day of the year.

According to a *Harvard Business Review* article about Zara's success, the short-term *now* focus changes the dynamic of shopping there:

> In Zara stores, customers can always find new products – but they're in limited supply. There is a sense of tantalizing exclusivity, since only a few items are on display even though stores are spacious (the average size is around 1000 square meters). A customer thinks, "This green shirt fits me, and there is one on the rack. If I don't buy it now, I'll lose my chance."[1]

This turns the whole retailing model on its head. For instance, being out of stock in an item is now a good event (signalling that customers have to move fast).

Zara's website offers an educational introduction to the "trends" that its ranges are organised around, like *bohemian chic* and *new military*. These are looks that also feature in current catwalk collections. But then that is the point: Zara can bring you high fashion you see in magazines today (as opposed to in the old days having to wait until a year down the line). From the men's site, it sounds like I am supposed to be wearing a *safari jacket* ("with or without belt"). Oh well.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

The Budweiser *Fresh Beer* campaign has only recently been introduced to the UK, but it has run in the USA for some years. The latest development stateside is *Day-Fresh* beer. Available in sports arenas and cool venues (bars and clubs) in selected cities, the company guarantees the product to have been bottled the same day. Even milk doesn't come so fresh. Bob Lachky, VP of brand management at Budweiser, explains this initiative as follows:

> In April and on select days throughout the year, we want our consumers around the country to have an opportunity to try Budweiser and Bud Light straight from local Anheuser-Busch breweries and taste for themselves the importance of freshness to beer. The fact is, fresh beer tastes better.[2]

The company has used date coding ("*Born on _*" dates) on its packaging since 1996. Having 12 breweries and 600 independent wholesalers across the States, plus the sheer scale of the brand, which keeps the product moving off the shelves, ensures that Budweiser has an average "retail age" of 35 days; significantly less than the average. Critics of this whole branding platform say that the age is not the issue. Some do say Bud's taste is not that great. Technically, as Bud is brewed with rice rather than haps, I believe the taste is significantly lighter, and appeals more to people who do not like "beery" beers. But because beer feels like a "fresh product" (being light, cleaning and effervescent) and we know it can go off if kept too long, this freshness claim feels intuitively compelling.

On the back of the *Day-Fresh* campaign Budweiser has been able to tie in with key sporting events (like the start of the NFL season), to produce newly invigorated advertising, emphasising that this is a company with fresh ideas. Most of all, I imagine it makes rival Miller seem behind the times, in every sense.

Other Instructive Examples

Keeping up to date is a motivation that many brands have tapped into:

- Apple has been clever to release successive operating systems with a great fanfare; it is not just OS X Version 10.4 (like an update of Windows), it is *Tiger*. The company also offers time-limited exclusive music releases in the iTunes music store.
- The BBC news site features a ticker, which gives you up-to-the-minute reports.
- There are endless updates, launches and facelifts of car models and gadgets – like the iPod Phone, Nano and Video iPod, launched hot on the heels of the iPod Shuffle and Mini . . .

News is obviously an area where currency matters. It is the whole point really – to pay attention to the news is to keep up to date. 380 million mobile phone users, the majority in Europe, subscribe to “infotainment”, according to Jupiter research.[3] These services consist of text alerts and downloaded clips, primarily for entertainment (e.g. breaking news about reality show *Big Brother*) and sport (e.g. cricket test matches).

Little wonder Reuters has spotted the opportunity to move into consumer news. The company makes most of its money from information and technology for the financial markets, but has faced tough competition. It recently announced new direct-to-consumer channels, leapfrogging other news services by going straight into mobile, web TV and podcasting. This brand has a fantastic heritage as the company that brings the news to the newspapers and journals; with the Reuters Newsline (seen in old movies as ticker tape) as its famous embodiment. Reuters has a proud heritage in breaking news: for instance, it was the first to report the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in 1865.

Instantaneousness is a quality of networked media, which gets directly to the idea of cultural currency. I am sure there will be *many* new killer apps based on live, fresh, simultaneous, last-minute and just-in services.

3C. Nostalgia Ideas

Nothing is simple in postmodern culture. Against the tyranny of *now*ness we see an increased preoccupation with history, nostalgia, revivals, remakes and remixes. Heritage makes things appear substantial; they have stood the test of time. It is the difference between the BBC and Sky, the pound and the euro, Mercedes-Benz and Lexus.

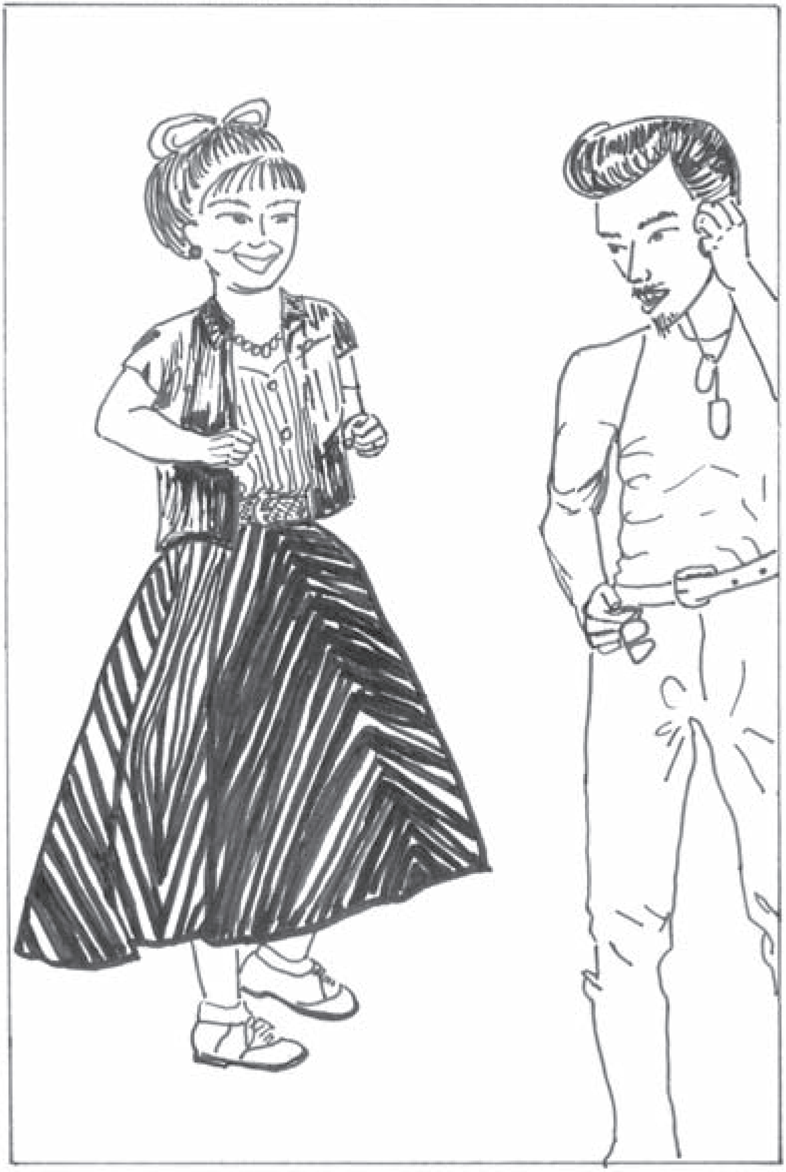
I have grouped heritage and nostalgia under one heading, but there is a subtle difference. Heritage denotes ideas that have continued into the present. Nostalgia is fondness for things thought of as belonging to a past era. The feeling of fondness often relates to memories of childhood. Woody Allen has a fondness for jazz and radio, both of which were key features of his own childhood. When I have asked people to name their favourite brands in workshops, they often cite brands with childhood memories. Nostalgic brands are often "cute" somehow, whereas heritage brands are often more serious, adult and "straight".

The characteristics *nostalgia brands* share in common are:

- traditional forms, names, cues;
- connoting a special craft/features in manufacture/design;
- having a story to tell;
- referring to a long history; either as an unbroken line, e.g. Jaguar, or as a remake, e.g. VW Bug;
- being associated with broader culture and history, e.g. the VW as the Hippy/Beatnik car, the Walkman as first great global Japanese brand;
- memory anchors and cues: visuals, tastes, sounds, slogans;
- reviving childhood memories;
- being given a modern twist or an update of the classic.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Nigo is an insanely trendy Japanese retro fashion designer. His label is called A Bathing Ape and many of his designs pay homage to the Planet of the Apes movies. Customers will queue outside his (unbranded, unpublicised) stores for hours, in order to get access to spend a fortune on the latest



3C. NOSTALGIA

t-shirts and other designs. Each customer is limited to buying just a few items. Nigo designs are favourites with hip-hop stars such as the Beastie Boys.

Nigo started out by making t-shirts in limited quantities as a fashion student, and sold them to friends and at parties. These days his company extends to music, art, cafés and hairdressing, all under the ubiquitous ape logo, and he has just opened a store in New York. His naive images are ironically playful, which makes Nigo design more than a time warp. They are a visual analogue of sampled breaks in the music that Nigo followers like. This is postmodern fashion.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

It is common to remake pop songs and movies. I am not aware of a remake of a car being done before the VW Bug. Others, notably the Mini, have followed suit, but at the time this was a bold, clever, original move. It started life as a concept car, but the unusually enthusiastic reaction told VW (which was a client of mine at the time) that it was on to something big. What the Bug did, apart from selling quite a few cheerful yellow cars to Californians, is restate the heritage value of the VW marque. It is a theme that was echoed in the marketing strategy for the Golf V, proclaimed as the true successor of the original Golf GTi. The latest remake in the VW series, which may also do the brand good, is the new *Herbie* movie, which brings us back to where we started.

Other Instructive Examples

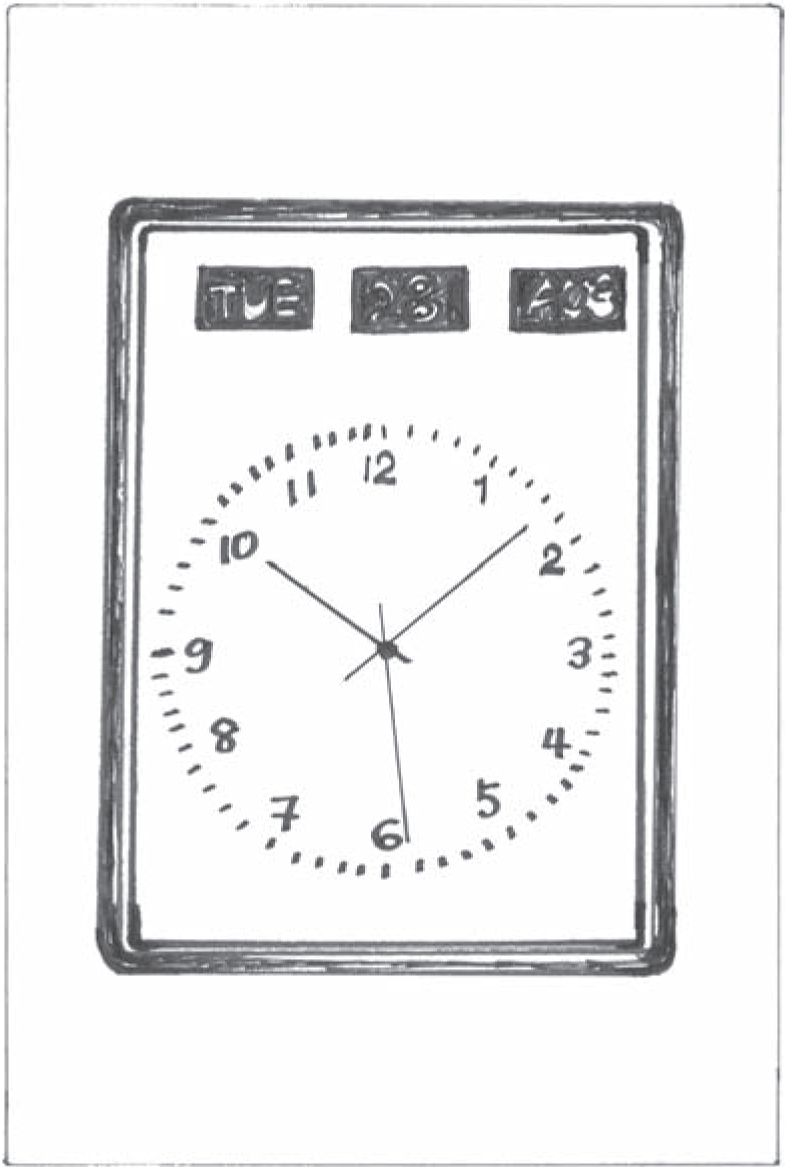
Jaguar is a good example of heritage rather than ironic nostalgia and retro. It is interesting that this is a younger company than its parent Ford (Jaguar has only made cars since 1945). But unlike Ford, which presents itself as a company without a history, Jaguar has stuck with its design philosophy and heritage cues: the wood panelling, the sleek lines, the cat, the naming conventions ("X-Type" and "XJ"). Of course, it helps that Jaguar makes great cars, the XJ topping European marques in the JD Powers survey. But if you took Jaguar's next model and put a Lexus badge on it, would it have the same appeal?

Kids in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s grew up with the famous advertising slogan *Bring Out the Branston*. Branston Pickle is now owned by Premier Foods, which has one of the smartest strategies in fmcg. Many of its bigger competitors (e.g. Northern Foods) have focused on selling convenience meals to retailers such as Marks & Spencer. They are subject to intense pressure on margins, health concerns about processed foods and falling spend on "luxury" household items (including the expensive "gourmet" ready meals). Meanwhile, Premier has focused on acquiring and reviving nostalgic food brands. Its list includes many of the nostalgic brands from my own childhood: Bird's Custard, Angel Delight, Ambrosia Custard, Hartley's Jam, Rowntree's Jelly, Branston Pickle, Cross & Blackwell, Gale's Honey, Typhoo Tea. The company has been rumoured to be looking at acquiring Weetabix too. While marketing traditional household names, Premier redesigns them for modern consumers, rather like the VW Bug. For instance, Branston Pickle is now available in convenient squeezy plastic tubes.

Travelocity goes one further, in reinventing a heritage that was not even its own. Alan Whicker, TV travel journalist, had spent most of the 1970s and 1980s as the advertising celebrity associated with Barclaycard. An established travel reporter (his show was called *Whicker's World*) he roved the world in these ads, in the process both showing how Barclaycard was welcome everywhere abroad and adding some "foreign travel" glamour to a boring piece of plastic. Travelocity has staged a remake of this campaign, using Whicker as a presenter for its own advertising. It looks like a smart strategic use of nostalgia: making a new-fangled, online travel service feel established, like a household name that has been around for years.

3D. Calendar Ideas

A lot of traditional culture was organised around time structures: seasons, times of day, the passing of a year, anniversaries of significant events. Our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3D. CALENDAR

New Year's Eve is a direct descendent of celebrations dating back at least 7000 years.

Cultural ideas that are rooted in time take on a fuller sense of reality – punctuating our lives, being fixed points, the measurement of other things. A fashion like colourful suits has a fuzzy place in our cultural memories (Jazz? Jamaica? Italy? Celebrities?). But give it a date – "1980s fashion" – and it seems almost solid. Important events become markers in historical time – the Second World War, 9/11, 0 AD. Conversely, an accidentally significant date (2000) took on a mass of cultural expectations, as a turning point, perhaps even an apocalypse (Y2K). We also rely on time-based rhythms and routines to structure our lives: the working day, daily news, the alternation of work and rest, weekends, the monthly pay check, the annual holidays . . .

Qualities that *time brands* share in common are:

- a definite time association: a year, day part, date etc.;
- a place in the cultural calendar;
- habit, routine, ritual, familiarity.

Probably the most famous time brand was 20th Century Fox. But sadly this has fallen behind the times, 21st Century Fox being the name of an internet comic strip!

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

The National Lottery has succeeded in owning Saturday night. It was launched in 1994 and has sales of £90 million a week, the majority of which are tickets for the Saturday night draw. Its popularity has waned slightly. My guess is that over time, the perception that *It Could Be You!* has worn thin among those who have hardly ever won anything. Having said that, over two thirds of all UK adults still buy a ticket for the Saturday night draw, making it far and away the highest participation event, and usually the highest-rating TV show in the UK. It is a landmark in the week, a synchronising of all our disparate personal experiences of time into one shared moment of suspense. And lotteries have a long history in this sort of role, dating back at least to Roman times.

Because of its place as timekeeper for the national culture, it is not surprising that the lottery formed a key part of the millennium celebrations with the *Big Draw* game where players had to pick six years between 1900 and 1999 – an opportunity to pick key family and historical dates and in the process mark the passing of a century.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Penguin used the occasion of its 60th anniversary in 1995 to launch a range of *Penguin* 60 books, 60 pages long, for 60p. The series was a huge (probably accidental) success, which took Penguin from appearing quaint and behind the times to seeming like the leading, authoritative publisher it once had been. It was a great comeback, gave a showcase for modern authors like Alasdair Gray, Stephen King and Jim Crace, as well as (in the *Penguin 60 Classics*) reintroducing key titles in the back catalogue, by authors such as Fyodar Dostoyevsky, HG Wells and Sir Thomas Malory, to a whole new readership.

Ten years on, for the 70th anniversary, Penguin has launched a range of 70 small-format books. Authors include WG Sebald, Anais Nin, Pat Barker, Vladimir Nabokov, Simon Schama, Zadie Smith and Gustave Flaubert. This time it has really gone to town on the cover designs – they are a visual feast – and yet apparently it got away with paying each designer £70 (it used freelancers and this must have been seen as an unmissable showcase opportunity for them). There is also an exhibition at the V&A showing classic cover designs from the last 70 years, which ties in very well.

Other Instructive Examples

2005 saw the first ever January sale by a high street bank. In a historical first, HSBC also opened 90 branches on Tuesday 28 December, which was meant to be a bank holiday! Deals included the lowest mortgage rate on the market

(3.97% for the first £100 000 borrowed). This was a clever and lateral move: applying a convention from another category and creating incredible salience for what was basically a set of cut-price offers.

IKEA launches a new catalogue every September. This shows off the latest range and is distributed free to most homes within the catchment area of the stores. It is one of the biggest printed publications in the world, and is rightly regarded by the company as a pillar of the business (along with the advertising, the range, the stores and its scale of production). A new IKEA catalogue conveys fresh ideas and inspiration. It ties in with the desire to update your home: keeping up not with the Joneses, but with the times.

Other brands making strong use of time include:

- Apple – Steve Jobs' 2003 *Year of the Laptop* was a great piece of time branding and happens to be an idea I have lifted for a client in a very different market, so I am afraid 2006 may be "taken" by the time you read this!
- O2 ran a *Happy Hour* with free texts between 7pm and 8pm. In a nice added twist it laid on happy hour London cabs, sponsored to give free journeys between 7pm and 8pm.
- Swatch launched a new measure of time – *Internet Time* – in 1998. Instead of hours and minutes the day is divided into 1000 beats. It was actually an old idea (dating back to the French Revolution) and has the advantage of being intuitive in scale; for instance, if an event occurred 22 000 beats ago (as opposed to 31 680 minutes ago) you instantly know it was 22 days ago. It hasn't really caught on, but full marks for effort and probably worthwhile in terms of the PR coverage.

4

Herd Instincts

There is a great scene in Monty Python's *Life of Brian* where the crowd chant: "We are all individuals." That points to a paradox in the relationship between people and culture. We feel like we are making individual choices, yet culture is collective, made out of shared forms, and to adopt these is also to become assimilated.

Some of the important movements in modern marketing can be described as addressing people's herd instincts, rather than seeing them as individual consumers. All of these have counterparts in traditional societies and the feeling of this selection is of quite primitive forces and structures coming into play. The mental image I have of this is the reflex that cats have, so that if picked up by a certain point of the neck they go floppy and immobile (it's so their mothers can move kittens with the minimum of fuss). When these sorts of herd dynamics are at play in markets the assertive, empowered prosumer of modern theory seems to go out of the window and be replaced by a primitive devotee.

- 4A. *Initiation ideas*. Initiations are ceremonies and rituals that usher in a new phase of someone's life – birthday parties, weddings and so on. A key aspect of this is being accepted into a new group – there are usually witnesses – and taking on a new identity. Primitive initiations were often very scary, whereas modern marketing equivalents are usually benign, but perhaps no less powerful in "nipping the back of the neck".

Table II.4 Herd instincts

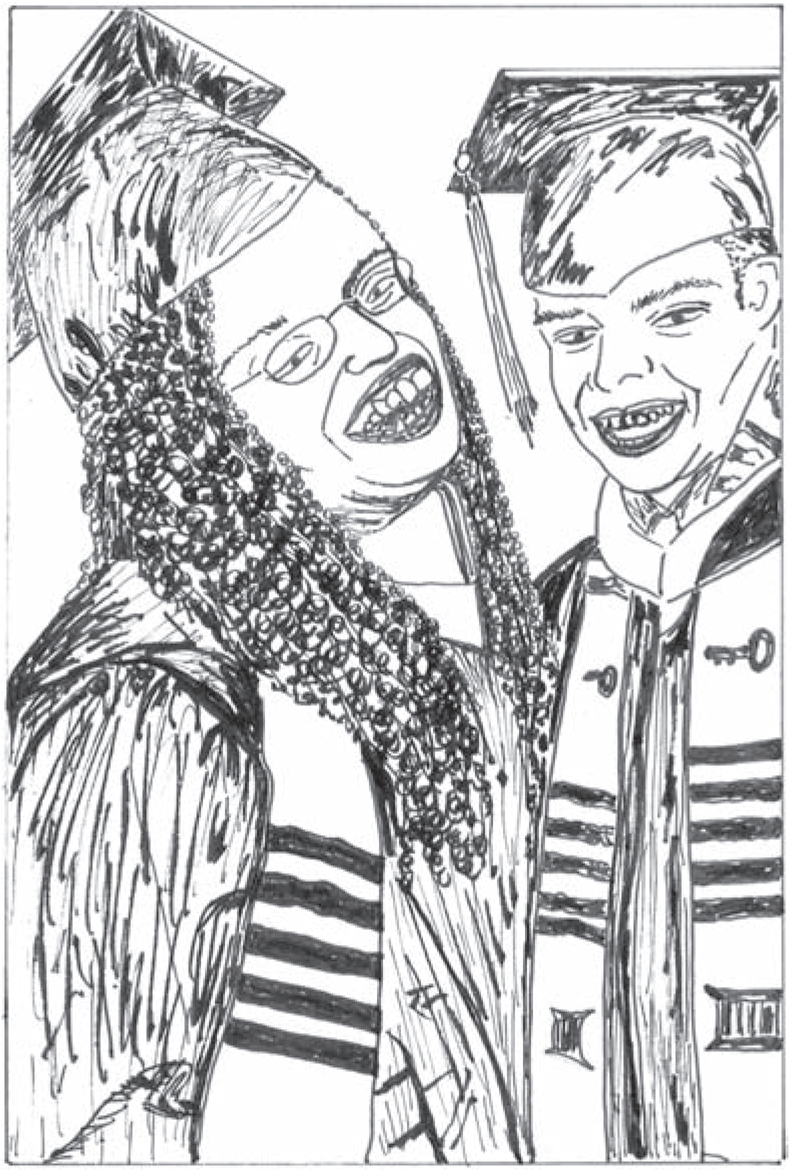
4A. Initiation	4B. Crowds	4C. Clans	4D. Crazes
Alpha Course	*C4 Cricket*	*Fast Company*	*Gmail*
Fitness First	*Fruitstock*	*Harley*	*iPod*

- 4B. *Crowd ideas*. The immediate experience of being swept along by crowd emotions is central to many brand experience events. What these do is install an "inner crowd" (or representation of that feeling) with which the brand is associated.
- 4C. *Clan ideas*. While style tribes (mod, rocker, punk) have waned in importance within youth culture, it is plain that there are many examples of this sort of allegiance and group identity. Brands can become emblems of membership – as with the Harley Owners Group. Like the other ideas in this section, clans have an archaic quality.
- 4D. *Craze ideas*. I have a slightly different view of how ideas spread than the American "buzz marketing" school, which prioritises word of mouth. I think it is also important to look at imitation (seeing other people with iPods or AIDS ribbons) and also the official dimension of seeing reports of the craze *as a craze* in the media.

4A. Initiation Ideas

In our supposedly modern, rational society we still have big occasion rituals, marking a life event like a birthday, marriage or death. Many of these rituals also mark a transition, what anthropologists call a *liminal* moment, named after the Latin word for doorway. A literal example is the custom of carrying a bride through the doorway of her new home.

Initiations are about personal transformation being enabled by social rituals. A key component is the solidarity and support that you get from the people who have gathered to mark the occasion. You don't just "come of age", you become recognised legally and socially as an adult. These rituals



4A. INITIATION

often involve the concept of witnessing – either in the legal sense or in an informal way of making something public (like the famous statements in AA meetings starting "My name is _____ and I am an alcoholic").

Features that *initiation brands* share in common are:

- a meeting place, whether in real life or in media;
- being inclusive, social, people are welcome;
- chances to discover, contribute and take part;
- well-defined routines, processes or formats;
- witnessing and making something public;
- the sense of it being "official"; e.g. that these events are well known;
- but also mystery: initiates discover secrets by taking part;
- converts, people who have taken part become enthusiastic advocates;
- word of mouth, converts as recruiters.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

How do you engage young people who don't go to church in a secular society? The Anglican church invited people to its *Alpha Course*. These evening discussion groups roved over "questions of life" (to which religion has traditionally been the answer) and gave people a chance to explore their values and beliefs. Some 700 000 people in the UK have taken the course since it was invented at Holy Trinity Brompton, in London, and over a million have taken the course in North America too.

From one point of view, helping people debate these questions is a service to the community, in a society where we get few chances to stop and reflect on "what it's all about". From the church point of view it gives people who may have drifted away from attending a stepping stone back – the act of visiting and having a conversation makes it much easier to return. In addition, when people do pause to reflect they often find that they do have some spiritual or religious beliefs, for example that there must be "something else". And the Alpha brand basically works because people find discovering things in groups rewarding and congenial. It is such a natural fit with the church that it is easy to forget what a radical marketing idea it is: a completely different way of achieving a basic objective of getting bums on pews. It is more like the recruiting tactics of cults, which will offer a "management seminar", "philosophy course" or "drugs rehab" facility as a way to engage potential recruits. And within the church (judging by comments on local parish websites) the Alpha Course seems to be seen as an introduction to Christian faith, while its public marketing has played this down relative to a much more secular promise of exploring the meaning of life.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

I met with Fitness First recently and it has a fascinating vision for its marketing. The gym sector is engaged in deep discounting; a recruitment frenzy. Fitness First wants to rise above this. It is planning to give every member a personal trainer. But what fascinated me is the packages it is developing around people's needs, rather than its own facilities. For instance, it could offer a "getting married" package, with weight loss, stress relief, a bit of time on sun beds and so on. It is treating a gym membership as what it often is: a resolution, part of a life change. And the structured packages not only make cultural sense, they will likely make what people buy better suited to their needs and much less price sensitive.

Other Instructive Examples

The Co-operative Bank's community driving course was an award-winning business in the community scheme that offered young people in disadvantaged areas the opportunity to learn to drive. The immediate aim was to reduce car theft (it was felt that joy-riding was just an expression of the fact that these kids wanted to try driving cars). But it also met social and education objectives: from literacy (based around the driving theory test), to anger management and impulse control (under the heading "road rage"). The biggest category of initiation rituals in primitive societies was those aimed at turning potentially unruly adolescents into responsible adults. And this looks like a descendant.

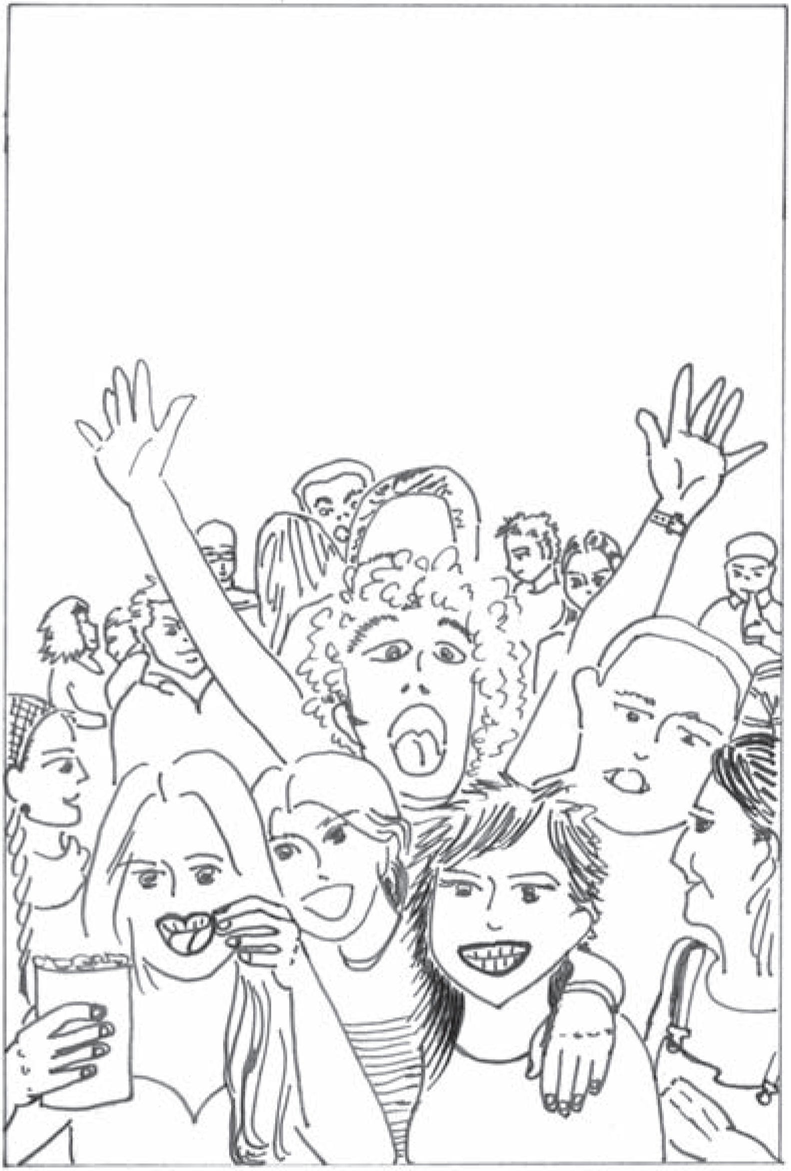
The Weight Watchers empire grew from humble beginnings 40 years ago, when the founder Jean Nidetch invited friends around to her home once a week to discuss their efforts to lose weight. What people seem to buy into is first a proven process (a bit like consultancy) and secondly the social support to motivate them and keep them going through that process. The process relies on a points system, where different foods are given certain numbers of points and members work with targets of the total numbers of points a day they should be eating.

4B. Crowd Ideas

A crowd can take you over: you participate in a shared sense of occasion, mood or movement. There seems to be a particular pattern of feeling, of losing your individuality and being swept along by crowds; a phenomenon apparent in the public reaction to major news events like the fall of the Berlin Wall, the death of Princess Diana, the new millennium, as well as in more recreational events such as football crowds, carnivals and New Year's Eve celebrations. These events don't have to be epochal or institutional, you can see the same patterns in Mexican waves and smart mobs (mobile phone-organised crowd "happenings").

Experience marketing is often concerned with crowds and events. I think that practitioners know these sorts of emotional patterns are key. But they often work to an official, client-sanctioned brief, based on individuals having a personal brand experience, as if they had seen an advertisement or chatted to a friend. This is a lost opportunity to measure the true driver of success, which is the level of feeling intensity in the crowd. Lacking a distinct model of experience strategy means that in practice these influential programmes are simply measured by things like how many people went along, levels of trial or repeat purchase, names captured for CRM and so on. Or they measure the media space associated with the event (banners and so on) as a straightforward sponsorship. I suspect that not only does this limit clients' assessment of the huge contribution that brand experience activities can make, but also it limits the way these activities are planned and dreamt up.

The qualities that *crowd brands* share in common are:



4B. CROWDS

- a participation event or mechanic;
- a feeling of being swept along, channelling a mass emotion;
- being able to see the rest of the crowd/experience the scale of the event;
- a sense of occasion, countdown or appointment;
- involvement mechanics, e.g. wristbands, slogans, galleries, live broadcasts on big screens, cheerleaders, mascots . . .
- “group think”: a shift in individual orientation as a result of group participation (something you carry away from that experience as an “inner crowd” or milieu).

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

With apologies to readers in Australia, I must just mention England winning the Ashes at cricket. It represented a highpoint for the sport in Britain in recent history and also sadly marks the end of its time with Channel 4, the broadcaster that had exclusive rights and brought it to the public free to air (it will be on Sky from 2006).

When Channel 4 took on the cricket in 1998 it was not a popular sport. It was known as a game played at public schools and supported by old duffers in blazers. Not only that, but it was difficult to understand, slow and loaded with strange jargon like “googlies”.

Channel 4’s TV coverage was a masterpiece in public education and also pioneered the use of advances like Hawk Eye and extreme slow-motion photography. But the cultural marketing of the sport was the centrepiece of the channel’s seven years at the crease, with open-air parties in the park and on the beach, events themed around West Indian and Indian cricket culture, inner-city cricket programmes and teaching packs for schools. Channel 4 didn’t just broadcast cricket, it popularised it. It was helped by a turnaround in the England team’s performances, starting in 2000 with a classic series against the West Indies. But sport is a psychological game: who is to say that the feeling of having millions of enthusiastic fans behind them didn’t contribute to this renaissance in the English game? And Channel 4 has been very clever in branding this as Channel 4 Cricket and working the crowd experience – notably through the “4” signs (drawn like the Channel 4 double-lined logo) that fans in the crowd waved jubilantly every time a boundary was hit.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Innocent smoothies' Fruitstock festival was an exquisitely orchestrated brand experience event that happened to take place in the park around the corner from my home. Proceeds from the event were given to a children's charity and it was very much geared up for families, with an extensive play area. As well as the main music stage – serving up an appropriate mix of jazz, folk, thoughtful hip-hop and gospel – there were numerous stalls selling food and drink (mostly organic, fair trade and so on). The whole festival was festooned with well-wishing commentary from the company, asking you to enjoy the fluffy clouds, each other and so on – not to mention the artificial grass-covered vans, which were a magnet for toddlers, including my own.

The Innocent product was well represented at the festival and seemed popular, judging by the queues for the stands selling it, but I think the main value of an event like this is creating a cultural context for the brand, something that gives it a living place in the culture, as if you had stumbled across a tribe whose traditional drink this was.

Other Instructive Examples

Many other brands have staged their own music festivals. The Virgin V festival is arguably a business in its own right, but the events by O2, Ben & Jerry's (who got there years before Innocent, at least in the USA), Budweiser and others demonstrate how mainstream this kind of marketing is these days. Others have been headline sponsors, like Levi's at Sonar and Bacardi at our 100 or so Ministry of Sound events in Spain.

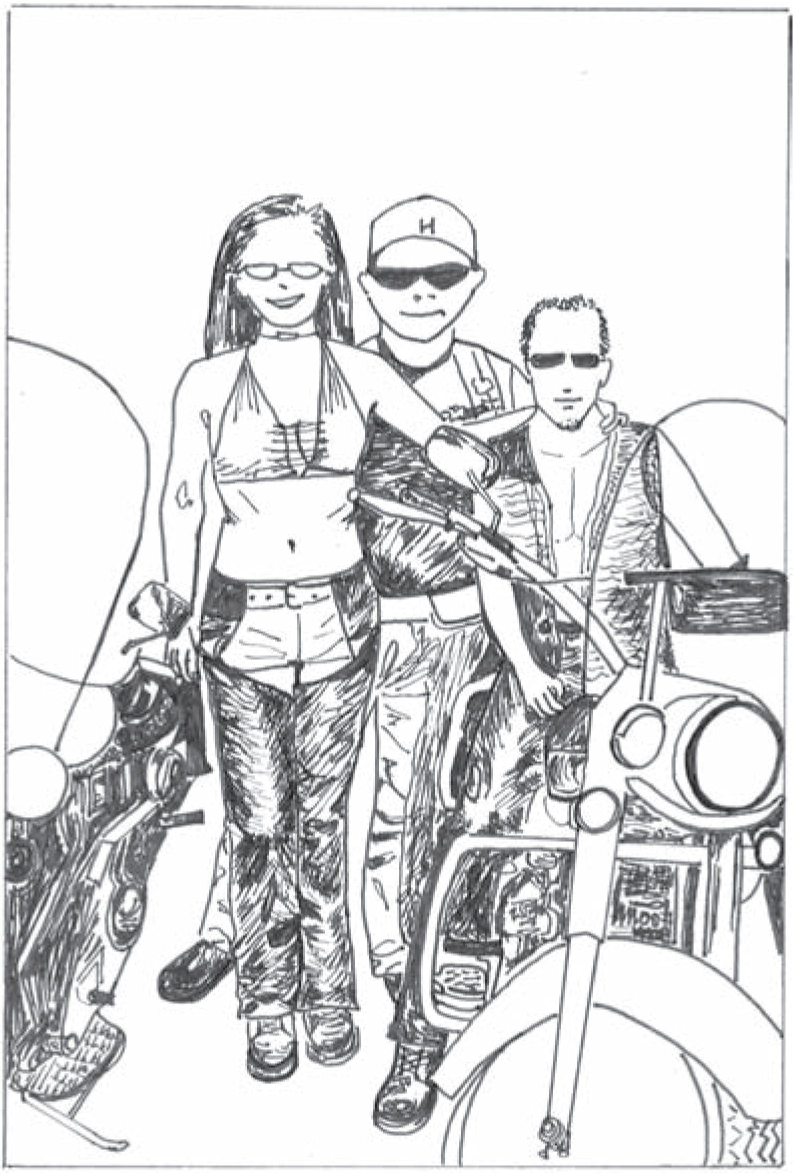
Equally popular are sporting events – not only for sporting goods brands, but also general brands seeking to inject some passion, like Coca-Cola and Ford who have been investing in live soccer. And the festooning of the Olympics with sponsorship is legendary.

More interesting from an innovative strategy point of view (as well as its sheer scale and good intentions) was Live 8, son of Live Aid, in itself modelled on great "consciousness-raising" hippy festivals like Woodstock and the antiwar protests of the late 1960s. Live 8 was a masterpiece of event and publicity design: it had the *Make Poverty History* wristbands (AIDS ribbon meets Kabala red thread bracelet), an innovative goal – to put pressure on politicians meeting at G8 rather than raise private donations – and many other new features. The sheer scale and media coverage of the event were breathtaking. But it is only the latest in a long series of charity events, fundraising concerts and telethons and calendar promotions like Year of the Volunteer, to maximise people's responses by sweeping them along in crowd emotion and momentum.

An interesting crowd event from a more mainstream branding perspective, which I already covered earlier in this book, was *Run London*. It illustrates how crowds themselves can be "activated" through modern means (with people inviting friends to do it with them by viral email) and was a great way to get more people to take exercise.

4C. Clan Ideas

In general the style tribes of yesteryear (goths, mods, punks) have given way to more of an "anything goes" approach among today's youth. There are still strong "tribal" tendencies in parts of youth culture, for instance inner-city gangs and skaters. However, they do seem to be waning in membership in recent decades. But these youth style and music taste groups were just the latest incarnations of an ancient tendency for cultural designs like clothing, adornments and hairstyles to be used to identify membership of one group, *as opposed to* others. This opposition – which led to scuffles at English seaside resorts between mods and rockers – seems to be an essential part of the constitution of clans. It does not need to be violent rivalry: it can be channelled into sporting contests, college fraternities competing for the pick of new members, and so on. You see it all the time in business too: the suits vs the writers, the factory vs head office, marketing vs sales.



4C. CLANS

A sure sign of a clan is an emblematic piece of clothing: a college scarf, a sports team's shirt. In the Zulu nation, clans were identified by a totem animal (and its hide). All clans carry some notion of solidarity too, the sense of being on the same side, engaging in group rituals, singing the group songs.

Qualities that *clan brands* tend to have in common are:

- shared styles of dress or other visual identifiers;
- belonging, being in the know, being insiders;
- shared values, i.e. definition of what is important and "what we're not";
- opposition to other clans/groups;
- belief that this group is better than others;
- rituals, songs, chants, jargon;
- solidarity, shared passion;
- organised events and meetings;
- venues with their own culture: etiquette, styling, customs, music, food etc.;
- the brand as somehow integral to this scene, an authentic part of it;
- special customs and language around this brand;
- being adopted by newcomers who are keen to fit in;
- ambassadors and older members who can tell the story.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Fast Company magazine launched itself as the self-proclaimed news sheet for a new clan in the workplace, the self-managed knowledge worker. Key cultural innovations that the magazine supported included being antihierarchy, pro-hot desking and other flexible work innovations, an interest in ethics and sustainability, having more creative job titles and roles, being more creative and less political. The movement was linked to the new economy or dotcom era. Some detractors claim that there was a certain amount of Orwellian doublespeak in things like *Job Titles for the Future*. My own view, for what it's worth, is that it was a welcome counter movement to the stilted and bureaucratic old corporate culture, although of course every form of extremism has rough edges. My past company St Luke's – a shareholder cooperative that is just turning 10 years old – was part of this movement and featured in an early issue of the magazine. The readers of *Fast Company* were welcomed to forums, online and at large conferences, and seemed to share a universal dress code (the so-called open-collar workers) despite their disdain for the uniformity of old corporations. Magazines have often spoken for tendencies, but few went so far in organising the clan and networking their members. The *Fast Company* project resembles an art movement like Bauhaus, in having a manifesto, a set of political beliefs, an aesthetic, an organisation and leading lights.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

The decision to buy a Harley Davidson would traditionally be about being a "biker", a member of a real subculture. But by the 1980s the brand had become more about nostalgia, with an older buyer, often more affluent and professional. The Harley Owners Groups was launched in 1983 to allow owners to "share their passion and show their pride". There were too many owners of new bikes without friends to ride with: middle managers in their forties who felt awkward about riding around their home town on their own. While many of these people were a million miles from being "Hell's Angels", it was still natural for this group to be organised like that (it even has "chapters") and it reflected a nostalgic set of cultural ideas left over from the *Easy Rider* days of motorcycle gangs. Today with 800 000 members this is by far the largest factory-linked motoring organisation in the world and it has created a context within which many people can enjoy their Harley and also a sense of belonging to a like-minded community.

Other Instructive Examples

According to a recent report on BBC's *Top Gear* (although the claim has been contested) the BMW 3-series now outsells the Ford Mondeo in the UK. That reflects the rising affluence of the last 7–10 years. But it is also a sign of the times. BMW is aspiration personified, it is flashy, "reassuringly expensive" as Stella might say. I think of BMW as being much like a business suit. It confers instant respectability. It isn't just about status, it is about looking the part. You could spend the same money as on a BMW saloon on an exotic sports car, but that would give a completely different set of impressions (unless you were an engineer or a designer, it would certainly raise eyebrows). Driving into a business car park in a shiny new BMW, stepping out in a well-cut suit, checking the name of the person you are due to see on your PDA . . . all of these give you confidence. These days it might be called "professionalism" rather than respectability.

Red Stripe is the epitome of a clan brand. I worked with this brand in 2005 along with my old friend Ted Polhemus. Ted's research was into how Red Stripe got adopted by the punks through exposure to West Indian scenes, for instance the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival. And we found that the same scene-based principles were helping the brand thrive in new markets today. In Zurich it had been placed in a few snowboarding and reggae bars and was already well on the way to becoming the new "in" beer; similarly with scene venues in California and Sweden. Red Stripe has its own qualities as a brand: it is authentic, good beer, has iconic scruffy packaging and everywhere it goes seems to appeal to the same DIY (cut 'n' mix) ethic that the Jamaicans brought to Britain. But it also seems to spread by fusion: one group of people happening on another's scene venues.

A clan brand – also a past client – which has fared less well in the modern world is Doctor Martens. This boot signalled the working-class roots of clans of football fans, skinheads and so on. The gay skinheads adopted the look, with signals of different sexual preferences being sent by different coloured laces. When I worked with this brand the challenge was to find a new role, since the old-style tribes had declined. There were still goths and other groups who bought the boot for its uniform connotations, but the new inner-city street styles emphasised sports trainers and the audience (e.g. students) who "should" be buying Doctor Martens were much more inclined to define their own look.

What brands with clans can do these days is apply modern technology to mailings, content management and relationship marketing. One United, the official Manchester United fan club, is a prime example. There had always been a strong clan around this and other football teams. What Man

Utd did (with help from my friends at Iris) was bring this into the twenty-first century. As well as selling season tickets, One United keeps fans informed and entertained, giving them the inside track gossip and information about the club. A key principle for this scheme was that it should be seen as adding value, bringing exclusive information and gossip, rather than just being a ticket and merchandising pipeline.

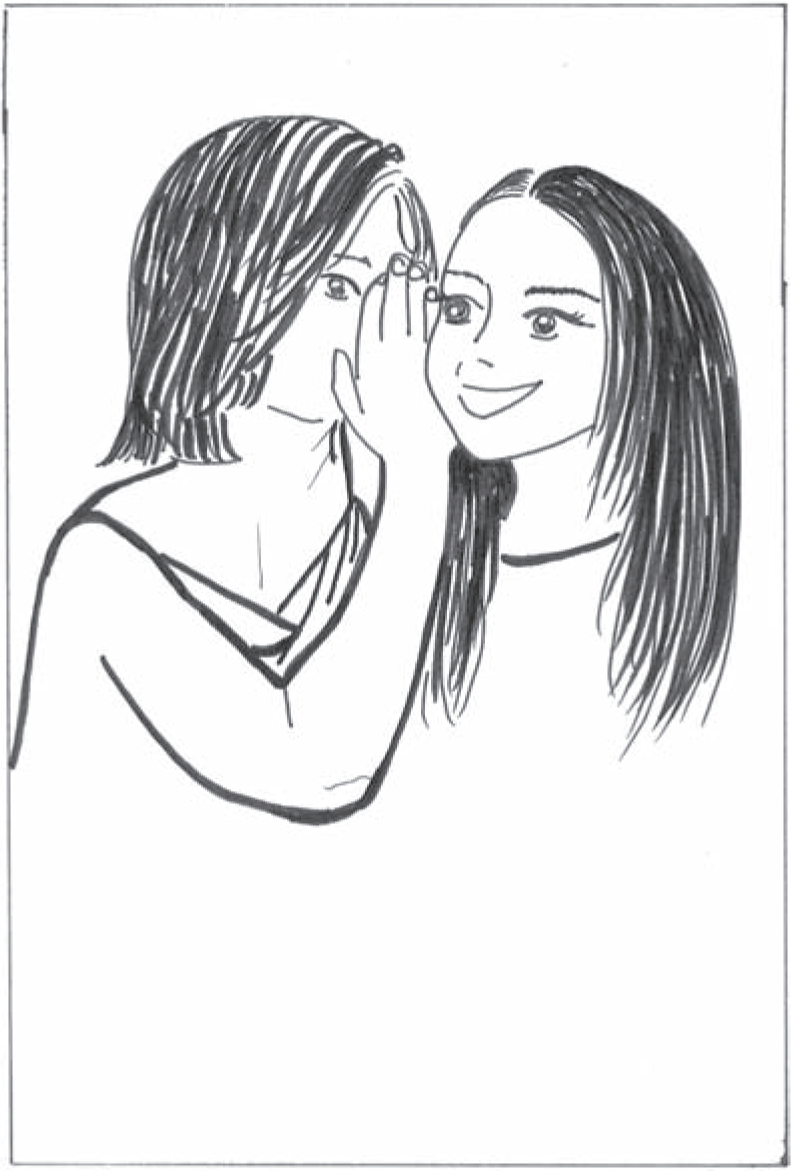
An identifiable contemporary clan is the ecologically minded cycling and recycling crew. The clannish nature of this allegiance can spill over into clashes with motorists (the so-called lycra lout phenomenon) as well as – surprisingly given their anticonsumerism stance – making for very brand-conscious members. This clan lusts after mountain bikes with exotic, heroic names like Rockhopper, Stumpjumper and GT Avalanche. The branded appeal of rugged, great outdoorsy transport with a premium price tag (up to several thousand pounds) is ironically similar to the fashion for 4WD cars. These bikes (and their more citified relatives) are as unnecessary for cross-town traffic as a BMW X5. Obviously they do not pollute or contribute to carbon emission problems, though. Also appealing to this clan's sense of "cool" are brands like Fresh & Wild and Triyoga.

4D. Craze Ideas

When people have studied viral marketing they have often focused on how an idea crosses over from niche to mainstream. One problem I have with the theory of viral marketing is that it relies too heavily on the classical marketing notion of messaging. My own take on *craze brands* is that, while word of mouth can play a role, two other factors offer a more complete description of the cultural process:

- imitation;
- reflexivity: the self-fulfilling prophecy effect of reporting by the media.

Think about how (if you are old enough to remember) you first came across the Rubik's cube. It probably wasn't as simple as word of mouth – i.e.



4D. CRAZES

friends or contacts recommending it. It was probably seeing another kid playing one. Or seeing it on the news, reported as "the new craze that is sweeping the world". Both of these ways of encountering things, especially if repeated a few times, communicate that this is a new tradition and has currency; literally, that it is *what everyone else is doing.*

Scoubidous are the latest playground craze in the UK. These brightly coloured plastic strings are used to make woven accessories. They have been around in Europe for years and were a huge craze in France in the 1960s. As well as teaching complex patterns and difficult techniques, the craze also allows for individual self-expression in design and use. They look a bit like a tribal costume, especially when kids wear loads of them round their necks, hanging from bags and so on.

The humble Scoubidous highlight many features of crazes. First, the incubator community – analogous to the role populous cities play in incubating flu strains – in this case schools. Secondly, the role of visual imitation. A lot of culture, particularly fashion and particularly among young people, spreads by copying what you see others doing. Scoubidous are worn for display and are very visible, so lend themselves to this. Thirdly, things that become crazes often resemble traditional cultural forms (and perhaps the appeal could be said to be archetypal?). Scoubidous look like tribal adornments. You could wonder whether graffiti has some distant relationship with cave art.

Qualities that *craze brands* share in common are:

- a talking point, urban myth, slogan, catchphrase, nickname;
- imitability, being visible, catchy and easy to copy;
- the news story that says this is the new new thing;
- an incubator population (dense, competitive and craze prone);
- existing networks it can spread through: playground, street fashion, bulletin boards etc.;
- preferably not overused, ideally new networks unused before by your market;
- being singular, striking, different, catching;
- having some intuitive place in culture, antecedents;
- if word of mouth is the strategy, making it ethical and above board;

- tapping into the desire to know first, to be ahead of others in finding out about new things.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Gmail – Google email – was launched not with a big fanfare and advertising campaign, but to a select list of initial invitees, mostly drawn from bloggers.com (the weblog service owned by Google). These were initially given six invites. Meanwhile the press and individual blogs and discussion groups were all buzzing about the fact that Gmail was set to offer huge storage (1 GB) for free. What adds social value to Gmail is that you can only get in through other members – i.e. you need to be "recommended". Then add some public hype and speculation, but with some details – like the unique advertising and search functions – kept hazy and mysterious. Gmail invites became hot property to the extent that they were being traded on eBay for up to $100 ($20 was more usual) and there was even a swap site where people offered items for barter such as baking someone a cake in return for an invite. Early in 2005 Gmail increased the number of invites per user from 6 to 50, which was tantamount to a "real" launch.

I did some research groups recently with trendy young people in London and one told me that he and about 30 "mates" were all on Gmail and used the storage for swapping music tracks. If that is at all indicative of how the networks of invitation have continued, then the viral motif appears to have endured as a key part of the brand.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

The iPod is a good riposte to the "word-of-mouth" school of thought. There is no catchy word-of-mouth message that spread with this device. It is the iPod itself that is the craze. You see cool people wearing them – and you want one. It is all about imitation, in particular the white headphones, which made owners stand out a mile.

The functionality is extraordinarily good and the iTunes software and music store are important too – as was the historical context of illegal downloads and the RIAA threatening to sue individuals. It is the iPod that has made most of the money for Apple, not the downloads. As I write, besides numerous iPod variants (Picture, Mini, Shuffle, Nano) Apple is launching a hybrid iPod and mobile phone with Motorola.

Other Instructive Examples

Around 1% of all young people in the USA are enrolled in Tremor, which they are told on joining is a community where companies can benefit from learning about their opinions and where they get to try new products before their friends. Tremor was developed by Procter & Gamble as a buzz marketing channel, offering a credible and cost-effective alternative to TV advertising. Only a third of the 20 products promoted a year through Tremor are P&G's own. An example is Head & Shoulders shampoo, which spread the word among teenage boys that it kills the fungus that causes dandruff (not a pleasant message they would necessarily want to use in above-the-line advertising, but a powerful piece of inside knowledge). Outside clients have included Dreamcast movies, Vanilla Coke, Sony Minidisc and the Dairy Association. Promotions often include money-off coupons and some pre and post research to check the results.

Play Golf America (a campaign by the PGA) picked up on a benign, but no less powerful craze mechanism: the desire among enthusiastic audiences of physical spectacles and performances to have a go themselves. The *Play Golf America* campaign ran alongside a series of major golf tournaments in America. It was a classic event and experience programme, using the actual tour and PR to stimulate ordinary members of public to have a go. Play Golf America is a great slogan (reports compared it to the popular *Got Milk* campaign), but I think the crowd participation pattern explains much more fully than the form of words why it would catch on. When Wimbledon is on, millions of Britons find a tennis racket in the attic and head to the park. When you see a dance production you come out of the theatre wanting to dance. Apparently this has to do with "mirror neurons" – the part of the brain that gets involved in a physical spectacle, by simulating how your body would move if you were doing the moves yourself.

A great snippet in the news recently was Universal Music using the head girls of every all-girl school in the UK as a buzz marketing audience. They are being sent Jamie Cullum promotion packs, including CDs, posters and stickers. The BBC followed up the story by interviewing a number of the recipients and the response was generally positive. Mostly they seemed intrigued and as one said:

> Of course this is about manipulation – what marketing campaign isn't? But look, it's got you interested, so that's playing into their hands as well. I'm not going to object if someone sends me a free CD.[1]

It illustrates the value of being creative in defining a different kind of opinion former, at least in PR terms. Full marks to whoever thought this one up!

The AIDS ribbon is another interesting example of how crazes often recycle "chunks" of traditional culture. The "talisman" is a symbolic (magical) object, worn to ward off danger. The St Christopher medal and bunches of heather are examples that survived into the present day. As well as the symbolic connotations (red for blood, cross for plague), might there not be an unconscious feeling that wearing a symbol like this could also help protect the user? I am not suggesting that is what the AIDS ribbon was about politically, nor seeking to lessen its role, but merely pointing to a reason why this symbol (as opposed to a t-shirt or hat) might have been so resonant.

5

Connecting

Only connect.[1]

These words, written by EM Forster some hundred years ago, look prophetic in today's society, when the struggle to make real human connections is greater (although the same difficulties are explored in Forster's book *Howard's End*) and when we are in the middle of rewiring our social relationships and institutions around the matrix of a network society.

Helping people make connections has emerged as an important role of brands and also an important source of meaning and value.

- 5A. *Co-authored ideas*. The idea of a mass medium created from a first-person perspective by the audience is a new idea, enabled by the internet. These brands, which are created by their audience, often have a limitless ability to scale up, with only a tiny central administration. And hence they can be powerful challengers, eBay, Wikipedia and others growing at exponential rates. There is a personal, "pedestrianised" feel to these forms of media, which is perhaps clearest when considering blogs as a prime example.
- 5B. *Socialising ideas*. Immediate new ways for people to make, enrich or renew social connections have great value in a time of alienation and endemic loneliness. A large part of the internet is devoted to such communities, where the main benefit is the bonds formed and maintained between members.

Table II.5 Connecting

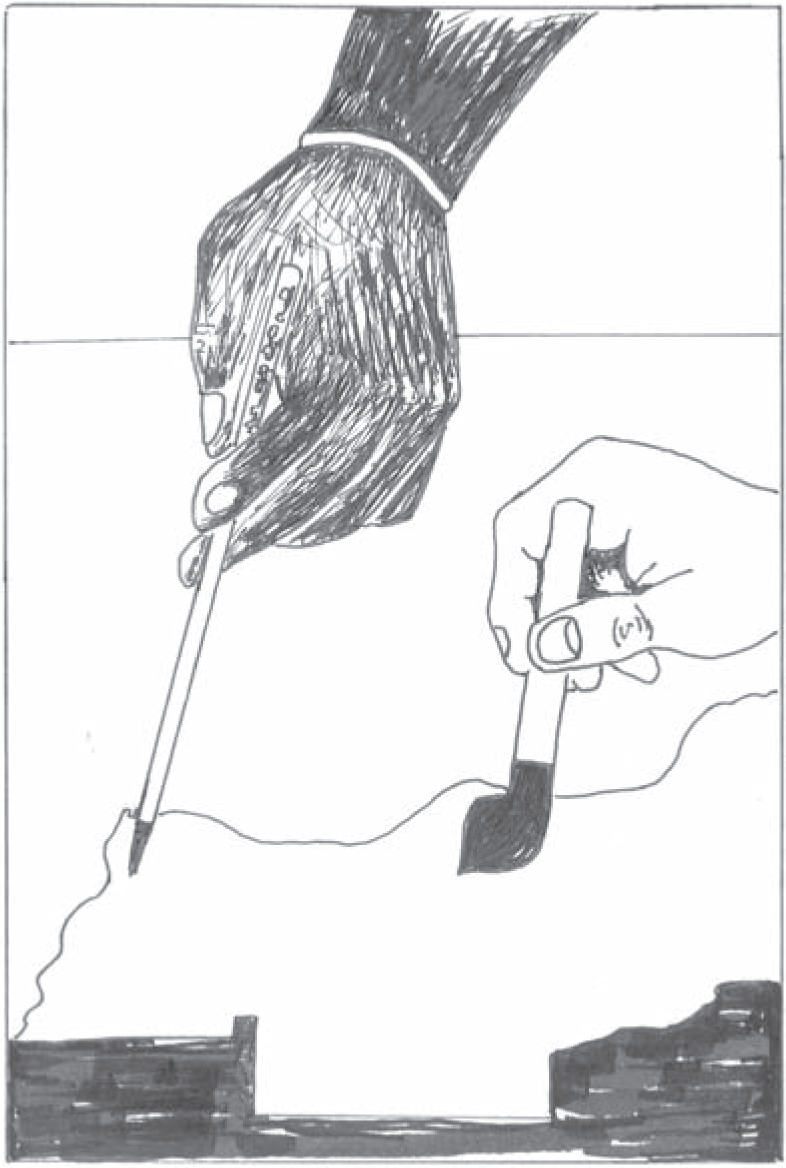
5A. Co-author	5B. Socialising	5C. Cooperative	5D. Local
Wikipedia	*Friends Reunited*	*Craigslist*	*Saturn*
HP	*LEGO*	*Biomat*	*Guinness*

- 5C. *Cooperative ideas*. Here people connect into a group or movement whose combined actions can achieve something, often altruistic – building social capital. These are about more than the immediate connections and, like clans, confer a feeling of belonging as well as putting something back.
- 5D. *Localised ideas*. There is no place like home. The "local" that culture always centres on can be a neighbourhood, but it is often the size of a nation – like Saturn cars and America, or Guinness and Ireland. On any scale it is official – *on the map*. Home markets and the expatriates abroad can be key for brands and this section explores how such local roots can be leveraged.

5A. Co-authored Ideas

I have called these co-authored because many examples involve users supplying content (mostly text, but also in the form of photos, music and video clips and artwork). I see this type of idea as very much based in personal perspectives and ideas – hence its inclusion in row A. The best freestanding examples of this tendency are blogs.

Blogs (short for weblogs) are the latest phenomenon on the web – 32 million people are reckoned to read blogs and nearly 10 million to write them. The closeness of these two figures says a lot about blogging: one writer for every three or four readers. That does not mean each blog only has 3.2 readers, though. Writers will only produce one blog, but readers may browse hundreds per month; a process facilitated by blogs having links to others with similar interests. A blog is usually a diary or journal, albeit one in which



5A. CO-AUTHOR

others can leave comments, which makes it co-authored. It is a way in which individuals can have access to publishing their own thoughts, views and ideas, in a way that was formerly only for the few with publishers and newspapers. Updating your blog regularly is felt to be very important, to keep the interest of those who revisit.

A blog is a way to make a statement. You can check someone's blog, just as you can check their outfit, record collection or car. And a key feature of blogs is that they stand against the official, the corporate, the establishment, the centralist; even when the blog is written by the chairman of General Motors, it is a movement away from the old system or official PR, towards individual perspectives. In fact, reading the daily thoughts of someone running a huge corporation is a leftfield view; almost as exotic as *Belle de Jour* (*The Diary of a Call Girl*), which is an award-winning UK blog.

In many ways blogs are a continuation of the ideology behind "cool" – the rejection of "organisation man" by the hippies and the DIY ethos of punk. Blogging has the same e-democracy agenda as Napster, Linux and others – but it is also a space for shared reflection and a medium for the spread of ideas. Watch this blog.myspace!

Features that *co-authored brands* share in common are:

- the content/value is wholly or partly generated by the audience;
- being personal, intimate;
- offering people ways to make a statement;
- being visible, communicative, expressive;
- DIY creativity;
- run against the crowd, average view or status quo.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Wikipedia, an online encyclopaedia, ranked 60th in the chart of global websites in July 2005 – up from number 500 less than a year previously. I am sure that by the time this book is published it will rank much higher. It already attracts more traffic than internet stalwarts like Netscape, NYTimes.com and About.com.

The fascinating thing about Wikipedia, which marks it out as a product of today's knowledge culture and society, is that it is written by its readers. Anyone can update its pages. Entries are checked, any rubbish and obscenity removed, and any disputes that arise over these entries are adjudicated by editors.

The entries to Wikipedia seem to be written by experts in those fields. Certainly the one on branding is pretty well informed, and each such page ends with links to further resources. It is a constantly updating knowledge base, with thousands of entries made per hour, so is often a better bet than even specialist reference books dealing with the same field (which can fall behind the times in areas like politics, popular culture or science where breaking news is common).

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

At the end of 2005 LEGO launched a new initiative called LEGO Factory. The basic concept is that anyone can access the company's digital designer software and create their own custom LEGO set. The launch follows the success of a design competition among the LEGO community and will be launched through community sites and the 2 million circulation LEGO magazine. It is a development that is true to the whole concept of LEGO; people have always made their own designs using the bricks anyway.

LEGO has a thriving ambassadors' programme: hobbyists who share their expert knowledge with official blessing. Ambassadors act as fan-to-fan advisers in online forums, form local LEGO clubs, write articles and even make conference presentations. In return they get the inside track, with conference call briefings and invitations to take part in secret projects, plus they get official recognition and can use the LEGO logo in emails. To cap it all, the company even has its own community relations specialist, Jake McKee, who runs his own blog, where he had this to say about the company's fortunes:

> As most everyone knows, the LEGO Group has had a rough couple of years. This year, we're so close to a positive result we can all taste it. But it's far from

> a lock at this point. We're going to need to really buckle down and pull those belts tighter to squeeze out every last dime. I really feel like we're on the right path, and things appear to only be improving. It's going to take several more years before we can breathe easy, but we're getting there.[2]

LEGO has certainly been prolific recently, producing lots of high-quality ideas. LEGO was already a cult, nerdy brand. A few years ago, there was a famous desk made completely out of LEGO for a star software engineer in Silicon Valley (he had it written into his contract as a stipulation). The LEGO *Star Wars* licence led not only to a great range of character construction kits, but also what many rated as the best ever *Star Wars* computer game (the characters look like they are made out of LEGO and explode into blocks when killed). This was a nerd brand marriage made in heaven.

Other Instructive Examples

In 2004 HP launched an event idea – *Hype* – whereby undiscovered artists and designers submitted work online, for printing and display in Brick Lane Old Truman Brewery. The Hype gallery gave young creative talent a showcase at the same time as showing what the latest HP printers could do to a much broader creative community who visited the show and the website. From what I saw when I visited it was very well put together. It used the excitement and participation of a brand experience event to demonstrate what could have made for a very dull advertising campaign about technologies and formats. More than just convincing people that HP printers are good, the event put them in a cultural context: what the cutting-edge visual artists are using today, a bit like visiting artists' and designers' studios and finding that 90% of them use Macs.

In 2005 HP launched the *Smiles* gallery, inviting people to upload photos featuring a smile to a gallery that would set a world record for having the most pictures on display. This service linked to HP's digital photographic services and offered a 25p donation to a children's charity per photo submitted. It is a nice idea rather than an earth-shattering one but, if you start to imagine the alternative conventional advertising approaches that could have been employed, it was a decent innovation. And it shows how the same mechanic that was used to reach a small influential network – of user-generated content – could be applied to a mass-marketing scheme too.

A number of camera phone launches (starting I believe with the Sony Ericsson T610) have found that allowing people to post pictures in an online gallery can create buzz around these products. If people can make creative content with your product it makes sense to allow them to showcase it. In the case of the T610 it attracted a few celebrities who posted photos from their everyday life (on Hollywood sets etc.) and created a huge amount of buzz and PR. A more recent Sony Ericsson launch (for the K300i) invited young people to submit embarrassing photos that are then rated by visitors. This unfortunately isn't quite as entertaining as it sounds (I think you had to be there) but the site had a great name at least – www.shameacademy.com.

Slashdot is one of those clever geek joke names like GNU (which stands for "Gnu's Not Unix"). If you read the slashdot url out loud, it goes: "Http slash slash slash dot dot org". The fascinating thing about Slashdot is that it is a community news forum – i.e. the members also provide the news, usually in the form of links to other news stories, sometimes in the form of leaked company news and other inside information. It resembles a blog, but dates back to 1997 and has a million or so active members. One famous posting was of Scientologist secret documents (Operating Theta Level III Codes), which were withdrawn a week later by the editors under pressure from Scientologist lawyers. The community has a culture all of its own, with "slashdotting" becoming a verb to describe the effect that happens when someone posts an interesting site and so many other slashdotters check it out in a short space of time that it crashes!

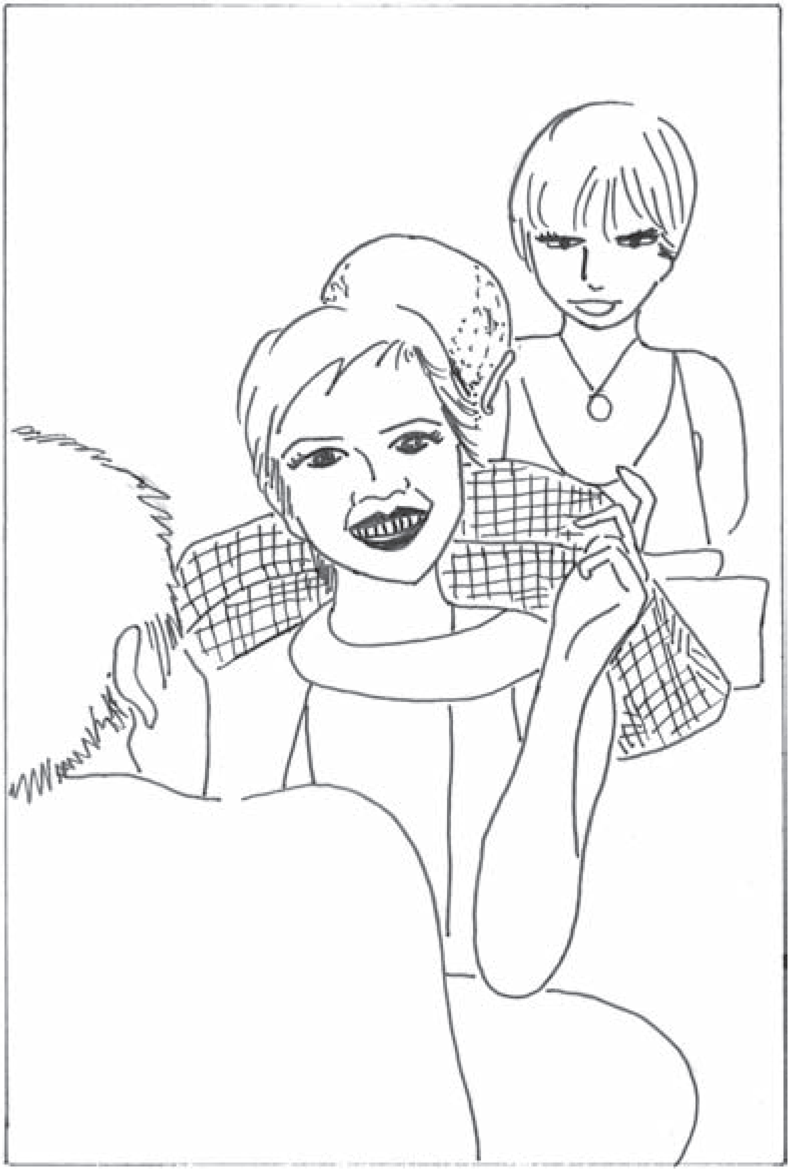
Amazon has many advantages. It uses the internet to give access to an enormous stock held centrally, to discount aggressively on the basis of its buying power, to be searchable, to use CRM systems to recontact people when a new book by an author they have bought before comes out, and so on. But I think the heart of the brand's success is its ability to carry reader reviews with every title and to list what people who bought this book also bought. Knowing what to read has always been difficult, relying on recommendations, book reviews in papers and lots of laborious browsing. Amazon has made the whole process easier and also broader, encompassing three million titles not to mention all the other products and services they sell these days.

5B. Socialising Ideas

Two hundred years ago it is thought that the average person (a farming peasant) in Europe would meet fewer than 200 people in their lifetime. And anthropologist Robin Dunbar has argued (from a comparative study of the size of the neocortex area of the brain vs social group size among humans vs primates) that human beings have a limit of about 150 people whom they can relate to: hold in mind, have feelings for, keep track of. Dunbar found that 150 is also the average size of traditional hunter-gatherer villages.[3] Modern communications and lifestyles bring us into regular contact with many more than 150 people, sometimes within a single day. And it is interesting to speculate what sort of effect this will have in the long term. Perhaps human brains will get much bigger, to deal with information overload! There is research evidence (which I quoted in my last book, *After Image*) that successive generations are exhibiting significantly higher IQ scores.

But for many people today the upper limit is not the issue. Loneliness is a widespread problem of modern society: the breakdown of traditional small-scale communities, high divorce rates and the geographical and social mobility of the modern economy mean that it is easy for anyone to become isolated. Loneliness is not necessarily a function of the amount of daily social interaction, more the quality of being held in mind by others (or not). New ideas that give people a way of connecting socially – especially if they make this process easier, richer in interaction or more efficient – can quickly become powerful businesses. Ideas that offer socialising benefits have included karaoke, speed dating, fun runs and all sorts of voluntary associations. But the prime examples are mostly in the internet, the social community medium par excellence.

Some qualities that *socialising brands* share in common are:



5B. SOCIALISING

- enhancing existing social bonds or helping create new ones;
- meeting people, getting to know them or holding them in mind;
- helping people exchange information, build empathy, share a joke etc.;
- tackling blocks, for instance inhibition, losing contact, being strangers;
- shared activities, taking part, contributing;
- rituals, etiquette and distinctive cultural formats;
- often large scale, yet having a grass-roots, immediate feel – not "top down".

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Habbo Hotel is one of the most successful examples of an internet community that has become a strong brand. Habbo is an online game where teenagers can chat and hang out, rather like they would in a giant mall. It is a huge community, covering 16 countries, and is one of the few virtual communities of this size where teenagers meet to interact socially rather than shoot at each other. Within the community each person is represented by an avatar, which they design from a standard list of features, and also a line of text about themselves that will appear when another player clicks on them. The text players type when in conversation is heavily filtered to take out swear words and other offensive content and the site is also moderated by a mixture of paid professionals and volunteers. Players can customise their own guestrooms, purchasing furniture and features.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Friends Reunited works because if you have known somebody once, then lost touch, the site makes it easier to get to know them again. School reunions have existed as long as schools. But this hit website used internet capabilities to take an old idea and give it a huge new spin. It became one of the top 10 most visited websites in the UK, registering 12 million members, about half the population with internet access at the time. In 2005 it had 4.3 million unique users and 191 million page views per month.[4] Like many internet innovations, what it did was make an existing cultural form both richer and more convenient. People could check out what had happened to all their classmates, without all the bother and embarrassment of necessarily going to meet them all. Plus it became a dating service for old flames or crushes (who might have gone through a divorce or become a millionaire in the meantime).

Friends Reunited was launched in 2000 and is still going strong. Its core idea is about socialising, but I feel justified in including it under the extensions heading because it has been nothing short of prolific in this regard:

- a reunion organiser;
- an alumni service for colleges and universities;
- the merging of the databases in various countries, making it easier to reunite for those who have travelled to places like Australia, South Africa and New Zealand;
- new channels, e.g. SMS alerts when you get a message or when someone new from your school, college or workplace joins;
- a dating service (not with old school friends, but within the membership network); it feels like part of a proper social community, compared with more anonymous and impersonal alternatives. It boasts half a million members, 50 : 50 men : women;
- a new virtual speed dating service; where you can review people's profiles before the actual event, which is managed over the phone.

Other Instructive Examples

Dating aside, it has always been problematic for people to get to know strangers. A few hundred years ago, in polite society people could get "introduced". And communities of interest allow friendships to spring up, in the same way as hobbies and evening classes always have offline. But Friendster is arguably something rather striking and new. It is a community devoted to making new platonic friendships and maintaining them. Yet the Friendster model seems to borrow more from the realms of flirting – in that it is all about two parties mutually disclosing information. The key is to find points of similarity, shared interest, agreement and empathy. Friendster is flirting reframed as befriending.

5C. Cooperative Ideas

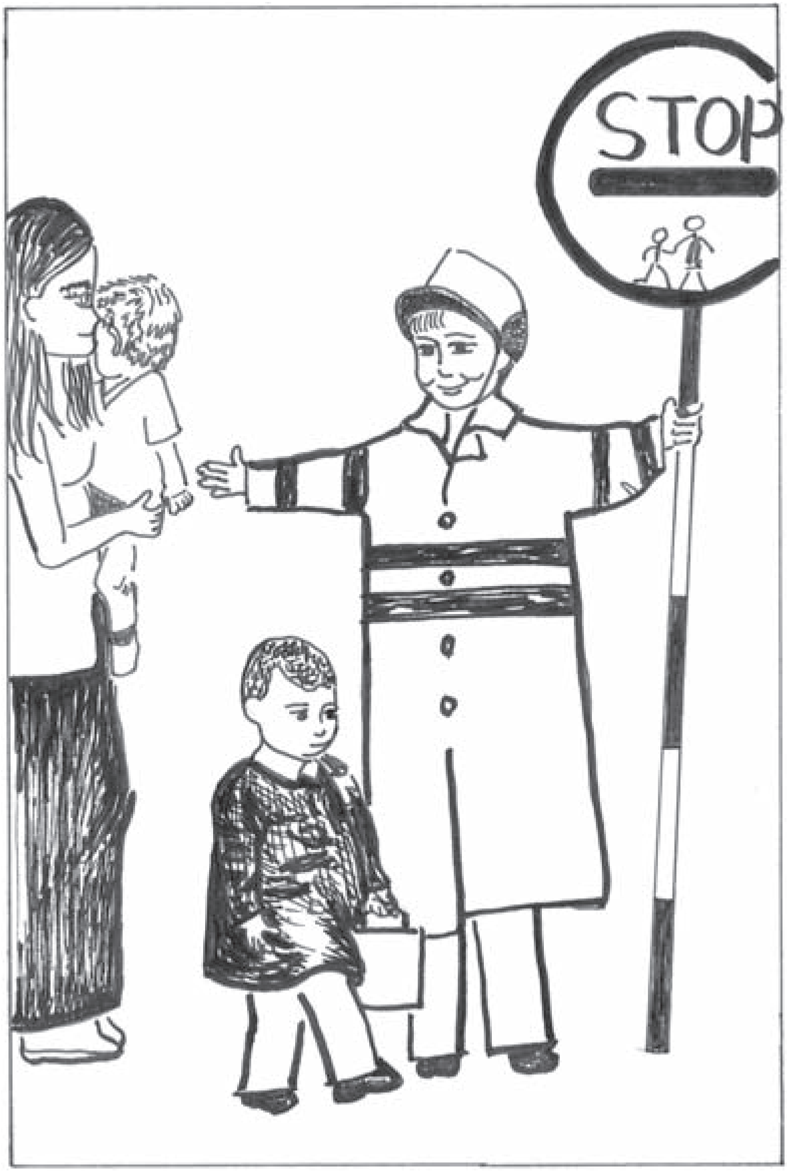
Cooperative brands involve communities where people come together to achieve something cooperatively.

The (evolutionary) reason that humans are social animals is that we cooperate in key activities. We always hunted together. Later we farmed together, and built cities and factories relying on complex networks of shared labour. An example of a modern cooperative culture is the newsgroup. One example, which I belong to, is called Analogue Heaven. There are only about 900 of us on the list and all are collectors/owners/fans of rare and (mostly) old analogue music synthesisers. Before the internet, clubs like this couldn't exist. It is an extremely deep and narrow niche, with members all over the world in daily contact and having instant access to a wealth of shared knowledge, support and the occasional entertaining disagreement.

But communities of cooperation are far from being just an internet phenomenon. Neighbourhood Watch is the largest voluntary organisation in the UK. It launched in 1982 after a group of UK police officers came across similar schemes on a visit to Chicago. There are 165 000 schemes in the UK today, covering one quarter of all households. The scheme is very visible as members are encouraged to put stickers in their windows, which in itself both deters potential burglars in the area and also reassures residents that their house is being watched over. The scheme works in partnership with local police and other bodies and consists of a membership organisation, meetings, education materials, agreeing objectives (e.g. car crime vs bogus callers), recruiting members, encouraging people to report suspicious activity and circulating the ubiquitous yellow and black stickers.

Qualities that *cooperative brands* tend to share in common are:

- meetings, friends and supporters, social ties;
- routine, regularity, formatted process;



5C. COOPERATIVE

- communications, e.g. viral/newsgroup emails, messages of support, message boards;
- lots of stimulating ideas and ways to get involved, e.g. contests;
- having a local angle, tying into neighbourhoods and communities;
- low level, folksy, informal graphics and very little hype;
- stickiness: involving local people regularly;
- a simple shared infrastructure, with all the complexity of such schemes taking place close to the ground and locally organised;
- having a wholesome or "good" stance, e.g. uncommercial.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Craigslist is your friendly neighbourhood (and free) classified advertising service. The internet is thought of as ushering in an era of globalisation, the death of distance and so on. But it is just as capable of breathing new life and interest into local neighbourhoods. Craigslist is a simple service offering community classified listings, much as local newspapers have for many years. It feels neighbourly and is, as the website puts it, a "relatively non-commercial environment", having only a few recruitment clients in three US cities to pay for its costs. And while many listings detail lawnmowers for sale, there are also dating sections, thriving barter listings and community forums.

Craigslist was started in 1995 by Craig Newmark and generates 2.5 billion page views per month (from 10 million visitors; i.e. each one is going there an average of 250 times!). There are 175 local sites covering all major US cities and many abroad. It is an enormous operation in terms of the user transactions, but only has 18 staff, as all they do is manage the facilities within which people post local notices. Here are a few typical entries from the London Craigslist, which give a much better feel for this neighbourly brand than dry description alone:

> **We need a ride from Van Morrison show at Audley End on Saturday**
> Date: 2005-07-13, 10:52PM GMT/BST
>
> London couple going to Van Morrison show at Audley End this Saturday. We can get there by public transit, but need a ride back to London after the show

(no buses or trains available at that time). If you're driving and have a couple extra seats in your vehicle on the way back, please get in touch. Will be happy to help with expenses. Thanks.

Black Leather Wallet on Herford Road
Date: 2005-08-21, 3:57PM GMT/BST
Hi, I lost my wallet when coming back from the dry cleaners. All my credit cards have been cancelled but I would at least like my drivers licence and old student id back as I can't replace those since I am out of the country. I would love my wallet back too as it was a gift and has much sentimental value. Please let me know if you have found it.

Pet Sitter needed in Istanbul – Want an adventure?
Date: 2005-08-12, 11:19PM GMT/BST
Are you responsible? Good with kittens? Fond of reptiles? Unlikely to rob us blind? Do you have references? Want an adventure? We are looking for a responsible – really responsible – animal-lover who would like to stay in our apartment in Istanbul between September 5 and September 16. In exchange for feeding our adorable baby turtles, watering our garden, and caring for the cutest, most affectionate kitten in the world – it's not hardship duty – we'd give you the run of our spacious, two-bedroom duplex near the Gatata Tower, a safe, historic and extremely lively neighborhood on the European side of Istanbul.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Biomat detergent in Israel earned Procter & Gamble its first major prize at the Cannes advertising festival for 30 years. The campaign targeted an existing social network; the orthodox Jewish community, who were hard to reach through conventional media (conservative Jewish people, accounting for 15% of the population, do not watch TV) and who live by a deeply rooted ethical code, placing high value on doing good deeds – *mitzvah*. The campaign asked people to bring old clothes to Biomat trucks, which were driven around the communities and not only collected but laundered the clothes using onboard washing machines. The clothes were then distributed to homeless people. In a subtle way you could call this product demonstration, or brand experience, but it also works by creating affinity, word of mouth and approval among an existing social network. And it took Biomat to brand leadership with 40% market share.

Other Instructive Examples

Computers for Schools, a scheme run by Tesco supermarkets in the UK, has become the benchmark for cooperative brand-building initiatives. Compared to many other possible loyalty/collector schemes with a charity angle, I suspect that the key to its success is the fact that the collection is for a local school. Parents (and grandparents) of young children are key grocery shoppers and it is common (in my experience) for people who are not collecting for a family member's school to ask if anybody else in the queue would like to have their vouchers. Tesco is by reputation a ruthlessly efficient company and its charity donations relative to turnover are low, and yet this scheme succeeds in making it feel to customers like a "nice" company.

As part of a project in 2005 looking at brand strategy and product range, I did some focus groups for The Co-operative Bank on what "cooperative" did and could mean for it. The answer came back loud and clear. At the moment the bank was saying "leave doing good to us" – i.e. its investment policies. The opportunity was to do things together with its audience. One idea I particularly liked was taking banking back into local communities; using the internet to allow local customers to form their own digital-age cooperative society, to donate dividends to local causes and schemes.

Amnesty International, a client of mine many years ago, still has a unique model of getting people to write letters on behalf of prisoners of conscience. Knowing that there are people across the world who are watching and offering support can have a powerful effect on both the prisoners and those keeping them. But it is also important for the members to be able to feel that they can do something, can make a difference, in response to the horrific stories seen on the news every day. Many companies and charities have used petitions, including War on Want, The Body Shop and even MTV (*I*

Want My MTV). But writing a letter to a person is a much more involving process.

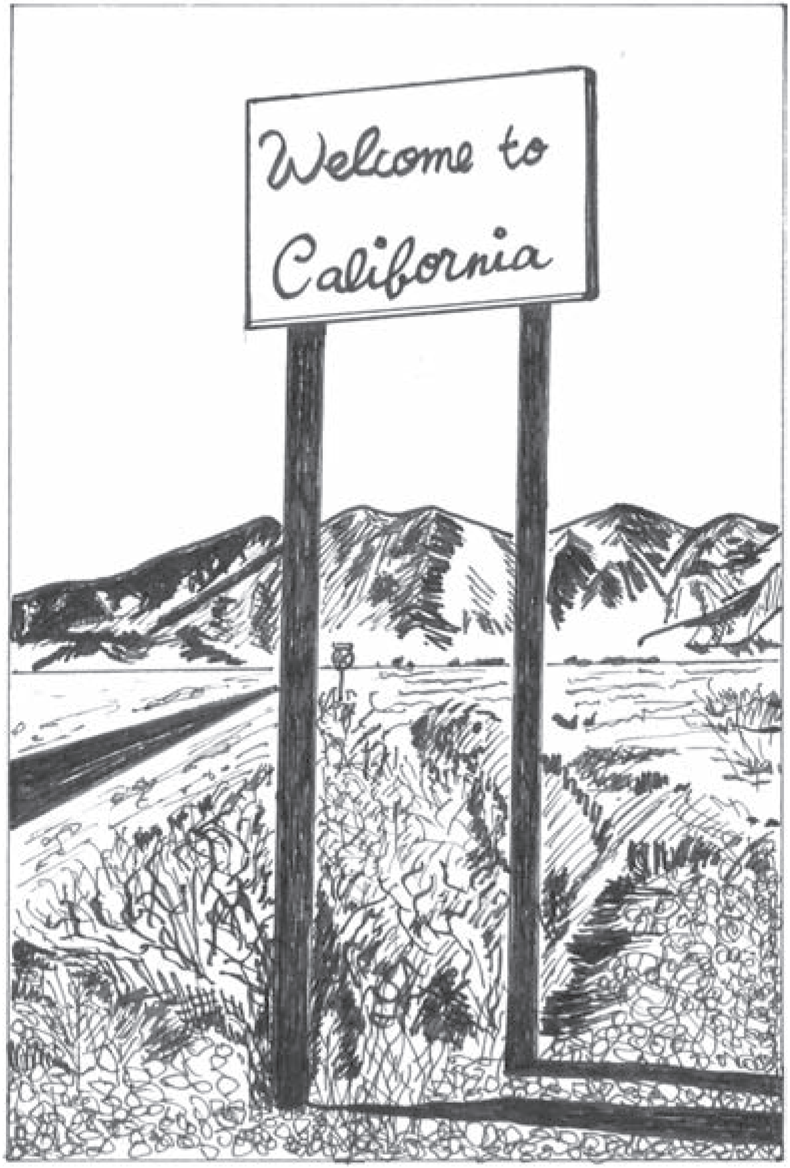
Another altruistic example is Timebank, which works between online and offline: an internet-based charity that enables people to connect with local volunteering opportunities. It meets a need that many express: the desire to put something back. The Timebank role is to be the matchmaker, to find out what potential volunteers can offer and want to contribute, and then using modern database technology to match this profile with local opportunities. But it also plays a powerful role as an intermediary brand: a kind of transit camp. Timebank is something you can join, something well constructed, with strong word-of-mouth and PR support. It is a catchment for the many who feel they would love to do something but have no idea how.

5D. Localised Ideas

Culture is intrinsically localised – it is *how things are done round here*, even if “round here” means a big country like the USA. The “here” of cultural concepts like home is defined by familiarity. People feel more at home with familiar foods, accents, climates and so on.

Most major corporations are built on a powerful home market, which provides the financial engine for international expansion. The size of the home market is why there are so many strong American brands, and also why in 50 years’ time there may be many strong Chinese and Indian ones. And with populations much more mobile and international, there is an easy route for local brands to spread. When people emigrate, things that are taken for granted at home become props for the homesick – a geographical version of nostalgia. Around 40% of Chinese people live outside China, and this is a beachhead for local brands like Great Wall, Hisense, Konka and Panda. Amoi already has a foothold in the UK market, thanks at the start to its Chinatown grocery sales, and Tsingtao is already known to many westerners as the beer that Chinese restaurants sell.

The local market is often completely different to export markets because familiarity brings both a taken-for-granted supremacy and also a certain


Welcome to California

5D. LOCAL

amount of contempt. IKEA in its own home market is seen as "the Ministry of Furniture" (i.e. dull, establishment), whereas in new markets it is much more of a creative rebel, appealing to hip young couples.

The qualities that *local brands* share in common are:

- being a local hero, rallying popular support, creating jobs, investing in communities;
- celebrating local culture, pride, roots;
- working through grass roots, folksy media, not being too slick;
- not being afraid to mix this approach with either the best imported ideas (Saturn) or using your home appeal as an export proposition (Guinness).

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

The idea behind the Saturn brand was to bring out a patriotic car, which was similar in style and features to the leading Japanese models (like the Honda Civic) but was *made in America*. Launched in 1990, Saturn became an immediate sensation in the US, making the front cover of *Time* magazine. It was a good time to go to the American market with this patriotic message. The same *Time* cover featured the subheadline "How Bush Might Declare War"!

In the 1990s the brand worked well. I covered its brand innovations in my previous books, for instance the new levels of dealer service and also the innovative (Harley-style) rallies and owners' club.

In the last five years the brand has struggled in the face of a new wave of European competition. So General Motors is now launching a new Saturn range with European styling to take on the Germans, principally Volkswagen.

Cars have always sold themselves on provenance. The twist with Saturn is not just originating in America (Cadillac, Ford etc. can claim that too), but about offering the best of all worlds: foreign-styled cars with a US factory and the best service to boot.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

In Ireland, Guinness is a national institution, an important employer and public player, on a similar level to a telecom. Its international success is also a source of national pride. Where Guinness is fortunate is in having so many people abroad who still feel they have Irish roots. Not only do they provide a base of customers in new markets, but they bring the *craic*, the Irish bars, the St Patrick's day celebrations.

Even in the UK, where the marketing of Guinness has been studiously cool for the last 20 years without a trace of an Irish accent, the St Patrick's day promotion in the pubs is still probably the major event in the brand's calendar. And Guinness in the UK seems to have switched strategy, with nostalgic adverts announcing that it is now imported from Ireland.

Other Instructive Examples

Microbrew beers like Anchor Steam restored localness to the beer market and catered to a market sick of slick national brands and searching for more authentic products.

There is a lot of potential to restore localness via internet and promotional means, like computers for (local) schools and the idea I also mentioned in the cooperative section to create a local network of microbanks, with local websites networking local customers, voting on which local cause gets the dividend, having local democracy, being a bulletin and information board for local people.

David Ogilvy reckoned that you always got a better response to press ads when you put the name of the city into your headline. Maybe this would be true of brand names too. Perhaps a national retail chain could name each branch locally? If it works for football teams, why not stores? Just a thought.

6

Luxury

Consumerism at its most basic is the idea that ordinary people can live like kings.

In contrast to being a modern invention, you can see the same idea at work in the Renaissance and in the Victorian era, where expansion of wealth across the population and a rush of new "worldly goods", either imported or manufactured, created a wave of consumerism that defined the lifestyles and aspirations of the time.

One catch is that once a generation have had a luxury for any time, it becomes normal. Yesterday's luxuries were car ownership, jet travel and eating in restaurants (these three being the mainstay of James Bond stories, a postwar austerity escapist daydream). Today's luxuries include gourmet food, high fashion, having servants. And there is a constant scramble by affordable "luxury goods" to stay special. Brands like Burberry have shown how fast you can go from "toff" to "chav" if you are not careful (and mostly it is out of your hands anyway).

- 6A. *Concierge ideas*. The combination of time shortage in two-working-adult families and the status that goes with personal service or servants have made the idea of concierge services (that take care of anything menial, specialist or difficult to arrange) a hot ticket. A prime example of how luxury gets democratised is Topshop using personal shoppers, formerly the sort of thing you'd expect at Harvey Nichols.

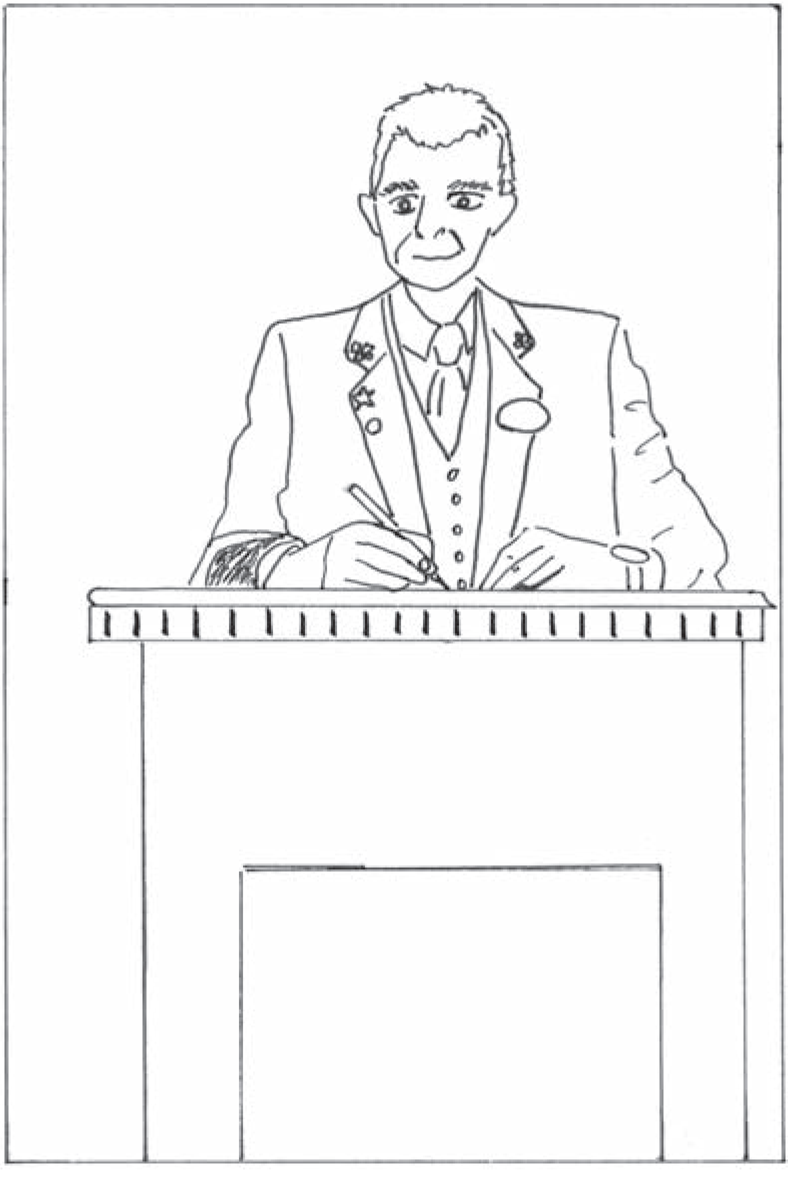
Table II.6 Luxury

6A. Concierge	6B. Plenty	6C. Exclusive	6D. Exotic
Ocado	*Waterstone's*	*Beautifulpeople*	*YO! Sushi*
Topshop	*Hennessey*	*Amex Black*	*Virgin Atlantic*

- 6B. *Plenty ideas*. Luxury as an immediate experience is a cushioning from the harsh realities and necessities of life. Words like pampering, excess and decadence spring to mind. But the best word is probably plenty, capturing the infantile satisfaction in having more than enough, safe in the knowledge you won't go without.
- 6C. *Exclusive ideas*. The core social idea about luxury is comparison – having things that others do not have. This mechanic can be associated with rare and expensive items, but can also be a powerful means to create brand value out of limited supply, access or membership.
- 6D. *Exotic ideas*. Foreign, imported items often have an (official) luxury status. Good sushi is a treat in Japan, but in the UK it is treated (and priced) like caviar.

6A. Concierge Ideas

I would include under *concierge brands* anything that organises your life for you, offers expertise in personal matters, or takes away domestic chores. This has become a surprisingly mainstream proposition, with Tesco.com home shopping service for example having 3 million customers, £500 million sales and 25% per annum growth. The official figures show that there are about 600 000 people working in childcare (nannies, nursery school staff) and these probably understate the true extent. On the other hand, domestic drudge is still a fact of life, with a survey in 2000 showing that it would cost £929 billion if the nation paid for others to do the unpaid work people do around the home: an average of three hours a day for cleaning and tidying, shopping, cooking and childcare.[1]



6A. CONCIERGE

Literal concierge services – as offered by Amex among many others – offer help with things that could otherwise have been time consuming and are easier to arrange with expert or local knowledge:

- travel services;
- services when travelling, e.g. finding a doctor;
- event tickets and restaurant reservations;
- personal shopping;
- arranging gifts, e.g. flowers;
- financial and information management;
- research and recommending options;
- difficult jobs.

At the high end, concierge services will do almost anything (legal) for customers. The Amex Centurion Card service is rumoured to have organised weddings and the purchase of a horse from a famous movie.

Another example is the service that comes with Vertu, a $20 000 phone from Nokia. Famous clients include Gwyneth Paltrow, Madonna and Jennifer Lopez. When Paltrow lost her charger, the story goes, she phoned the concierge and another arrived within minutes. Instead of attending technology fairs, Vertu launches new models at fashion events, like Paris Couture Week.

However, when you are rich enough to afford a Vertu, or to be offered a Centurion card, it is quite likely that you have staff to arrange your life anyway. The more interesting segment for concierge services consists of the "mass affluent", who are short of time and willing to pay for luxuries, like pre-prepared dinner party meals. The current fashion for concierge services started with US firms like Accenture offering them to employees as a highly valued perk, which also left people freer to be more productive in their long working days. A survey in a newspaper recently asked people what they would do if they won a million pounds: "hire a housekeeper" (or similar domestic servants) was the top answer. It is a fact of modern life, with two-person-working households and longer working weeks, that domestic arrangements are harder to manage.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Tesco has the volume, but Ocado is not far behind and may prove to have the better idea. Instead of working from local stores, Ocado delivers Waitrose groceries from a central warehouse. Orders are rolled along conveyor belts and loaded into pods, pulled by big trucks, to car parks, which transfer the pods to smaller vans. The other advantage Ocado has is the Waitrose brand – upmarket, foodie and not price sensitive – appealing to the mass affluent audience. Ocado has sales of £135 million according to the *Financial Times*, while covering only the South East, and is planning to more than double this catchment area. It was voted best online grocery service by *Which?* and *Good Housekeeping*. Given that the whole idea of a service like this is to make your life easier, having one-hour delivery slots (as opposed to two-hour with Tesco) is a bonus.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Topshop is a high street "cheap chic" fashion chain (part of the Arcadia Group) that has been bubbling with new ideas over the last few years, including working with leading-edge designers and being the first high street chain to show at London's Fashion Week, and above all a range that is bold, credible and hip enough to carry all this off. Recent hits include a new Surfwear range and a successful Vintage range – extending into a charity thrift auction of celebrities' castoff clothing for World AIDS Day.

Topshop's personal shopping service is cloned straight from high-end department stores. It offers a style adviser, a choice of being brought clothes to your brief or walking the store, a VIP shopping suite, gift wrapping and queue jumping at the tills. All free of charge and with no commitment to buy anything. Within this service the retailer also offers last-minute "quickie" appointments, to help find an outfit for a particular occasion. If you live inside the M25 or within an hour of the centre of Glasgow, you can book a style adviser to come to your home or workplace. If you invite some friends and make it a fashion viewing party, then the host also gets a discount of 20% on clothes. That looks fantastic for the customer. But the question in some readers' minds might be whether it makes commercial sense. According to a report (on why this scheme won a Retail Week Award in 2005) it does, with an average spend per appointment of £250.

Other Instructive Examples

First Direct was one of the first, and is still one of the best, of the new wave of *concierge brands*. The founding CEO's vision for First Direct (an ex-client of mine) was for it to behave like a "butler" for your money. It was the first to offer 24-hour banking by phone and has spread through networks of recommendation to a fairly upmarket customer base. The service is still rated one of the best, and it has kept innovating with handy text alerts and internet banking. When I did research groups in 2005 with financial services customers it was still one of the few banks that anyone had anything positive to say about.

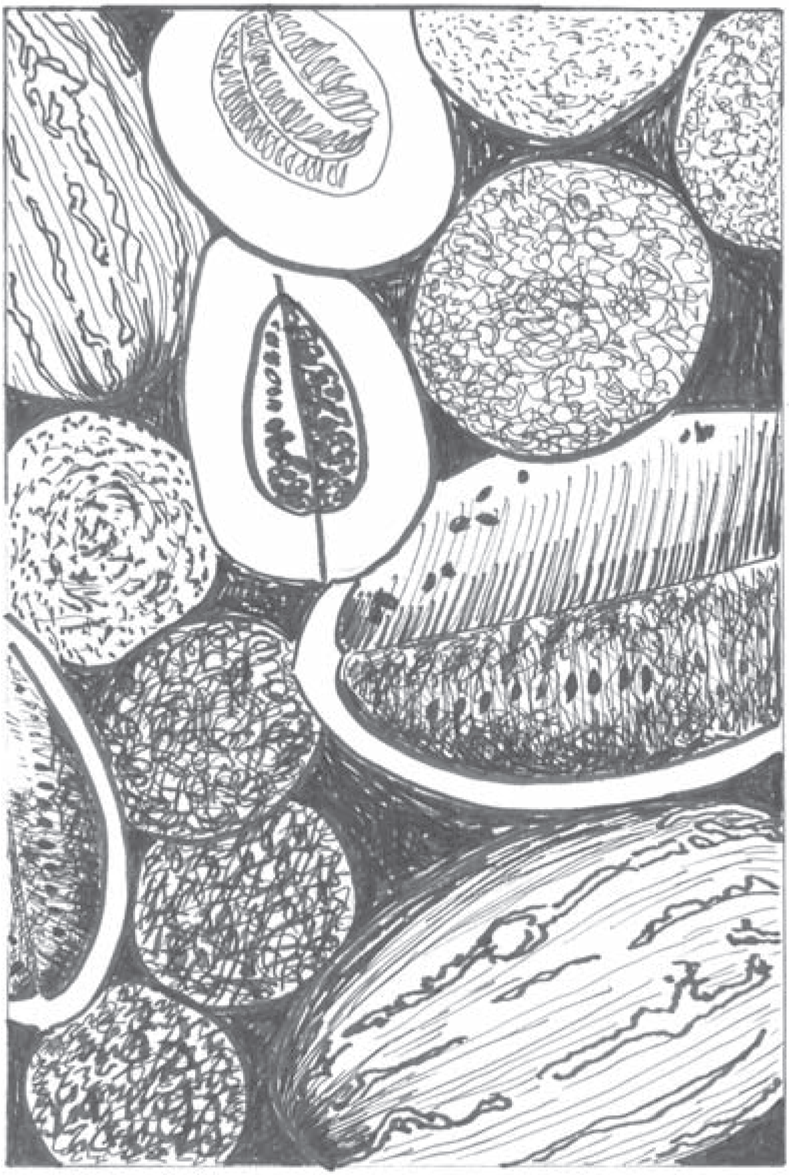
Another classic concierge-style initiative was the gourmet ready meal, pioneered in the UK by Marks & Spencer. This allowed busy workers to look forward to something that approximated to a restaurant meal when they got home, but without the preparation and washing-up associated with eating at home. Recent innovations have included healthier (and fresher-tasting) Steam Cuisine and a range of Gastropub-style food.

6B. Plenty Ideas

> Plenty O'Toole: "Hi, I'm Plenty."
> James Bond: "But of course you are!"[2]

Plenty is about a very immediate urge, which I think of as infantile: the greedy desire to have more than enough, never to go without.

Cultural experiences that elicit this feeling include the harvest festival-style displays that greet you on entering a supermarket, the books heaped



6B. PLENTY

out on tables in modern bookstores and the baskets of fresh muffins in a local café.

This greedy desire can also extend to power and sex, the idea of having a harem of available women being described by one anthropologist (in a documentary I saw on an African monarch) as *the whole point* of being a king in the first place.

The qualities that *plenty brands* share in common are:

- excess, abundance;
- personal pampering and indulgence;
- cushioning from the realities of life;
- cosiness, softness, warmth;
- enclosure or a sense of place: the *land of milk and honey*.

Plenty is relative. If you think back to the days when food was in shorter supply, then you can see how "all you can eat" offers in restaurants could mesmerise (whereas today they just seem like they are for students).

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Waterstone's is an innovative book retailer, the biggest in the UK, and has enjoyed resurgent growth recently, opening 13 new stores. Their flagship store is on the site of the old Simpsons building. This is Europe's largest bookstore and one of my favourite hangouts (it has a very nice café on the fifth floor, which is great for meeting people). It is a beautifully sympathetic use of the classic building but the sheer scale of the shop is what stands out. They give you the one experience Amazon cannot, which is the physical sense of being in something of the size of the ancient library at Alexandria.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Henny (Hennessey Cognac) along with Crystal champagne is one of the key brands adopted by bling-bling US rap culture. This addresses the idea of being cushioned from the harsh realities of life. Who better to demonstrate this than high-roller rappers, who as their lyrics often remind you have escaped the violence and squalor of ghetto life. Rap videos are fantastical orgies of plenty: crowds of sexy girls, expensive cars, cigars, jewellery and so on.

American Brandstand (a project by consultancy Agenda Inc) tracked the mentions of brands in the Billboard Top 20 singles charts. All but one of the mentions were in hip-hop and R&B singles. The top brands were:

- Cadillac;
- Hennessey;
- Mercedes;
- Rolls-Royce;
- Gucci.

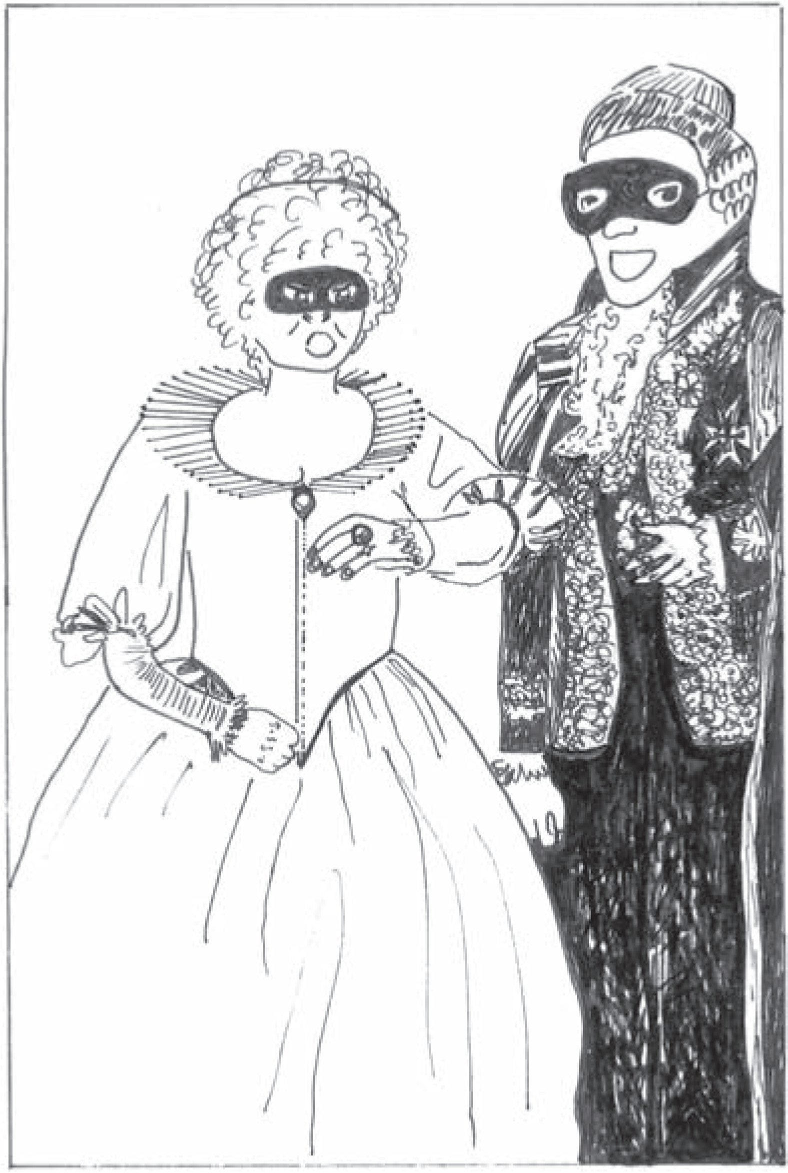
Agenda Inc commented:

> 2004 has been the year in which bling moved from fashion to a wider range of categories. Fashion brands fell sharply from 494 to 281, car brands fell back from 476 to 449, while beverage brands jumped from 172 to 251. A striking trend in 2004 was the big rise in cross-category luxury brands. Aspiration continues to grow in hip-hop culture, and is driving renewed interest in – even an expanded definition of – luxury in mainstream culture.[3]

Other Instructive Examples

Umberto Eco described the whole culture of modern America as being founded on two ideas: *more* and *the real thing*.[4] The culture of *more* is certainly apparent in food servings (sofa-sized bags of crisps), although this has had an unfortunate effect on the health of an increasingly sedentary nation, which leads the world on obesity trends. I suspect that the whole plenty idea does connect with the culture of individualism and entitlement in the States: that all *should* have *plenty*.

6C. Exclusive Ideas



6C. EXCLUSIVE

Exclusivity is such a clichéd form of brand appeal (*"Why ambassador, with these Ferrero Rocher you are really spoiling us!"*) I had initial reservations about including it in a book about new directions in marketing! But as a basic cultural driver and given new twists in new media, it can still make for interesting and powerful marketing. It is certainly a defining member of the third column of the periodic table – it makes for elitist branded cliques. But these are not clans. An exclusive credit card, car, hotel, handbag or similar is a marker of social status, not an invitation to other owners to make your acquaintance. In fact the drive seems to have more to do with an illusion of difference and apartness; what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called *distinction*, a testament to your personal taste.

The unpleasant truth of exclusivity is the human desire to be – or to be seen as – better than others. A simple means to create exclusivity is to charge hefty premiums. Research with opera goers found that expense was part of the appeal, ensuring that only an elite portion of the population could afford anything but the cheap seats at the back. Brand advertising has adopted the semiotics of this sort of exclusivity, for instance Stella Artois's *Reassuringly Expensive* campaign. But following a key theme of this book, this section will explore ideas that have not so much claimed exclusivity (in image advertising) as *done* something interesting with the idea of exclusivity.

Features that *exclusive brands* share in common are:

- scarcity;
- difficulty, an acquired taste;
- being expensive;
- exclusive, i.e. difficulty getting in;
- eccentric, avant-garde, aristocratic.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Beautifulpeople.net is an idea that I pitched to my colleagues at Ministry of Sound (some of whom thought it was too outrageous, even for them) . . . only to find out a month later that a real site with the same name and concept existed and was coming to the UK from its country of origin in Denmark.

The idea is to create a community where only good-looking people can get in – as voted for by other members. If you can have premium-quality food or clothing stores, why not dating services? This is a recipe for controversy, PR coverage and intrigue. It has just launched in the USA and certainly seems to have got the press and blog telegraphs humming over there. As it allows in an average of 1 in 15 applicants, it is pretty exclusive.

Example 2. A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

For years it was rumoured that Amex produced special cards for the super-wealthy. One story I heard involved a member of a royal family being recognised at a nightclub in Australia when they paid with one of these cards. It may or may not have been true – spokespeople for the company claim it wasn't – but in 1999, to cash in on this potent urban myth, Amex launched a black Centurion card. You cannot apply for this card, you can only be offered one, and the common route would be having a platinum card that you charge hundreds of thousands a year to. A client of mine got given one after a few years of paying for an investment bank's leadership training course venues on his Amex. The card charges a hefty fee, but in return you get a concierge service, free upgrades to first class on many airlines and quite a bit of exclusive status. The latest news on this card is that it is changing to Titanium. The Centurion card has not made it into the American Brandstand chart; perhaps it would be too exclusive (and hence unknown) as a reference? But there cannot be many brands that global rap star P Diddy *pays* to be associated with!

Other Instructive Examples

If you are going to have an expensive, exclusive version of your service, you don't need to be pompous about it. Richard Branson's original concept for Virgin Atlantic was to call economy class *Riffraff*, as a true counterpoint to its *Upper Class*. Even without this (admittedly slightly derogatory) addition, *Upper Class* succeeds in being properly exclusive. It is like the way royals and A-listers seem to see the world, and it makes ordinary business folk (who are probably the majority of customers) feel part of this celebrity world. There is something accessible and almost enjoyable about the overt snobbery of the name *Upper Class* – it vaguely reminds me of Oddbins teaming up with Ralph Steadman: aristocratic, yet very human, accessible and witty.

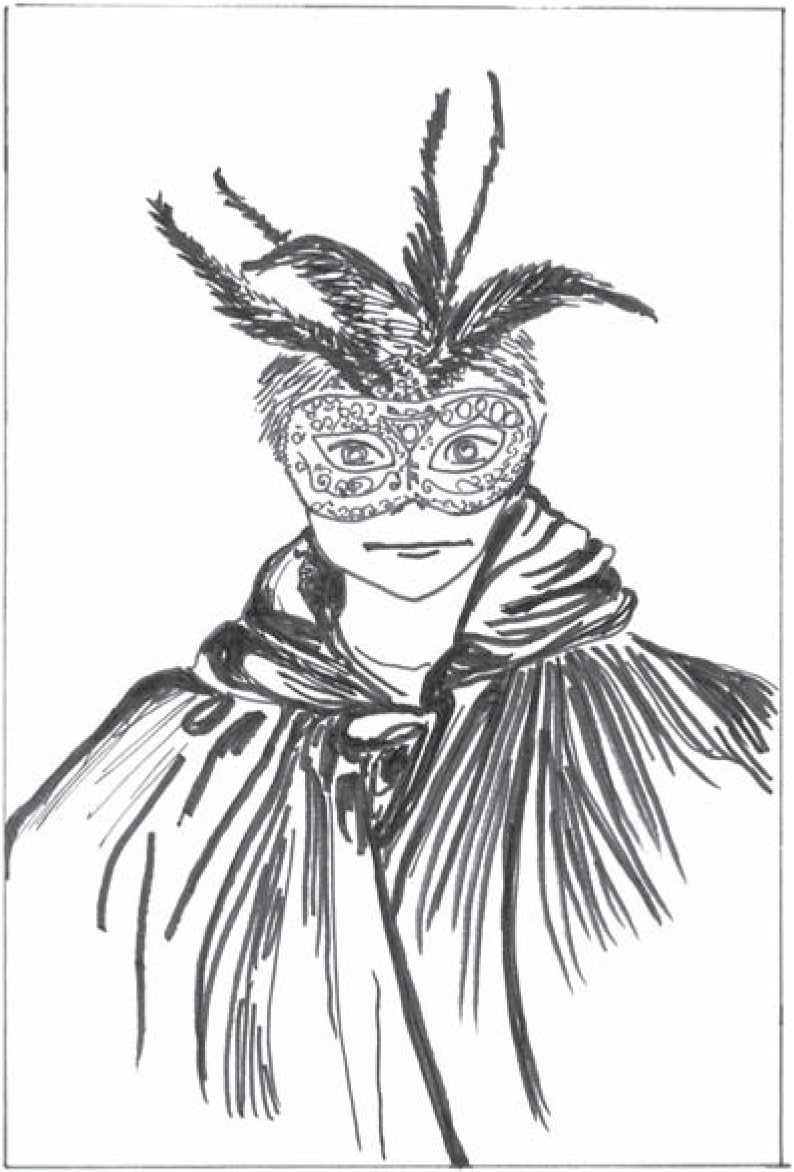
At the other end of the spectrum is the idea of a super-premium category. It is an idea I put forward to a group looking at possible strategic directions for Fortnum & Mason. What if the range and prices were pitched higher – much higher? So that it might appeal to the elite tastes of millionaires – probably the direct equivalent of its client base 100 years ago, after all. If you started with the needs of that target audience and worked back through the floors (the food hall, beloved of tourists, is only one of five) you might arrive at something quite compelling. It would be unlikely to be a shop where you carried shopping bags home (again, a return to an older, genteel model). So it could become a showroom for the best that money can buy – from the new 102-inch plasma TVs to the latest couture fashion, perhaps even apartments, yachts and sports cars.

Several brands have already moved into this super-premium space, already the preserve of private banking, luxury car marques and couture fashion. Armani has launched a range of scents (originally ones that Giorgio Armani created for his personal use) costing from £120 and only available at Harrods and Armani's Sloane Street store. Alongside a small range of jewellery with prices *starting* at $5000 and the couture range, these are branded *Armani Privé* – to distinguish them from normal Armani products.

6D. Exotic Ideas

Another cultural source of special value is exotic, that is foreign, imported goods.

The words "import" and "important" share a common root. Imports may have in fact been the original luxury items. Archaeological studies of



6D. EXOTIC

artefacts in Palaeolithic times reveal that indigenous natural resources and crafts were traded and can be tracked across whole continents. Since the earliest human cultures, there have always been foreign imports, which are rare, valuable and hold a special place among artefacts. Things that are local can become taken for granted, almost invisible. But things that come from other places often retain some of the cultural associations of those places and also stand out in their new context as not "of here". It is easy to see how these could take on religious and ceremonial connotations, being "other-worldly".

Many brands of the past played on provenances that were fake, made-up, or stereotyped. Like Fry's Turkish Delight, a countline bar that advertised itself through orientalist storylines straight out of romantic fiction: mysterious strangers on white horses with curved swords, women in veils and flowing outfits. Or Singapore Airlines' *Singapore Girl*, which pandered to views of oriental women as beautiful, mysterious and submissive.

These days, with a shift towards at least a modicum of brand authenticity (and away from such obvious racial stereotypes), that sort of brand seems anachronistic, giving way to more genuine foreign brands such as Muji. In Japan Muji – which means "no brand" (i.e. similar to calling a shop Own Label) – is seriously cheap. I bought a pair of jeans there for about £5. Over here, Muji is seen as exotic, designer, cool and is quite pricey.

The qualities that *exotic brands* share in common are:

- coming from somewhere foreign, which has superior production and craft skills; or different natural resources; or traditional forms of art, food, fashion etc.; or has attractive cultural values;
- promoting the brand according to which of these is attractive, i.e. not stressing German styling (e.g. the latest BMW range, which in my opinion is trying too hard and lacks taste) or Italian engineering (e.g. Alfa Romeo);
- considering taking the offering to the next level of authenticity;
- finding exotic channels and media that reinforce this authentic imported status.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

The YO! Sushi chain of conveyer belt sushi bars (*kaiten*) was launched in 1996, after founder Simon Woodruffe tripped over the idea:

> I was having lunch with a Japanese man who said "What you should do Simon is a conveyor belt sushi bar with girls in black PVC mini skirts" – I found out there were 3000 of them in Japan.[5]

The chain is expanding internationally, opening restaurants in Dubai, Athens and Paris and planning to have 20 international sites, matching the number in the UK, by 2007.

The brand is very much a western idea of Japanese culture, taking the funky graphics, neon lights, technology and aspects of the food culture, while making these accessible to western tastes. A real Japanese restaurant can be intimidating, requiring extensive knowledge, as well as expensive. At YO! Sushi prices are reasonable and if you don't know sushi, you can just grab something you like the look of. It is exotic enough to be attractive, but accessible enough to attract a whole new audience to sushi. The experience is very well choreographed – perhaps reflecting the fact that Woodruffe comes from an entertainment background and was once a stage designer.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

The clever twist in the Virgin Atlantic brand – if you think about it – is building the brand around its routes. Most other airlines are named after their country of origin. Virgin Atlantic is named for the ocean it flies over and most of its advertising is about new destinations. Most recently the poster announcing the launch of a new route to Cuba used a graphic that was a cross between an aircraft and a metal cigar tube. This plays on the distinctive design of the airline's planes, with the flying lady and a special paint (formerly used only in the motor trade) that produces an effect similar to 1930s metal-skinned aircraft, harking back to the golden age of flying.

I would say that as a long-running poster series, this Virgin campaign deserves more recognition for being consistently exotic and clever, linking the graphic design of the fleet and the glamorous destinations it keeps adding.

Other Instructive Examples

As well as flights abroad, Britons have really taken to foreign food in the last 30 years. More than twice as many Britons (55%) claim to enjoy foreign foods compared with people in Italy and Spain. Although arguably our indigenous national food culture was a low base!

It might be thought that we were saturated with ideas from abroad, that they had lost some of their exoticness through endless exposure to TV programmes, ready meals and cheaper flights. But the Selfridges events reported in the *Spectacle* section show that even at the sophisticated end of the market, we are just as prone to enthusiasms about foreign culture as preceding generations who, for instance, latched onto Chinoiserie. And interesting new imported formats continue to arrive. Martha Lane Fox, founder of lastminute.com, has recently launched an authentic Japanese-style karaoke club.

Authentic is a key word when it comes to imported goods. When I was in the Philippines 20 years ago there was a ripoff brand called "White Horse Twelve Year Old" which made whisky. The suspicion with localised versions is always that they won't be the real thing.

A modern UK case in point is Stella. It does art cinema-style advertising, with a long-running sponsorship of films on Channel 4, and holds big outdoor screenings in parks. But it is not an imported product, just an imported brand name. And like Levi's, it seems to have got caught between more authentic and cheaper competition. The result? Stella lost 10% of its sales in the last six months of 2005.

Heineken has responded to these same pressures. It has switched its production to the Netherlands and is now importing to the UK. As well as a newly imported product, Heineken has innovated the packaging (to look like beer kegs), the format (e.g. a new home draught system, with mini barrels) and the advertising. Heineken also took the bold decision to drop its two-tier product range (Heineken at 3.5% ABV vs Export brewed in the UK at 5%). It now only does 5%. Most Europeans will tell you that lager brewed below 5% just doesn't taste very good. And anyway, it is more luxurious if it has been brought all the way from somewhere else!

7

Provocative

What links the four disparate ideas under this heading is that they all tackle the repression that is central to "civilised" modern life. I don't mean oppression, but rather the pinning back of basic human instincts like sex and aggression. It is a matter of social forms being imprinted in very personal psychologies, laws being written on the body.

Wherever there is repression, there is also mischief. This chapter includes many of the ad campaigns that are thought of as "creative" and "cool". And you don't need paid-for media to be provocative. Even if you do buy some ad space, you don't need too much (Wonderbra originally bought only 80 poster sites) because PR will do most of the work for you.

- 7A. *Erotic ideas* tap sexual desire, but usually in some provocative way. For instance, many campaigns have addressed female sexuality; more of a hidden, repressed and confrontational subject. Another cultural territory that seems to fascinate is pornography, which also combines sex and repression (legal/illegal boundaries).
- 7B. *Cathartic ideas* are the immediate thrilling experience of things that "shouldn't be allowed", like the silly and dangerous stunts on MTV's *Jackass*. Apart from the slapstick nature of these ideas, there is also a boldness and thrill that go with flirting with what is not permissible.
- 7C. *Scandal ideas* – the way that scandal, gossip, things getting banned and so on becomes a talking point for a certain sort of brand increases the appeal.

Table II.7 Provocative

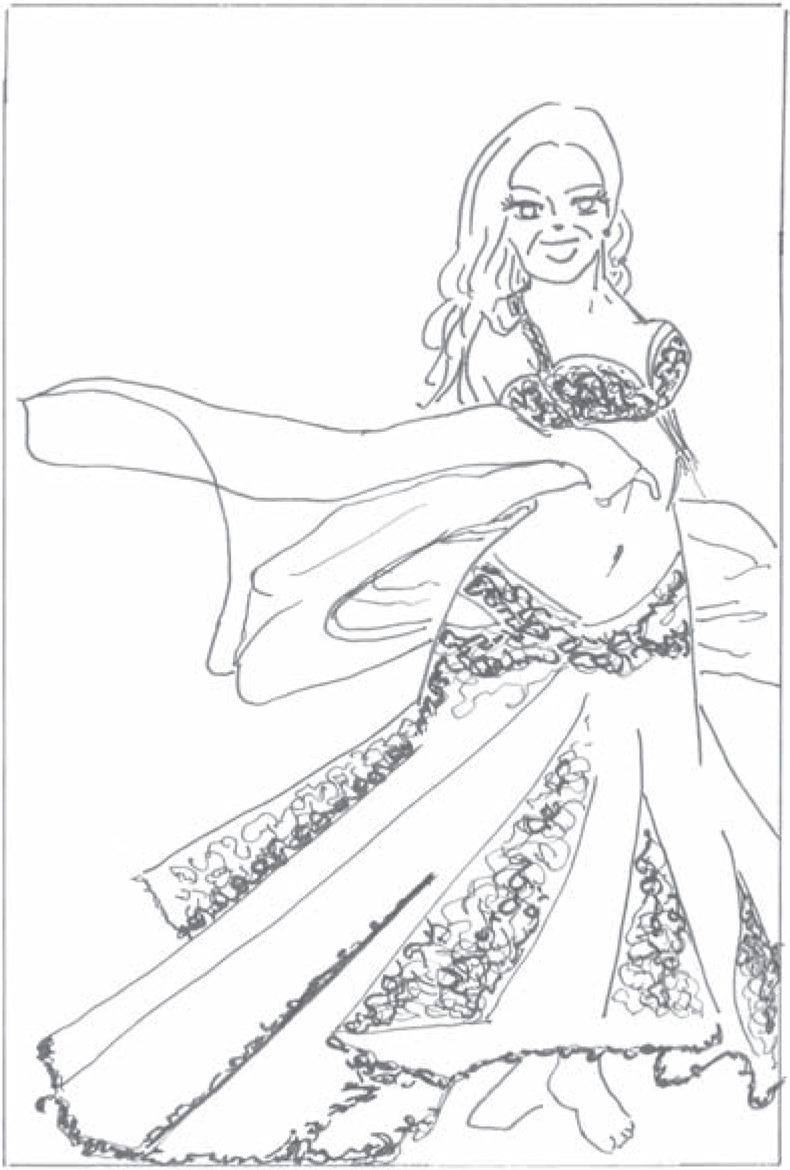
7A. Erotic	7B. Cathartic	7C. Scandal	7D. Radical
Coco de Mer	*KFC*	*Club 18–30*	*Innocent*
Scruffs	*Pepperami*	*Big Brother*	*Persil*

- 7D. *Radical ideas* – politically rebellious or anticonventional notions that make challenger brands feel like revolutionaries (and can make even established brands that turn radical feel like challengers).

7A. Erotic Ideas

Sex and advertising have a lot of history together. The French have developed a taste for "porn chic" advertising, too rude and shocking to be used in other markets (in the UK you cannot even show a woman's nipple). There are Freudian critics who think advertising is only about desire – for instance women as sex objects. There are so many examples of the gratuitous use of sex for boring products, it almost ought to be a category within awards. One TV campaign for a shampoo range (Organics) relies on the fact that the name sounds like "orgasmic", which it has to be said is a little tenuous. Erotic advertising may be attention getting, but I am mainly interested in examples where there is something strategic and relevant about the connection.

Malcolm MacLaren and Vivienne Westwood's boutique Sex started the whole punk look and culture of shock 30 years ago. They were not the first avant-garde movement to use sex to shock and communicate rejection of establishment values. But as in other areas held sacred (including their rendition of "God Save the Queen", the second line of which continues "the fascist regime") the punks went further in deliberately offending public decency. Famous early punk clothing included the "cowboys" t-shirt, featuring an image from gay porn, deemed so obscene you could be arrested for wearing it!



7A. EROTIC

As well as shocking or confronting, *erotic brands* may also confer glamour, communicate adultness, create complicity. The whole idea of the *erotic* is a strategic decision about what to show and what to hide.

Some common factors that *erotic brands* share in common are:

- a bold portrayal of sex compared with contemporary values;
- erotica: the art of innuendo and suggestion;
- sensuality: rich experiential media and venues;
- fusion with other cultural movements: girl power, anarchy, laddishness etc.;
- the medium being the message: the act of advertising as a "statement", talking point etc.;
- sensual delights, pleasure;
- humour, wit, enjoyment;
- or arty sophistication in art direction and styling;
- or some other cultural means to avoid being too raw, direct and shocking;
- . . . unless it is postpunk or French!

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Coco de Mer, founded by Sam Roddick, daughter of The Body Shop founders, is a Covent Garden boutique and online catalogue, one of a number of upmarket sex shops (Myla, Agent Provocateur) aimed at fashionable women. It is styled like a boudoir, shows erotic sapphic films on its website, sources renewable materials for sex aids and is a fascinating, authentic enterprise. It seems genuinely concerned to improve its customers' sex lives and also holds *salons*, seminars on sex for couples at the store, at Soho House and privately in people's homes.

The consumer sex industry is booming, with even Boots stocking vibrators and Durex producing its own range of sex toys. Brands like Coco de Mer go further than high street sex, not just by being more upmarket, but by mixing fashion, style and erotica. Its lingerie ranges (Coco de Mer sells its own, as well as others' like D&G) are all the more exciting for being merchandised with whips, sex toys and changing rooms with peepholes. Conversely, there is something perhaps less "squalid" about sex toys with high design values sold in cool outlets (vs the lurid plastic and nylon sleaze of traditional sex shops).

Coco de Mer's additional twist is its commitment to sustainability and the link with the Roddick family, which acts like another cultural fig leaf – making it "okay" to shop there.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

At the other end of the social, gender and delicacy spectrum is Scruffs Workwear.

The task was to sell rugged, functional workwear to builders, plumbers, joiners and so on. The unlikely (but laudably relevant) solution dreamed up by the direct marketing agency was to make it shockingly sexy. The campaign drew on that old standard of pornography, the workman as sex object (a typical 1970s porn movie scenario being two hunky plumbers and a horny housewife). The company created made saucy print advertising with porno images of workmen having sex, and headlines so rude that they make Club 18–30 look shy (the tamest example was "Always wear protection in case you spill your load"). The campaign also included a four-minute DVD that "demonstrated the product in action" (i.e. more porn homage) and a launch at Stringfellow's table-dancing nightclub. In this case the erotic shock is not about being avant garde, it is about being the talk of the building site. It is not quite "virgin territory" given brands like Pirelli (with its girly calendar) that have used sex to sell to similar male audiences – but it worked.

Other Instructive Examples

A great example of an erotic brand working strategically – as opposed to those that sell sex goods or use sex to get attention – is Häagen-Dazs.

Formerly ice cream had been marketed for kids, childish and fun. Häagen-Dazs marketed a premium product and went after an adult market with advertising that was literally "adult" – connecting the sensual indulgence of eating ice cream with sexual pleasure. This was a latent truth. And chocolate advertising – e.g. Cadbury's Flake – had already made use of the psychology of "substitution" (whereby people will enjoy the pleasures of comfort eating as a substitute for the messy and risky business of finding and having real relationships). But it was a huge reframe for ice cream and is a good example of how markets can be revitalised by tapping into a different kind of brand idea.

Wonderbra advertising was interesting in that it demonstrated the power of provocation. The original posters featured the model Eva Herzogova and the headline *Hello Boys*! Where many erotic ads portray passive women as objects to be consumed, this ad portrays the idea of being powerful, dominant, in control. Arguably it is that which made it so arresting and shocking (and erotic) – it was far from being the first time we had seen a bra in a poster. The advertising is acting as a sort of demonstration: "See how impactful this poster is? This is the impact you will have if you wear a Wonderbra!" The excitement in the press (or among boyfriends etc.) confirms to women that men do find the images attractive. That is a clever media strategy, compared to all the private communication to women in their own magazines, which says: "You can look like this," Wonderbra is saying: "You can get this sort of reaction from the people around you."

Glamour is another common erotic brand strategy. The word "glamour" (from an Old Scottish word *glamor*) means a spell, charm or other magical device designed to make someone fall in love. A related modern word would be "allure", literally a lure. Glamour has two connotations:

- that *Cleopatra* quality: *to put a spell on you*;
- sophisticated, enchanted, places and people, celebrities.

In other words, glamour is a hybrid of the erotic with luxury.

A classic glamour brand, currently showing signs of a revival, is Playboy. The mythology of the brand is of the Hugh Hefner mansion, parties, beautiful glamour models and of course clubs with girls in bunny tails serving cocktails to customers. For a while "smutty magazines" seemed behind the times (like the Miss World competition, too sexist to be modern), but now Playboy is just a classier alternative to *Nuts*, *Zoo* and *FHM* magazines, with huge retro value and something of the glamour of a James Bond movie. The brand's "bunny" logo is being used on clothes and accessories is a classic means of stretching an iconic brand.

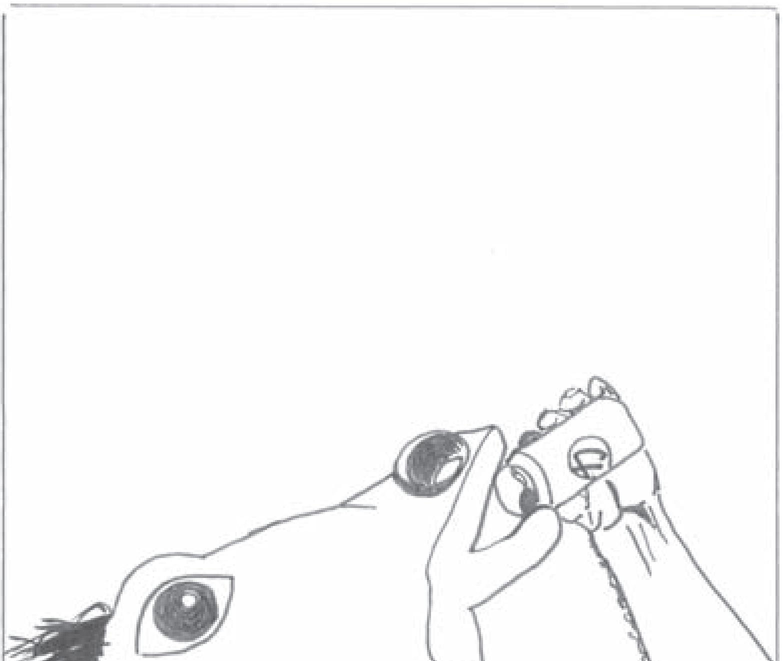
7B. Cathartic Ideas

Catharsis is a term for the release of repressed emotion, originally applied by Aristotle to the effect of tragic theatre on its audience. An evocative expression of this term in everyday situations is *naughty*: the immediate effect of seeing bad behaviour, rule breaking and transgression can be a sort of enjoyment and complicity. There is often something both childlike and primitive about catharsis, something of the aggression and glee of knocking over a tower of bricks or biting a leg!

Catharsis connects with the spirit of anarchy, naughtiness, rule breaking and also the underlying feelings of aggression, fear and thrill that go with these. Little surprise that it is particularly evoked by the culture of teenagers: rap music, death metal, happy slapping, slasher horror movies and blood-spattered computer games. Less horrific, but no less extreme, is the world of thrills, dares and tomfoolery evoked brilliantly by MTV's *Jackass* – a grown-up reflection of what it's like on any playground containing 15 year-old-boys.

Qualities that *cathartic brands* share in common are:

- breaking the rules, being naughty, transgressive, anarchic;
- upsetting and provoking people, particularly the establishment;
- aggression, sadism, wicked streaks;
- sinful aspects: gluttony, debauchery etc.;
- horror, violence, slapstick, shock;
- guerrilla marketing stunts;
- schoolboy humour.



7B. CATHARTIC

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Once upon a time KFC used to emphasise *Colonel Saunders' original recipe* and the chicken being *finger-lickin good*. But nowadays the advertising and whole direction are about the cultural context. First we had *Soul Food*, which based its appeal on the fact that African Americans seem to love the brand. And now we have advertising featuring call centre staff and other typical members of the public singing with their mouth full – and even a British couple flirting in front of their children! There were 1671 complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority about that ad, which is a new record, although the ASA did not find against the advertiser. I think it is one of the best campaigns on TV at the moment – for being true to the culture today in all its crassness. Most advertising still clings to a notion of aspiration that the KFC ads expose as just stuck up and repressed. The KFC business is booming, while McDonald's is closing restaurants in the UK. KFC has been expanding rapidly, in response to a shift to white meat on health grounds, but no doubt also riding a wave of popularity: that it is okay to eat, chat, sing and have your elbows on the table – much like most teenagers, who are a core audience for the business. I guess the only worry for the business right now might be bird flu panic.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Pepperami – "It's a bit of an animal". The campaign features an animated sausage character who gets killed in a variety of gruesome horror movie ways; through a cheese grater was a recent one. It is cult advertising, extended through ideas like a viral ad on the internet that was "too hot for TV" – for the new chile-flavoured Pepperami. The character has also featured in pitch invasions of England football matches and other stunts. The deep truth of this advertising is that it is about the sort of junk food that you are not supposed to eat. It was always already a naughty brand. Plus if you want to get psychological about it, then the campaign is opening the lid on a world of cannibalism, sadism and assorted nasties. The response to the campaign has been dramatic: lots of complaints of course, but also a 55% increase in sales the very first month the campaign ran.

Other Instructive Examples

Death cigarettes were launched back in 1991 by the Enlightened Tobacco Company, with a black pack and a skull-and-crossbones logo. I would like to imagine that the creative process for this went along the lines of a conversation starting: "What is the one topic or theme we can't go anywhere near?" A recent brand with a similar naughtiness quotient is a new brand of cigarettes called "Shag". It's a clever name, because in old-fashioned slang it used to mean tobacco, but these days mainly means having sex. The brand is being given away with a free packet of condoms and is targeting students, who were the group Death cigarettes seemed to be aiming at too. The brand has been criticised by antismoking group ASH, because it is encouraging young people to smoke. The problem is that the devil has the best tunes, and by outlawing cigarettes in the first place, we have already made them more cool and attractive to teenagers in search of transgressive ideas. "Shag" and "Death" are just specific manifestations of a general appeal that cigarettes, binge drinking and shagging for that matter have as the subjects of "official" disapproval.

Another brand that deserves a mention in the naughty advertising hall of fame is Pot Noodle. The latest campaign features the idea of a *Pot Noodle Horn* represented by a bulging erection-like protuberance in a man's trousers, which turns out to be a large wind instrument and represents lust for the product. This follows on from a previous campaign whose slogan was *It's dirty and you want it*! The marketing includes a promotion where you can collect in-pack tokens for your own Pot Noodle Horn, an interactive website and all the usual fun and games. And to my mind one of the brand's finest hours was the *exploding toilet* stunt – complete with a siren, flashing light and disgusting sound effects – staged in real pub toilets, on behalf of the new curry flavour. I think the resounding message of this marketing is not what it says or shows or does, but the reaction to it: its success in drawing criticism from the moral media. Once again, it is cool to be disapproved of.

Another campaign causing endless mischief was Yorkie's *Not For Girls*. The company has even printed the message on the pack. Yorkie chocolate had always emphasised that it is chunky, macho, for lorry drivers and so on. The media interest was sustained by the banning of Yorkie's "for men only" sampling teams by several cities. An official Nestlé website tells the brand story in corporate language:

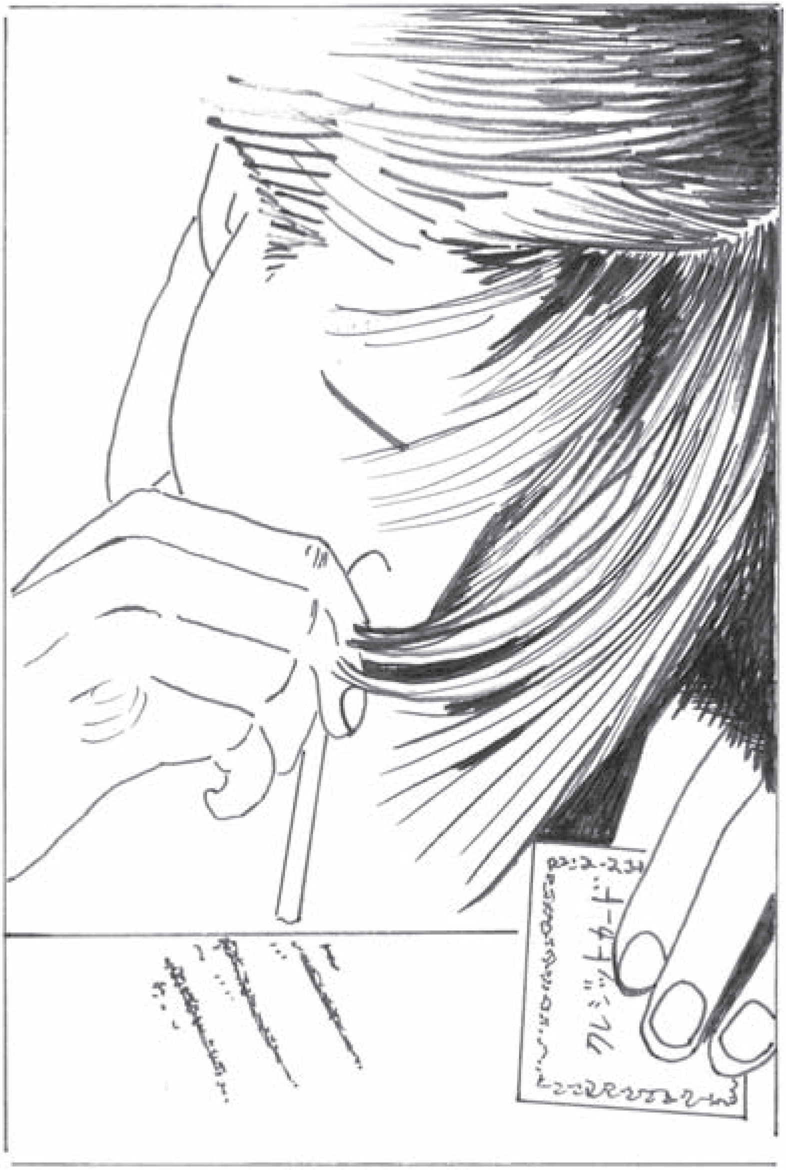
> In today's society, there aren't many things that a man can look at and say that's for him. The "Not For Girls" campaign theme for Yorkie uses humour, which resonates with today's British male and simply states that Yorkie is positioning itself as a chocolate bar for men who need a satisfying hunger buster.

But who are they trying to kid? No marketing in this mould is ever going to appear socially responsible – in a way that is the point, and there is a place in life for things that are un-PC, unhealthy and so on. The Yorkie idea looks slightly more contrived to me than the previous examples (you can see the puppet strings), but according to reports in the media it worked, bringing a 20% uplift in sales.

PlayStation is perhaps the ultimate catharsis brand and I once entertained the company's European marketing department with a talk on this theme – including some historical stuff about human sacrifice! Its advertising reflects this well (for instance that ad where the porn stars fight the golfers in a wildlife programme setting). But I reckon the heart of the brand is games like *Grand Theft Auto*. PlayStation seems to own the dark side of gaming – being an exemplar, even when games are available cross-platform. And PlayStation does have exclusive games developed by Sony, of which my current favourite (one of the best-looking games I have ever seen) is *God of War*. In this game you fight mythological beasts and take on godlike powers – thoroughly archetypal, cathartic and terrifying.

7C. Scandal Ideas

These brands tap into the other kind of culture associated with sex – the desire to peep, whisper, spread rumours. Gossip is a universal human



7C. SCANDAL

phenomenon and some psychologists speculate that it exists so that those who break the rules are not allowed to get away with it (for instance, in stereotyped terms, the tarty woman who might sleep with others' husbands tends to be gossiped about and ostracised). Conversely, things gossiped about have a fascination, which can give brands powerful currency.

Features that *scandal brands* share in common are:

- the storylines: titillation, sex, shock, gossip, voyeurism;
- catchy phrases or slogans, as word-of-mouth fodder;
- sailing close to the wind, in terms of shock value vs decency;
- advertising getting banned, adding to the scandal/appeal;
- relevance and truth, e.g. Club 18–30 holidays really are shocking;
- a brave management team and a certain amount of luck.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

What Club 18–30 basically offers to its customers is an outrageous (drunken, debauched, promiscuous) holiday experience. It is the UK equivalent of the American "spring break" tradition and many older societies have had initiations and festivals where people can go wild. I pitched for this client's advertising account years ago and our strategy was summarised by the endline *2 Weeks to Live*. We didn't win because another agency presented something more scandalous – an advertising campaign on the ultimate public medium of 48 sheet posters, with headlines like:

- *Beaver España*
- *The Summer of 69*
- *Girls. Can we interest you in a package holiday?* (with a picture of a man wearing tight underpants)

The advertising resulted in 341 complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority (which was the highest number for any campaign that year) and the advertising was banned – but not before it had created huge PR coverage and word of mouth. Plus there was the "disapproval" cachet of being banned. As the saying goes: "Your mother wouldn't like it." I remember when the client team briefed us on this pitch: they said every time there was a scandalous, negative story in the tabloid newspapers, their bookings shot up. This advertising campaign achieved the same sort of effect.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

The *Big Brother* show, originally from Endemol in the Netherlands, has become a long-running international hit. Contestants are locked in a house together, and each week one is voted off by the public, from a short list nominated by fellow housemates.

Big Brother is a virtual or vicarious socialising brand, one that works by following characters in a social situation, taking sides, pulling puppet strings (by voting) and so on. It has a passionate fan following and plenty of shows devoted to discussions among typical members of the audience, as well as features involving lookalikes, relatives and celebrity fans. *Big Brother* also strikes me as having an instructional value: in this experimental context you can reflect on different strategies to win friends and influence people. But it is undoubtedly also just scandalous, giving people plenty to talk about by the office water coolers, and also giving them a sense of being involved in a little social scene with contact so vivid, frequent and close up you feel like you are only next door.

In the early series the process of voting and eviction – the audience playing God – seemed to be the hook. In recent series, juicy scandal and tabloid stories appear foremost, especially sex or conflict. The public voting figures have been lower, but viewership is still very strong. The series is reported like news, with digest shows and the website following the "key stories" and *Big Brother* offering text alerts for major news flashes. The most shocking event in the 2005 UK series was a woman who came into the house late and (determined to make a name for herself) masturbated with a wine bottle in front of several housemates and a million other viewers on her first drunken night in the house. As people used to say of the news: “You couldn’t make it up.”

Big Brother wasn’t all that new in original concept; MTV brought out *Real World* in 1992. But *Big Brother* has used a stream of innovative ideas – in tasks, new twists and so on – to keep viewer interest fresh, year after year.

Other Instructive Examples

Getting banned seems to work in sectors where being rebellious and badly behaved is attractive. One such category is rock and roll, and many singles have been helped on their way by a banned video. Russian band t.A.t.U. had a huge hit in 2003 (“All the Things She Said”) after their publicity claimed the video (featuring the two 14-year-old girls in the band kissing) had been banned from *Top of the Pops*. The BBC denied there was a ban, saying they simply had better exclusive live footage and they didn’t know where the story had come from. But by then the tabloid story had raged (“Paedophile Pop”) and the single had gone straight to number one.

Fashion also makes regular use of scandal as a driver, as in for instance Calvin Klein’s *Lolita* campaign featuring young models, and the Young Designers Emporium (South Africa) poster campaign featuring models with red bruising marks on their bottoms and the line *Brand Spanking New Fashion*.

Benetton always used to court controversy – until it ran a series of ads featuring prisoners on death row. This caused outrage from conservative commentators in the USA, who said it was glamorising murder and would offend the families of these men’s victims. Benetton and its creative director Olivieri Toscani were not new to scandal: previous ads such as a nun kissing a priest (banned in Italy) and a patient dying of AIDS (banned in the UK) were typical of the photojournalism approach they had used for decades. Previously the company had always stood by its bold advertising and its political messages, saying it offered “reality” when so much other fashion advertising offered only image. But after the American *We, on Death*

Row campaign cost $20 million to produce and a major lost contract with Sears, Toscani fell out with the owners and left.

A (probably *the*) classic gossip brand is *The Sun* newspaper. It is not because *The Sun* stoops lower or is more sensationalist than its rivals (although it often does and is). It is because it has the ultimate redeeming quality and key component of successful gossip: a very sharp tongue. It has a way of saying things that is clever, cruel and populist, despite its pretence to be "dumbed down". Here are a few classic *Sun* headlines:

- "Bananas in Pajamas" (Michael Jackson arriving at court, looking dishevelled).
- "Up Yours, Delors!" (Jacques Delors, European president at the time).
- "Gotcha!" (the sinking of the *Belgrano* in the Falklands war).

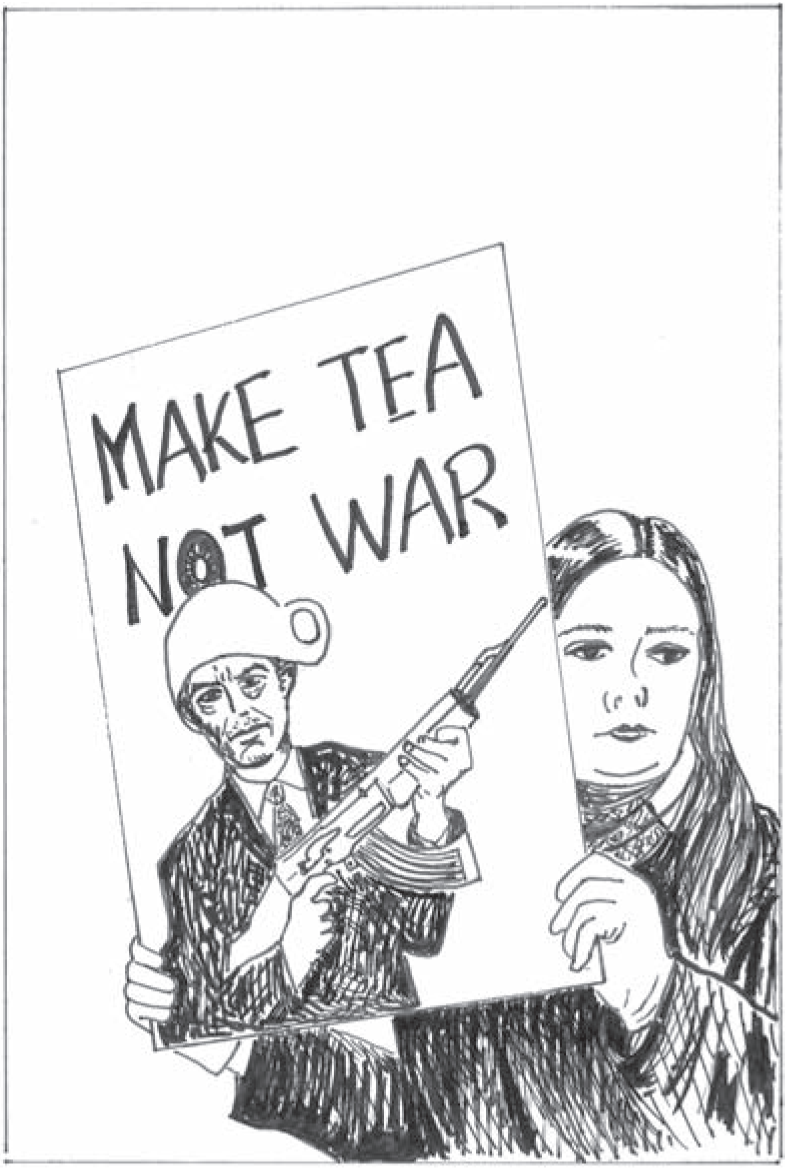
As another example, this is just my personal opinion, but I think the Hilton hotel brand has been given a boost by the antics of heiress Paris Hilton. A boyfriend circulated a tape of them having sex, which leaked onto the internet under the ironic title *One Night in Paris*. That was embarrassing, I am sure, but it helped Paris (and her sister) become talked about, photographed and celebrated – there is nothing like a bit of scandal to boost your star rating. They are classic socialites: not movie stars or designers (although they have dabbled), they are what the British call *It* girls. They are rich, sexy, aristocratic, beautiful, decadent and glamorous. This is the perfect image for an international chain of hotels, aimed at businessmen who perhaps feel like James Bond as they head off on another mission for their company!

However, just to demonstrate it is not true that there is no such thing as bad publicity, consider the likely damage done to any remaining sympathy for the UK royal family by Prince Harry's choice of fancy dress for a party, reported by *The Sun* as:

- "Harry the Nazi" (with a picture of him in full Nazi uniform, complete with a swastika armband).

You couldn't make it up!

7D. Radical Ideas


MAKE TEA
NOT WAR

7D. RADICAL

The 1960s "flower power" values – freedom, peace, love, authenticity, anti-authority – continue to reverberate. In some ways we are all hippies now, although those ideals have been translated for the BMW-driving, ready-meal-eating suburbs. The result is a continuing stream of cultural ideas like organic baby food, pot pourri, yoga exercise DVDs and eating GM-free beans, while watching TV on the sofa . . . which true hippies might struggle to recognise as their own love children. The underlying thoughts and feelings are the same though: a reaction against an overcorporate, overmaterialistic, overcompetitive, overmanufactured, overprocessed, overmarketed world – a desire for freedom and a more natural, spontaneous and gentle way of life. Every now and then a brand comes out with a campaign promoting this hippy agenda and it nearly always causes a sensation.

Features that *radical brands* share in common are:

- deliberately naïve presentation;
- liberal values;
- "nonmarketing" marketing;
- grass roots, local, human scale;
- experiences and happenings;
- natural and "barefoot" forms of culture;
- an issue, something you want to challenge or change;
- pursuing a change in behaviour (rather than just a virtuous image);
- giving people simple, accessible ways to change their behaviour (including what they can do to lobby, protest, boycott etc.);
- a simple slogan (or name) that trumpets the cause;
- being forceful in marketing and communications: big themes, big schemes.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

The only thing naive about Innocent smoothies seems to be the tone of voice the company uses. People in the business have raved to me about the meticulous construction of this brand, like the fact it says "enjoy by" (instead of "sell by") on the cap. It was even chosen by the Design Council as a showcase brand. The packaging has also won several prestigious D&AD design awards. Not bad given that the company founders (with no design training) apparently came up with the identity themselves:

> Lacking any kind of knowledge about the design process or how to go about finding and developing the right image, the company was forced to keep things simple. The logo, which resembles an apple with a halo, or a person with a halo depending on how you look at it, was sketched on a serviette in felt tip pen. "We tried to make everything say instantly that the product is fun and good for you. The bottles are simple and free of gimmickry. They're easy to hold and that's all they need to be," says [Dan] Germain Brand Manager.[1]

The founders are self-confessed "hippies". But as a BBC interview pointed out, this is all part of the brand mythology:

> "We just want to produce lovely drinks. And save up enough for a day out at the seaside," says the brochure. Such utopian-sounding aims are echoed by Richard [Reed co-founder]. "There's a touch of hippy in us," he tells me. Yet these are very shrewd hippies. It is a quote recounted in interviews elsewhere and the seemingly effortless success feels an extricable part of the brand itself.[2]

The three founders, friends who had been discussing their business idea since they graduated from Cambridge University, worked first in management consultancy and advertising. And they were savvy enough to raise £250 000 from a business angel. But whether instinctively, or through more careful (but hidden) planning, they have constructed a brand that is a virtual point-for-point remake of Ben & Jerry's:

- founded by some guys who quit their day jobs;
- natural ingredients and a "homemade" approach;
- measured in "chunks" rather than grams (in Innocent's case in pieces of fruit);
- cute use of language;
- cute typography (no capitals) and childish graphics;
- little use of advertising;

- link-ups with charity (Innocent did a brilliant promotion for Age Concern, featuring bottles wearing little knitted hats);
- more cute stuff on the web;
- a hippy-style festival;
- a big price premium.

One thing they haven't done yet, though, is follow Ben & Jerry in selling to Unilever for hundreds of millions! Innocent is the number one smoothie brand in the UK, is growing at 60% a year, has a turnover of £25 million and is still a company with daft ideas (like driving around London in minibus offering lifts) and a refreshing attitude. If they want free marketing tips, the other winning ideas for Ben & Jerry were:

- A high-profile *David* and *Goliath*-style court case and publicity campaign – *What is the doughboy afraid of* – against Häagen-Dazs/Pillsbury's dirty tricks (Pepsi just bought P&J Smoothies, and perhaps it too will put pressure on retailers?).
- A Free Cone Day when it said thank-you to customers by giving away over a million free ice creams.
- Special editions and a series of music tributes like the Cherry Garcia.
- Taking the lead on eco issues, including bleach-free paper and funding research into more environmentally friendly versions of refrigeration.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Unilever is certainly not known for a "flowers in your hair" approach to business. Persil (Omo in international markets) took a radical change of direction in 2004. Here's how the company explains its new strategy:

> Although it might sound strange for a leading laundry brand like Omo to say this, we believe, like you, that this type of dirt is good: it's an important part of a child's development. It's how kids learn, express their creativity and even bolster their immune systems.[3]

For many years this brand had competed with Ariel over which brand got the clothes cleaner. Persil's slogan was *Washes Whiter.* Each had brought out new formats such as capsules and tablets and seemed like leading examples of quite old-fashioned "housewife" brands, in being obsessed with cleaning results and perfection in family and home presentation, in an age whose interests and standards in those respects had lowered.

The new campaign announced that *Dirt is Good.* Persil produced research saying that children were avoiding getting dirty, for fear of being told off, in contrast with developmental studies showing that getting stuck into messy play was important for children's development and creativity. This insight led to propaganda-style TV advertising. It proved a big idea capable of activation in lots of other interesting ways: a school's messy play/painting programme; a national *Dirt is Good* day in Australia; a national *Messterpiece* school holidays painting activity; research and education materials – for instance, suggestions for 39 things every child should experience before they are 10.

This mass participation and urging of activities make the Persil marketing akin to charities and political movements. And there is a quasi-political agenda here: for hippy parenting, and against the uptight hygiene of our parents' era. Of course, if you wanted to be *really* radical you could always cut back on the household cleaning products you use!

Other Instructive Examples

Nike Free – what a *great* product idea: *like running in your bare feet.* The benefits are that your feet get stronger, more poised and alert – but they also get protected. And Nike cleverly linked the product to African long-distance runners, who connote sporting excellence, barefoot running and a subtle hippy "ethnic" theme. Nike does hippy!

Howies is a clothing company that grew out of the mountain bike, skate and snowboarding scene. It seems, in a totally genuine way, to be a business built by a couple, some of their friends, a 16 year old they gave a lift to once, and so on. They were seriously short of money for their first eight years, despite being "voted the 9th coolest brand in Britain. Nike were 12th".[4] The founders say that the business exists to make people think about the world, and they have executed this in ways varying from "painting topless ladies with our T-shirt designs" to charging themselves an "earth tax" of 10% of profits, donated to grass-roots environmental and social policies. And needless to say, their garments are produced in as thoughtful and low impact a way as possible too.

Dove's *Campaign for Real Beauty* has been standout advertising in what is usually a highly conventional industry. Mainstream female toiletries are supposed to be about the science of beauty (anti-ageing). The campaign is presented like a cause, but unlike a real cause (like *Father's for Justice*) it doesn't really ask people to do more than buy into the sentiment. Nevertheless, going against the endless pressure in the media on women and girls to be thin, perfect and like models is certainly to be applauded.

But there is a big question: do they mean it? The campaign started as an idea to promote firming lotion (necessarily aimed at women with fuller figures). The result was that sales increased 1000%. Realising that the company had stumbled over a big brand idea that transcended that product by far, the *Campaign for Real Beauty* was born. I am sure that lots of women working in the company feel good about it. I suspect the question is whether they will pursue this strategy in a slow year. If they mean it they will stick to *Real Beauty*. We shall see. Meanwhile it is a creative, lateral strategy that has caught people's imagination and is only to be applauded.

There is a simple test of authenticity, which is whether the message is *consistent* with the company's overall operations. That's not the same thing as being aligned – or even relevant. You could decide to campaign for human rights while your business sold woolly jumpers. It's a free world. Just so long as there is no inconsistency. Nobody likes a hypocrite.

BP is a company that is apparently committed to going *Beyond Petroleum*. It has trumpeted its lead in solar energy and forged partnerships with moderate NGOs, including Oxfam at one point. And yet many accuse the company of *greenwashing*. Why? Because the majority of its operations have to do with oil. In *Fortune* magazine, Cait Murphy wrote of BP's campaign:

> Here's a novel advertising strategy – pitch your least important product and ignore your most important one . . . If the world's second-largest oil company is beyond petroleum, *Fortune* is beyond words.[5]

The same article interviewed a BP regional president who explained that the company was trying to convey that among oil companies it was trying a little harder, although being literally *Beyond Petroleum* was still decades away. Somehow this nuance got lost in translation. The one caveat about radical ideas is that they set a high bar, which your organisation must clear ethically. I have met senior managers at BP, including their chairman, and they do seem quite sincere about the course they have set. Perhaps choosing to say it so definitely in advertising is the key issue?

Moral philosophy has known for centuries that virtue and visibility don't mix particularly well. Even when you have done something for all the right reasons, gaining by publicising it can be a tricky business, full of pitfalls and potential backlashes. When Naresh (a fellow St Luke's co-founder) and I got a brief from IKEA HQ asking how they should communicate their ethical and environmental initiatives, our recommendation, at least for external communications, was simple: don't!

8

Control

Control gets a bad press: people are labelled “control freaks” or obsessive compulsive if they have a tidy desk (which I don’t, I hasten to add!). But control is one of the basic features of our development. It should properly be understood as the counterpart to chaos. Culture is control all the way through. Without that there is only scratching the dirt.

More positive ideas of control, like personal agency, mastery, security, heroic achievements and performance, have to be understood if we are to explain why so many powerful brands tap into various ideas to do with control.

- 8A. *Personalised ideas*. Ergonomics used to design standard products that would work well for the average consumer. But there is no such thing. For instance, one in five adults has some form of disability. The new leading edge of design, which has only just got going and is most apparent in malleable digital forms, is customisation.
- 8B. *In-control ideas* – the immediate experience of being *on top of things*, exemplified by the Blackberry, which keeps you in the loop (even if you’d rather escape it for a while!).
- 8C. *Competition ideas* – the joy of coming first, being recognised, making it to the top of the heap, channelling aggression into socially acceptable forms. Or watching others like a national team do it for you and just giving your ego a workout!
- 8D. *Grading ideas* – the official recognition of the results of competition, like exam results or job interviews. But also like winning an eBay

Table II.8 Control

8A. Personalised	8B. In control	8C. Competition	8D. Grading
Trailfinders	*Blackberry*	*Pop Idol*	*eBay*
Nike iD	*Barclaycalm*	*Accenture*	*Economist*

auction and getting feedback. Which reminds me, could you please take the trouble to leave a great review on Amazon if you like this book. I'd be most grateful!

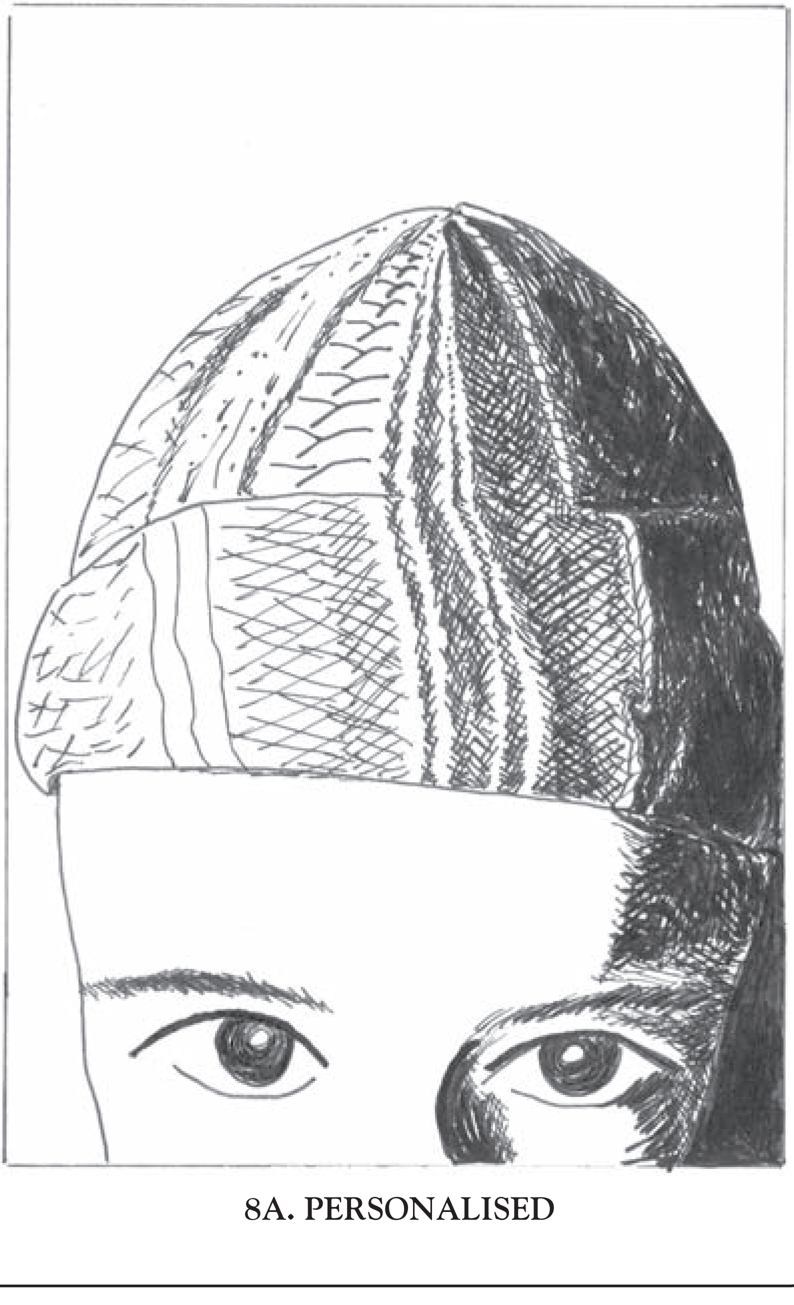
8A. Personalised Ideas

Anything that can personalise an experience has the potential to fit better as well as acknowledge the primacy of "me". For instance, ringtones have been a $3 billion global hit because they help with the problem of whose phone is ringing, as well as (for young users) being a statement of your identity.

Individualism is a key issue for teenagers – it is *why* to rebel, against conformity. A curious feature of this movement is that it does not imply distance or isolation from your peers. In fact, many youth subcultures exhibit uniformity in attitude, clothing, music. The rebellion is against adult authority, represented by schools, parents, boring suburbs. Individualism is a stand against the system and subverts its cultural codes, but is not very individual.

A more mature version of this is individuation (or self-actualisation as Maslow called it), which is the development of psychological and cultural independence – a growing sense of what you are about and who you are. The more interesting – deeper – forms of personalisation involve self-actualisation, for instance allowing a buyer to design something rather than simply specify a few options. It's the difference between a ringtone you have created yourself and an off-the-shelf ringtone from a pop record.

The qualities *personalised brands* tend to share in common are:



8A. PERSONALISED

- either individualism, i.e. making a rebellious, anticonformity statement, or individuation, i.e. expressing a confident sense of your self.
- an element of customisation, meeting people half way;
- benefits of adaptation outweigh the cost and hassle;
- an attractive brand concept that pulls together the disparate pieces.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Trailfinders is individuation applied to travel. One of the key stories in the travel market has been the shift from packaged tours to independent travel. Trailfinders is a long-standing independent travellers' resource. The company helps you put together tailor-made itineraries, including discount flights, local transfers and accommodation, car hire and tours (more of the trekking than "booze cruise" variety). It has been voted the best independent travel agency by the *Observer* and *Telegraph* newspapers. A core feature of the service is the local knowledge of its consultants: they can help you put together a trip that makes sense, saving you months of research into a new location.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Nike iD is individualism applied to product design. You go to the store, have a meeting with a consultant and design your own shoe from a range of options in basic styles, colours and materials. My wife just got a pair and is happy with the results, but also the whole independent feeling of having put her own look together. It is probably a proposition for those quite confident about their tastes and style choices, but that describes most opinion formers in fashion and style. And it really lifts Nike apart from challengers like Puma. The *iD Labs* are by invitation only, but you can also design your own pair on the website.

Nike iD moves the goalposts on sneaker-upmanship. It also provides a great springboard for interesting marketing. In the States the company let people design a shoe on Reuters' Times Square video billboard in New York.

When the shoe was done you downloaded the resulting design to your mobile as wallpaper. And of course, you could also order the shoe. There was a rather controversial moment that almost spoiled the party when an MIT student submitted a design that said "Sweatshop". When the design was rejected, the student leaked the related correspondence onto the internet. But that's not a product of this scheme, rather a reflection of Nike's ongoing difficult relationship with activists. Something similar had happened before in an Adidas design competition.

Other Instructive Examples

Procter & Gamble – ever pioneering in everything but its TV commercials – also tried a customised beauty product concept called Reflect.com, putting six years and $60 million into the scheme before it was finally withdrawn. Like Nike iD, it let women mix and match options. It seemed like it did meet needs, offering products that were better suited to people's hair types and skin tones as well as colour preferences; but perhaps people were happy enough with the standard ranges and creating individualism from this basic palette with their own styling and accessorising ideas. Or perhaps it could be counted a success, but being a success with the coolest 3% doesn't cut it at P&G. It doesn't have a company/house brand for initiatives like this to rub off on, unlike Nike.

Other mass customisation examples include companies like Bag Daddy (design your own handbag), Funkylala (design your own t-shirts) and the brave and apparently successful customisable M&M confectionery initiative. Mercedes-Benz offers a Designo option for customers who want to individualise their order, including the wood trim and upholstery choices, as well as exterior paint choices.

Starbucks is probably the strongest brand out there on customisation. I usually have a grande latte, but safe in the knowledge that I could have been a bit more original – like an American colleague of mine who seems to have developed Starbucks orders into an art form, taking a few minutes just to say them. Starbucks is taking this a stage further with the HearMusic café concept, where you can burn your own compilation CD from a huge database of singles, while sipping your coffee. It apparently went very well in test market and is being rolled out across the States this year. This is a great example of a brand innovating behind its benefit (customisation) not its product (coffee).

For Clarks shoes, St Luke's latest campaign showcased individuals whose style choices were portrayed as if they were fashion brands, with the endline *Be Your Own Label.* It is an important insight: what has changed even in fashionable markets *is* people becoming their own label, or blog, or music label or art director.

8B. In-Control Ideas

A large part of our early development is spent gaining control of our body functions, walking, voice, and later self-discipline, social presentation and so on. In all these areas the fundamental threat posed is losing control.

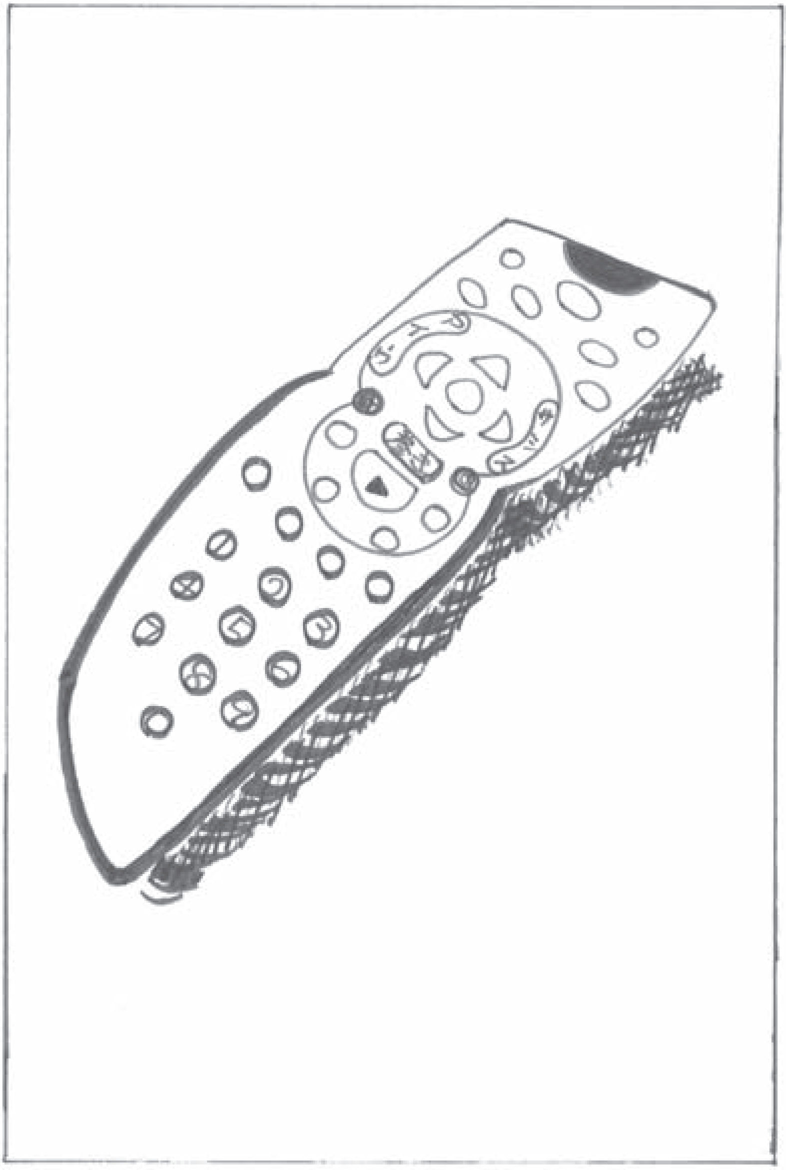
Control should not be understood as having "controls", i.e. technology. In fact, having controls that are hard to use can lead to a loss of control:

> BMW's 2001 introduction of iDrive, its pioneering driver information/entertainment system, was arguably the biggest corporate disaster since Coca-Cola Co. decided to tinker with the formula for its eponymous beverage. To say that the automotive trade press and nearly every contributor to a Web discussion of the system hated iDrive is a huge understatement.[1]

The vehemence of this reaction is probably a response to a loss of psychological control. With updates of the system, user training and better interface design maybe the company can turn it around. But what should have been a big plus has been a big pain so far.

Control is a big feature of product design, but on its own can just lead to unwanted features and options. Brand ideas that address *psychological* control may have an element of technological wizardry, but may also take their lead from simply making people feel safe and on top of things, or like there is a safety net.

Features that *in-control brands* share in common are:



8B. IN-CONTROL

- a sense of magical power, awe;
- extending natural abilities and/or improving the experience;
- anticipating and defeating chaos, being on top of things;
- intuitiveness, not like "programming the video";
- particular attention paid to the learning curve and cognitive demands (e.g. how many steps/routines you have to memorise).

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

The Blackberry is an executive status symbol and the biggest craze in this arena since the Filofax. It has lots of clever things about it, from instant email to those *Sent from my wireless handheld Blackberry* notices on every email (using exactly the same "viral" tactic as Hotmail did), which are a covert status symbol.

A big talking point has been the stories that users tell about how addictive it is (nicknamed the *Crackberry*), how you cannot resist checking new emails and messages, even when on holiday and so on. But I like how someone I know described theirs: "I like it because I love telling people what to do." As a means of sending out quick-fire orders and directions and being in control in real time, it would take some beating.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Barclaycard has launched a new campaign under the snappy slogan *Barclaycalm*. It taps into that side of in-control brands that is about peace of mind and avoidance of anxiety. There are witty adverts featuring Jennifer Saunders, but the heart of the initiative is a package of services designed to set your mind at rest:

- Identity theft prevention advice, support and optional insurance.
- Fraud protection measures.
- Emergency card replacements and cash advances, home and abroad.
- Purchase delivery insurance.

These look fairly generic, but may be enough as a package to carry the cultural idea of a worry-free credit card.

Other Instructive Examples

Egg was the first banking site to introduce in 2002 an aggregated "money manager" service where you can view all your online financial products (from different providers) in one place. It even threw in Barclaycalm-style fraud prevention for good measure.

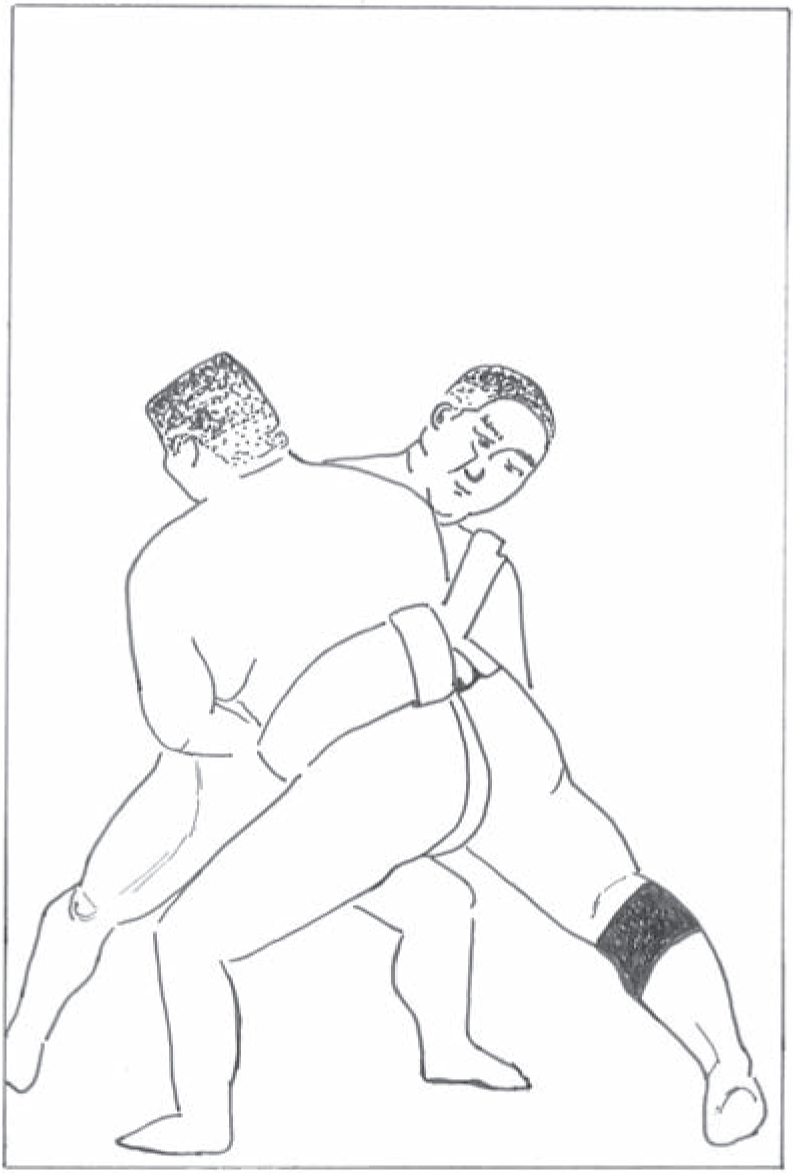
Or take UPS tracking – such a great feature, which turns waiting for a parcel and being in the dark into an involving experience (except when the company lost a valuable parcel of mine for two months in Belgium somewhere – but at least I could keep pace with its non-progress!).

Sky+ and the personal video recorder (PVR) represent one small step for mankind, one giant threat for advertising. The ability to skip the adverts may change the broadcast business model and the brand advertising paradigm for good. According to research, one of the biggest benefits early users of the system identified was the ability to dodge having to sit through adverts. Sky says "only" 30% currently skip adverts, but I bet that accounts for nearly all the nonlive viewing (you can't skip ads when you watch programmes live).

8C. Competition Ideas

Competition is a huge subject in human motivation. The most important feature is often not the struggle but the limits placed on behaviour – rules of engagement, whether in combat, sport, games, exams or business. This makes it a safe place to let loose aggression, which otherwise could spiral out of control into violence, even murder.

Competition seems to fascinate us as spectators too, with sports events, game shows, business news and numerous other expressions that we follow emotionally as if participants. The way in which competition hooks our



8C. COMPETITION

interest is complex. Computer games designers talk about the "economy of desire" – the identification with characters or teams, emotional pacing, suspense and the release and euphoria of winning.

With the advent of interactive media, competition has taken new forms in recent years, although these mostly extend the existing styles of involvement. For instance, instead of shouting answers at a quiz on TV we may now also be able to take part.

Competition can make for involving, fascinating brands. eBay is one example, where competition to "win" auctions often pushes the prices far higher than might have been paid, for instance when buying the same goods from classified advertising. People get caught up in the thrill of the chase and this emotional dynamic explains how an otherwise dull-looking system can excite such loyalty and interest.

The features that *competition brands* share in common are:

- a contest, with winners and losers and a prize/achievement;
- a cultural back story and tradition;
- rules of engagement;
- ways for the audience to get involved;
- pacing and suspense, for instance through rounds of competition;
- personalities whom the audience identifies with.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

Why have talent shows become such a global television phenomenon? They have always been a staple of commercial television and date back to live entertainments where people would step onto the stage to do their "star turn". One explanation could be the increased competition within the modern economy. Shows such as *Pop Idol* could be seen as a metaphor for a society where competition, ambition, instant fame, celebrity and social mobility are key stories. Certainly the modern media, alert to these agendas, have a field day with these contests and the stars they create, much as with the reality TV eviction-based contests. Another line of thinking would see the ability for these shows to manufacture pop stars as an extended marketing programme.

Pop Idol was not the first of the modern crop of talent shows, but it has been one of the most successful. Created by pop impresario Simon Fuller and with BMG's Simon Cowell as its most acerbic judge, the UK show has become both one of the most profitable ever for ITV and also one of the biggest ever UK TV exports, spawning *American Idol* and versions in many other markets. This international spread allowed the staging of a *World Idol* show, pitting the winners from different countries against each other, borrowing the additional interest of national rivalry to create a pop music equivalent of the World Cup.

I suspect the main draw is the new-found ability for the audience to get involved in the competition. These interactive features both intensify audience involvement and also crucially provide big new streams of revenue for the broadcasters. The show makes extensive use of premium-rate viewer interactivity, through telephone, text messaging and the digital TV red button. *American Idol* is credited with establishing mass interest in text messaging in the USA.

The latest news is that Cowell, who also created similar show *The X Factor*, is considering plans for a movie based on the *Pop Idol* format. Reported in *The Sun*, Cowell revealed that plans are quite advanced and that the casting for the movie itself would involve a competition, possibly covered by yet another talent contest TV show. (Of course, it may have been a wind up!)

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

Accenture has long embraced consumer-style marketing that helps it to cut more of a dash than its (dull and dowdy, at least in their marketing) professional services competition. And this was taken to new heights when Accenture signed a deal with Tiger Woods as "the official symbol of Accenture's new high performance business strategy", according to a press release by the company in 2003. CEO Joe W. Forehand said:

> Tiger Woods' strength, mastery, discipline and relentless focus on winning are universally recognized qualities that mirror the characteristics of a high-performance business, making him the ideal representative for Accenture's market positioning.[2]

Woods already had an eight-figure sponsorship deal with Nike, and this stipulates that he must wear Nike gear in all public appearances. But that wouldn't worry Accenture (it is his sports outfit, after all). It is interesting to see how a figure so closely identified with one marketer can support others; provided the categories are far apart, people seem to put the associations in different compartments and take each on their merit.

The deal with Accenture is unusual, but it has very credible roots. The company had sponsored golf tours for years, it being the favourite hobby of many of their clients. And the deal includes Accenture supporting the Tiger Woods Learning Centre, which seems to make the whole thing meaningful and motivating for the star too. He is positively gushing in an interview on the company's website, and without having checked, I suspect he will not be found on the record expressing this sort of enthusiasm for other sponsors, even Nike:

> TIGER WOODS: Well, without Accenture, there's no way we could ever have had the financial support, the expertise that Accenture has had. And they're able to help us in the future in our direction with our website and our foundation so that's been absolutely tremendous. And we look forward to the continued years of working together.[3]

The advertising is pretty good too: attention getting and relevant, addressing clients and potential recruits. The slogan *Go On, Be a Tiger* might be a bit clumsy. But I actually think the real message of this advertising is more than what the ads literally say, it is about behaving like a world-leading brand: here is a firm that is in a different league. In other words, the most competitive thing about the Tiger Woods deal may be having the balls to do something this big, much like IBM with its *Deep Blue* chess match.

Other Instructive Examples

I was struck by the tactics of the UK Olympics bid team for the 2012 games. The challenge was to establish and demonstrate public support for the bid, a crucial part of their case for holding the games and against an initial backdrop of public indifference. The campaign was staged to replicate the involvement of the public in the Olympic Games itself, featuring famous sports stars as spokespeople and a keen media interest in how we were doing against the other bids, notably the French. They took a diffuse civic issue and made a *competitive issue* of national pride. All the more gratifying when we won, of course.

An interesting extension of talent competitions is MTV and Adobe's *Boom* contest for UK schools, in which – as part of the national curriculum – students got to make a pop video and submit it to a regional and then a national competition. The kids were given new tracks by four famous artists to create videos for. This programme taught kids key IT skills as well as drawing on their creativity and enthusiasm. The package included training for the nearly 1000 teachers taking part, professional software and plans and resources for the six-lesson process. Seriously cool.

8D. Grading Ideas

There is a special feeling of doing something not everyone can do: being graded high.

Take Sudoku. These infernal little puzzles, imported from Japan, have been all the rage, with newspapers printing them and a wider audience than usually does the crossword or other puzzles doing them every day. The process of doing Sudoku seems very "sticky". And it presents an intellectual challenge with a corresponding sense of achievement (and cleverness) when you complete one of the puzzles. It is the process of elimination that people seem to find uniquely compelling – the "if it is not there, it must be there . . ." train of thought. But the core of the brand is requiring and confirming a certain knack, like many such crazes before it (e.g. the Rubik's cube). It is like an IQ test.

8D. GRADING

BBC's *Test the Nation* applied the same fascination (and also competitiveness) to the actual subject of IQ. Ten years ago, before the revival of game shows by *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, this would have seemed like a highly unlikely candidate for the Saturday night slot. In *Test the Nation*, rival groups of professionals – students, chefs, hairdressers and so on plus a group of celebrities – sit an IQ test or general knowledge quiz. Amusingly true to type, in one programme the rocket scientists came joint first.

Viewers at home also take part, noting their answers either on paper or on the internet. If the latter, their results are calculated and reviewed centrally, with high scorers being contacted and involved in the show. There is no big prize – rather, it is the satisfaction of testing your cleverness that drives the audience to the show.

The other key thing is the sense of an event, of the whole nation watching. IQ tests are not hard to come by, in books or online, but the publicness of the brand gives people "permission" and also a shove in the right direction.

The features that grading brands share in common are:

- setting the audience a puzzle or challenge;
- exercising or developing a knack, skill or talent;
- a feeling of cleverness and superiority conferred on those who "get it";
- a competitive context, i.e. some are being more clever than others.

Example 1: A Brand for Which This Was the Core Idea

eBay is the world's fastest-growing company and has built a powerful brand by electrifying the culture of bargain hunting and auctions. It is the process (and mastery) that defines this brand rather than any "image":

- Stalking: searching auction lists, tagging items for watching.
- Tracking the bids, waiting.
- Researching, asking questions, checking out the seller's feedback.
- Bidding, perhaps an early toe in the water.
- Pre-empting with *BuyItNow* or *BestOffer*.
- Pouncing, the last-minute bid.

- Winning.
- Agreeing payment forms, swapping details.
- Receiving the item and leaving feedback.

The structure of this process does really resemble hunting and you have to wonder if the thrill of the chase – exercising an instinctive knack for hunting – is what is really for sale on eBay. I am sure that many people have bought things at prices they might not have paid outside this system (I know I have). And eBay dealings are carried on under a constant awareness that the site grades people: numbers of transactions, percentage of positive feedback and so on.

Example 2: A Brand for Which This Was a Cultural Extension/Platform

The famous red-and-white poster advertising campaign for the *Economist* weekly magazine started with a simple proposition – "get ahead in business". It was a stylish campaign, well written, but perhaps a little derivative of the already famous *No FT, No Comment*. The first poster in the campaign carried the headline:

- "I Have Never Read the Economist" (management trainee, aged 42)

Over the next 17 years the campaign evolved into something altogether more interesting – a campaign about the audience's cleverness. It played on the fact that when you know things that others around you don't, or when you solve a clue or a puzzle, you feel smart. For example:

- One poster spelled out the word *ECONOMIST* using the tops of *Smarties* sweet packets (each of which always carries a letter).
- Another poster simply read *B#* – which in musical notation and read aloud could be understood as saying "be sharp".
- A poster on the side of a taxi read *The Knowledge* (referring to the exam that taxi drivers in London take, as well as the benefit of becoming better informed).

The *Economist* campaign is celebrated within the advertising and design community because it is so consistent. But I think this campaign is better than that: it touches on a human truth about the satisfaction of "getting it" and knowing that not everyone else will.

Other Instructive Examples

Baby Einstein captures the middle-class parental obsession with infant development and competitive achievements at (and pre-) school. The whole thing is ironic, since Albert Einstein himself was almost a school dropout and his groundbreaking papers on physics were published when he was working as a patent clerk.

In another education example, which is more impressive? Some nice advertising (*Those Who Can, Teach*)? Or a scheme that attracted 5% of all graduate job applications made by final-year students at Oxford, Cambridge and Imperial College? The idea of *Teach First* is to offer a two-year placement to teach at some of the toughest inner-city London schools, bundled with a "mini MBA" to help people transfer the leadership skills into management, sponsored by the likes of McKinsey. It offers graduates who are uncertain about their direction in life a chance to try teaching without closing down all other options and also a pretty impressive credential for a future employer (having survived and mastered teaching 14 year olds, business challenges will look tame). *Teach First* also runs competitions for undergraduates to devise breakthrough new teaching approaches, with a prize of £7000 but you also get to see your ideas tried in action. It is a clever idea in all sorts of ways, but I see it as fundamentally aimed at people who want to dabble with teaching while getting further points for their CV; it grades the teachers!

SECTION
III

DEVELOPING BRAND STRATEGIES

Developing New Brand Ideas in Practice

Organised Chaos vs Corporate Constipation

Why do entrepreneurs, importers, friends from college and the like develop many of the best new brand and business ideas?

- Innocent smoothies were developed by a bunch of friends from college.
- Nike was developed by a bunch of friends from college and their sports coach.
- Red Bull was the brainchild of an importer.
- YO! Sushi was launched by an ex-stage designer and roadie.
- eBay's software was written over a Labour Day holiday by a hippy software coder.
- Google was founded by two young doctoral students from Stanford.
- Napster was launched by a college student and his uncle, a lawyer.
- Amazon was founded by a software engineer, working for a hedge fund.

There could be a number of reasons:

- They are more creative, better able to think laterally.
- They think about the customer as a real person.
- They think about things from the outside in.
- They come up with holistic concepts not product features.
- They are more prepared to challenge the status quo.

- They are responsible for more attempts (and you only read about the ones that succeed).
- They are faster to market, more energetic, more lean and flexible.
- They carry things through to logical conclusions and don't compromise.
- They are stubborn, stick with ideas, make them work.

I would think most of the above are true – although they all miss a central feature, which is the subject of this section: the ability to organise in a way conducive to innovation. But it does start with an attitude, for instance obsession with what the customer wants and the resilience to survive crises – as illustrated by this quote from Jeff Bezos:

> Jeff Bezos remembers Amazon's darkest hour. It came in 1997 when, for the first time, his three-year-old e-commerce website faced online competition. Amazon was nowhere near making money and Wall Street thought it was going to go belly up. "There weren't that many people working at the company at the time – maybe 150. People were worried about what the competition meant. So we had an all-hands meeting. And I said: 'Look. I want you to wake up every morning terrified with your sheets drenched in sweat, but don't be afraid of our competitors, be afraid of our customers, because those are the people with whom we have a relationship.' And that philosophy of staying obsessed with customers has served us well. It was one of the best decisions we ever made."[1]

Amazon is a good example of brand innovation. It is a company made out of insights and ideas: personalisation, discovery, listmania, search inside the book, reader reviews. It embodies an approach where not just the founding insight but the ongoing business is shaped by ideas, which are cultural in starting with customer experience and working in.

The other thing that characterises all the companies I have worked with who are good at brand innovation (origination or development) is an *organised chaos* process. To illustrate, here is a typical sequence of events in the last three weeks at Ministry of Sound:

1. The operations director put in a proposal to launch a chain of bars. He used to manage a chain of bars and nightclubs, so he knows the sector pretty well. His original paper contained some key insights:

- An economic opportunity: after a crash of the high street on-trade channel the sector is reviving, but there are lots of bargains – sites and companies – to be acquired.
- A gap in the market: a hybrid venue, a bar plus nightclub (to 3 am) in one.
- A precise description of location and site criteria, costs of lease and refit.
- A role for the MoS brand: brand competition is weak, we are quite relevant.

2. A specific site was found to try the concept. The site and financial details were checked and we found we could get a deal where it would be hard to lose money. We talked about the overall idea and everyone agreed it made sense.
3. Three architecture firms were briefed. One was chosen who came in with a very interesting design, where the walls are moved and the venue morphs from bar to bar-club. A key idea in the design is "discovery", with lots of little rooms and alcoves.
4. The architect also, on his own initiative, did a stack of market research with customers in the Midlands and North to gauge attitudes to the Ministry brand; the conclusion of which was that it was relevant and appealing, but we needed to adapt it to bars, make it softer, a bit more sexy and sophisticated.
5. In parallel we held a creative session at Ministry and came up with the idea that the venue should function like a reality TV show, with lots of cameras and LCD screens dotted around, so people can check each other out and feel "on TV".
6. This idea was discussed with the architect who liked it (it's a good fit with the discovery theme too) and he worked with someone from the Ministry club to specify how it would work and think about costs and practicalities. We also went through the concept with the legal team, who told us it was okay so long as we don't record any footage (which would take us into privacy and data protection issues).
7. We agreed a name – *Minibar* – which we like so much we are also looking at doing a drinks range under this moniker.

8. Next steps are, in the words of our founder James Palumbo, "Get on with it."

The long-term plan is to launch 20–30 of these bars, at which point the multimedia experience (if it works) will be a network across the chain and also accessible by mobiles and web: reality TV mixed with people's social lives.

We are planning to launch by March 2006 (I am writing in mid-September 2005), which is less time than it will take to publish this book. I am sure many of the details will change, but what I wanted to illustrate with a project whose events were still fresh in my mind was a fast-moving process of organised chaos, basically a free-flowing conversation.

Contrast this with typical corporate constipation. In one project I was involved with in 2005, a company had spent six months at board level with management consultants tightly specifying a process, which its teams of employees (drafted on to the project with no respite from their day jobs) then had six weeks to deliver. It was a beautiful plan in terms of who did what, reporting to who, by when. It was a disaster from an innovation point of view, because everyone was stressed out, tired, feeling like minions in a big system with no room for initiative, and no one could actually take responsibility for any of the ideas or really engage their willpower. The project was stopped anyway when a new CEO arrived (and it was known throughout that a new CEO would arrive about that time). There were some interesting ideas suggested along the way, but mostly they seemed to get the life squeezed out of them and/or were not worked on from enough perspectives to make them workable (the famous "silos", for instance between marketing and product teams, were compounded by a lengthy game of "not invented here").

Why would a company invent such a rigid structure, with so little real conversation? My guess is that it is a product of the same sort of bureaucratic system that sent a former client of mine (on the board of BT) and several thousand colleagues a memo from someone he had never heard of, telling him that he was no longer allowed to serve coffee in meetings. It only took him one phone call to undo, but it may have taken weeks to be planned, approved and so on.

Creative processes and creative people thrive in small communities, with access to rich information and diverse skills in the same team, where they can take the initiative and work in a holistic and free-flowing conversation. Good ideas emerge from such a set-up fairly reliably. And they tend not to emerge from a more bureaucratic system.

I imagine many readers would agree. But if you take the implications of this seriously, it means we have the wrong structure: that many cherished ideas like "agency", "marketing department" and so on are *wrong*.

That is not a wholly new realisation. Stephen King (the luminary brand strategist at JWT, not the horror writer) wrote about this in 1973:

> Again it is a matter of going back to the theory of the successful new brand. If it must above all be a *totality*, then the physical product and the communication elements must clearly be linked by a common set of objectives; they must clearly be developed together and tested together. Not, as happens so often, one after the other. If it is to be relevant to people's needs and desires its starting point and language must be in consumer terms.[2]

In King's day the missing dialogue was that between (in his words) "advertising men" and "R&D men". He pointed out that this dialogue needs to be continuous, so that they are not ignorant of each other's areas or too shy of each other's skills to make practical suggestions.[3] The product of his way of working (between products and advertising people) was a brand with an idea in it, one example being Mr Kipling's cakes.

Stelios Haji-Ioannou has built his easyGroup empire on a culture of dialogue and what he calls "socialism". He tells a story about when he was starting out and he met an ad agency team who came in with some "concept boards" with pictures and words on them. He couldn't work out what they were on about, so he ignored all that and carried on building the business around cutting costs, constantly chatting with passengers and so on. In the process the company built a strong brand, but as a by-product of doing interesting stuff. easyJet brought in ticketless ticketing and other new ideas. But most of all, it took all the ingredients of flying, trimmed all the fat and made it cheap but cheerful (like Southwest in the USA). Its adverts and PR were quite aggressive, attacking what it called *fat-cat flying*. Stelios's idea was to target anyone who was paying out of their own pocket. It is a principle the company has applied in other markets, although it never seems to have had another hit quite like low-cost airlines.

The awkward truth of all of this is that most conventional marketing and advertising is geared up to a linear process, where things are done in a logical sequence. In contrast, most good ideas come from a holistic process, where everything is done at once within an incubator-style environment, with multidisciplinary teams, attitude and initiative (i.e. access to big decision making). The same insights actually apply to the development of ideas that are added to existing brands: the role traditionally played by messaging, which suited a process of filtering, targeting, media planning and so on. It is all innovation and companies like Ministry of Sound or easyGroup do it every day. There is an argument that it should mostly be done in-house and certainly quite a high proportion of ideas in this book were arrived at that way.

A key message of this book is that brand innovation *is* brand management. The brand is only as good as its last three or four ideas. All of brand marketing should be treated as an innovation project. Forget the brand "essence" – in a few years' time it may be different as a result of these new innovations, perhaps five years older or younger in the typical customer, different in tone. Like a person it needs to evolve to stay interesting. It should be coherent – each new idea should make sense and be brilliant in its own terms – but not consistent (in the sense of endless dull repetition of the same old formula).

Faced with this new kind of brand management challenge, we have the wrong structures, the wrong skills, the wrong habits. So those who do it themselves, without a traditional process – like the Innocent founders who drew their own logo on a napkin – are often coming up with the best ideas and the best results. What might be needed is a kind of science park for brand ideas, a place where people can develop viable options for both new brands and reanimating old ones, drafting in experts as needed, from multimedia design to privacy law. And it is really hard sometimes to see how we could possibly get from here to there, while so many vested interests and lazy old habits are in force.

Another thing the development process has to recognise is that some of the best ideas are partnership ideas. If you have a strong brand others will bring ideas to you. If you try to think of them all yourself, you will miss ideas like U2/iPod.

The other factors that help are:

- Clear objectives, e.g. "double revenues from brand X in two years".
- Clear parameters, e.g. "must not require major capital investment".
- A totally open remit otherwise, so that any sorts of ideas can be deployed.
- Access to senior decision making throughout (ideally inside the team).
- A shared model of innovation and a lack of preconceived structures that get in the way of this (most traditional brand theory militates against holistic innovation).
- Some exercises, ways of thinking about issues and coming up with ideas that help produce workable brand ideas.
- A free-flowing process of conversation.
- Attitude, team spirit, energy, passion, the ability to endure conflicts.

I don't think that great brand innovation is necessarily the product of exceptionally clever or creative people – although the industry is almost overloaded with talent! I generally find that most people in a *good enough* process are just as capable of being clever and creative. There are people who seem to have had an imagination by-pass, but they can still contribute to a creative conversation (and actually you seldom want a rights lawyer or accountant to have the wacky ideas anyway!). A lot of what is key is having a broad and rich stream of information, and that comes with diverse experts.

I have worked on quite a few innovation projects with IKEA, a company that prides itself on being normal, down to earth, humble, just good at running some shops. Yet it consistently comes up with wild ideas that work. Why? Because it is rather good at putting together a team and holding a free-flowing conversation and challenging "the rules". IKEA also has a habit of helping most agencies it works with (including my old one) win "agency of the year" awards, partly because it is good at talent spotting, partly because it brings out the best in itself and others.

There is one catch. People with different backgrounds and different expertise, with different mental models and ways of working, tend to hate each other. Conflicts in ways of thinking can easily become personal conflicts. Conflicts can be where the best ideas come from, the clashes being also capable of sparking ideas. But you need a working culture that is capable of working through these conflicts.

What can hold teams together is some greater cause, some dominating cult of the personality, some common sense of an external enemy, some passion for the culture of the product. You can always tell when a company is more about “we” than “I”, although there seem to be quite a few ways to get to the same end result. The other factor, which James Palumbo says is his favourite word, is “execution”. There is no such thing as a good idea, there are only *good ideas done well*. It is about being able to deliver a real experience of quality. Ministry of Sound’s Minibar concept will live or die on whether the actual bar/club experience is great, whether we can pull off the innovations.

Using the 32 Cultural Ideas: Reframing

I am going to suggest a very simple way to use this book:

1. Set a strategic framework.
2. Analyse your own brand molecule.
3. Analyse your key competitors’ brand molecules.
4. *Reframe*: try out cultural ideas used in other markets.
5. Develop the ideas into detailed options that could deliver the strategy.

Let’s start by exploring why *reframing* can be a viable approach. Leafing back through the case studies in this book, quite a few are examples of brands that have imported a cultural idea to their category – that is, finding an idea that is quite natural in other categories but has not been used in this one:

- Selfridges’ *Vegas Supernova* is a theme park-style *spectacle* (like Disneyland) applied to a department store.

- IBM's *e-Business* was a management consultancy-style *faith* idea (like McKinsey's *War for Talent*) applied to IT.
- HSBC's January sale brought retail-style *time* branding to financial services discounting; HSBC also adapted the *atlas* role of travel guides and documentaries to its brand campaign about world cultures.
- Zara's core idea was *now* fashion – freshness, like a greengrocer.
- The VW Bug was a remake (like a movie) of a *nostalgia* brand, and you could argue that the iPod was a cover version of the Walkman.
- Häagen-Dazs applied a Cadbury's Flake/Wonderbra *erotic* strategy to ice cream.
- Club 18–30 used tabloid newspaper *scandal* tactics for a packaged tour holiday.
- Pepperami used the *cathartic* themes of horror movies and computer games to popularise a meat sausage snack among teenage boys.
- The Mini is a regressive toy car for adults.
- Accenture used Nike *competition* branding (Tiger Woods) for a consultancy.
- Innocent smoothies are a point for point remake of *hippy* brand Ben & Jerry's ice cream.
- Dove's *Campaign for Real Beauty* and Persil's *It's Not Dirt* are *radical* campaigns in the tradition of IKEA (*Chuck Out Your Chintz*) and Benetton.
- Nike iD does *personalised* mass customisation (dating back to Burger King's *Have It Your Way*) for trainers.

What this list demonstrates is what many creative teams in ad agencies have always known: that adapting the conventions of one market to a new market often brings a fresh, disruptive idea that is also workable. That is because the cultural format is already established: you know what a *clan* should look and feel like (for instance the Harley Owners Group) so you can reapply it point for point to a new situation and audience (e.g. the Saturn Car Club) using many of the same features and activities.

This approach needs to be distinguished from *me too* marketing. Copying a competitor's ideas is counterproductive. When you copy a competitor it makes that company look more established and you look like a pale imitation. But despite this, it does seems to work when you copy an idea from a different category. Why would that be?

- Culture evolves in this way: conventions from one area of life jump to another. It's in the nature of a cultural idea, making new connections from existing contents. There are occasional new ideas too (otherwise we would still be making cave drawings and working with flint tools), but they are relatively rare.
- The process seems to relate to how we categorise markets into distinct "buckets" of ideas. Studies in cognitive science have suggested that these categories are fundamental and influence the way we think. Something that falls into a different bucket but uses the same idea isn't seen as similar, because it is in a different bucket.
- The cultural forms under these 32 headings are the stuff that brands are made of. That view tallies with postmodern theories of culture, that the "surface" or medium is the message. It may be a mistake to look at things in more abstract terms as if they had an underlying essence or meaning. That is why seeing a brand simply as a molecule of such ideas may be better than trying to boil it down to values – and why the notion of underlying trends in culture can be misleading too.
- There may be something innate or archetypal about these cultural forms. We could have an instinctive disposition to react to things in certain ways that are regressive, or exotic or nostalgic.

Not only does importing ideas from other markets seem to work, but it seems to be associated with breakthrough ideas. Perhaps this is because of the combination of ready acceptance (this is already the sort of idea we feel familiar with, respond to) and on the other hand radical novelty (we have never connected it with this realm of life). People had always thought of ice cream as quite childish, until Häagen-Dazs offered a very adult, eroticised interpretation of this food. But we are readily able to respond to foods that offer such pleasures, like chocolate, acting as sex substitutes. And we are readily able to accept and respond to advertising that is provocative and erotic.

This is only one approach to coming up with brand innovations, but I find that this style of thinking is often a good source of ideas that defy market conventions, especially early on in a project, when you are trying to think up some options beyond the obvious.

The best way to demonstrate how to apply the five steps in a practical marketing context is to show how they can work in practice. I will use a hypothetical case study (i.e. one I have made up) to illustrate each stage. This is not offered as realistic, but purely to demonstrate the working method. The ideas I will come up with are starting points, of the sort that are useful early in a project to test what is possible and there would be a lot of further work to be done if you actually wanted to conduct the process for real.

Example: Let's Kill Lynx

1 *Strategic Framework*

Just say you were working in Procter & Gamble's fragrances department. You would probably (given how competitive P&G people are) be very interested in inventing or licensing a brand that could take on Lever Fabergé's Lynx.

The men's deodorant market in the UK is worth about £300 million and 60% of sales are by Unilever brands, with Lynx, the brand leader, having a 20% share. This is a very competitive market, crowded with strong brands. There is little prospect of growing the market; the UK is already one of the heaviest users of deodorants in the world. The question would seem to be not how could we find another way of appealing to men than Lynx (many of those bases are covered – skincare, exertion etc.) but *would it be possible to take over Lynx's position*, in helping young men feel attractive to women?

2 *Our Brand Molecule*

I am assuming a new brand will be launched (or a new brand to the category licensed), so it is for us to create that in stages 4 and 5 in this case.

3 *Competitor Brand Molecule*

Lynx (called Axe in some markets) is the brand leader in men's deodorants. It is targeted at men in their late teens and twenties. It is a brand that has been built on high-quality image advertising from BBH, the agency that is also responsible for Levi's. Like Levi's, the commercials feature boy/girl scenarios, are stylish and often use music.

Another key ingredient of the brand is launching new product variants. These come out once a year or so and provide a platform on which a new cultural idea can be developed.

- Lynx Phoenix sponsored a dance music festival in Ibiza, at the disused San Antonio Zoo – the *Lynx Phoenix Legends* party. The live acts were a virtual *Who's Who?* of dance, including Africa Bambaataa, Grace Jones, Chaka Khan and Leftfield. Tickets to the event were available through on-pack promotions and the event was broadcast on TV, vastly increasing its reach and impact.
- Lynx White Label was a limited-edition variant, packaged in a tin with a hologram.
- Lynx Pulse was used in 2003 to launch a pop hit: Oliver Cheatham's "Make Luv". Unusually, the agency worked with record industry insiders Positiva to select a track before it started work on the commercial. It also used top choreographers to create a dance (loosely styled on 1970s John Travoltaesque disco dancing), which was featured in the ad. Within two weeks of launching the commercial the single had gone to number one in the charts and Lynx Pulse sold twice as well as previous variants.
- Lynx Touch's advertising for its 2004 launch was straightforwardly erotic. It showed a man in a waiting room whose actions magically arouse and undress women: he unzips a bag and a woman's boot unzips, tunes a radio and her nipples become hard, opens a book and a woman's shirt unbuttons itself – he pauses, but the look in her eye tells him to continue . . .
- Lynx 24–7, also launched in 2004, offers 24-hour protection. One of a number of TV commercials for this variant, which won a Gold award

at the 2005 Cannes festival, shows a couple retracing their steps after an amorous encounter, to collect items of clothing strewn since they met in a supermarket.

- Lynx Unlimited's 2005 product launch takes us into the exotic territory of Chinese epic movies, with two characters fighting – an idea of "fighting as flirting" lifted straight from the hit movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. A woman tries to escape a man and he pursues her, both using impossible stylised moves, like running through the air or being upside down under a bridge. His final move is to take off his shirt, releasing the fragrance of Lynx, and she finally floats into his arms. The campaign also included acclaimed online interactive games, like going through an obstacle course, before throwing flowers to the girl from the ad (which replicates the opening scene).

The whole campaign remains true to an idea that is called the *Lynx Effect*. What it says is that women find men who wear Lynx sprays irresistible. The company has been using this idea consistently in advertising for over 10 years. Its latest ads (July 2005) are for the brand, rather than any variant. One shows a boy attracting two female horseriders, who strip off and wrestle in mud that he has sprayed with Lynx – with the message *Spray More to Get More*. There is also a *Lads' Pad* game online, working to the same theme, at www.spraymoregetmore.com.

The latest news is that Hollywood actor Ben Affleck has signed a £1 million contract to be the new face of Lynx, in a new TV campaign to screen in 2006.

No other male brand in the market pursues this "attractiveness" theme, although the Unilever brand Impulse, also advertised by BBH, covers the same ground for women.

The other main brands follow different strategies:

- Sure (for men and women) is about staying dry in extremes of emotion and exertion. It has advertised this message for decades and also sponsors sports teams like the British and Lions rugby team.
- Fashion brands like FCUK, Lambretta and Ted Baker were perhaps the most direct threat to Lynx, although none has done much more

than produce products under licence and most have performed disappointingly.

- There are premium ranges of toiletries for men, like Calvin Klein and Clinique.
- Nivea and Gillette offer deodorants as part of a skincare and grooming range.
- Adidas and others have tried (with mixed success) to establish a sports brand.

Lynx is by far the strongest brand with the most interesting marketing. The key strength of Lynx is that it is the undisputed leading brand in its category – what everyone uses, not a risk (men worry about this sort of decision). As with Hoover vs Dyson, perhaps creating a different category through product innovation could hold the key to an effective (and cost-effective) attack.

There are three potentially vulnerable-looking elements in the Lynx defences and all relate to this brand working to a classic image-advertising model:

1. The product is pretty basic, smells quite pungent, is arguably quite unlikely to deliver its promise of being attractive to most women. It is typical of young men going out "on the pull" that they overdress, use too much aftershave and/or deodorant and then do corny things like trying to employ chat-up lines. Not only that, but there is nothing other than the basic scent to substantiate this claim. There is no component analogous to pheromones (of 1970s *Stud* spray fame) that does what the ads portray.
2. The entire edifice is built on image advertising. We could take heart from the decline of brands like *Stella Artois* and *Levi's*, which have proved vulnerable to brands with more authentic quality and media platforms. Just being a TV advertiser makes the brand suspect, I would argue, as people know they may be "paying for the image".
3. The experience of buying this product is very *grocery* and completely belies the fantasy imagery in the adverts. The packaging is pretty boring,

especially seen on huge displays among the shavers, shampoos and creams. The situation is no better in Boots and Superdrug, which are the other main outlets. You have to wonder if a distribution idea – for instance vending machines – might help by taking the product out of the supermarket and into more interesting parts of people's lives. That approach worked wonders for ice cream (Häagen-Dazs and Mars have their own fridges). It could be that a Red Bull-style alternative distribution approach, in the launch years, could be the basis for a more authentic and interesting brand. It would protect your margins from the sharp teeth of the buyers at Tesco. And it could also situate you closer to people's social lives.

These three prongs give us something to work from:

- A product that actually is attractive to women and sufficiently different almost to be a new category.
- An alternative media plan to fake image advertising that delivers greater authenticity, interaction, experience, buzz, community involvement and so on – a Diesel to their Levi's; a Red Bull to their Coke.
- Alternative channels, e.g. vending machines, in more relevant venues.

Overall, I would say that the key brand opportunity is to *do* what Lynx only *claims* (and does not deliver): to make single young men more successful in attracting girls. If we succeeded, it would be seen in retrospect that Lynx was a fake – it was all advertising and no trousers!

Figure III.1 is the Lynx brand molecule, pulling together the key strands from the last five years.

Our objective in this hypothetical case study is to usurp the promise that Lynx makes to young men.

The Lynx campaign is executed to a high creative standard and has been established over 10 years. It would be futile to apply the same sorts of ideas in the same sorts of media. We won't find a bigger star than Ben Affleck, more stylish, entertaining and erotic advertising, a better music tie-up than the dance hit of the year in 2003. We would be seen as trying to copy Lynx,

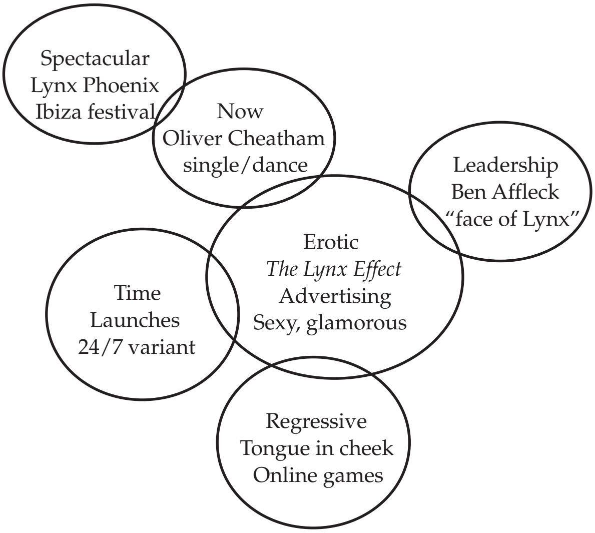

Spectacular
Lynx Phoenix
Ibiza festival
Now
Oliver Cheatham
single/dance
Leadership
Ben Affleck
"face of Lynx"
Erotic
The Lynx Effect
Advertising
Sexy, glamorous
Time
Launches
24/7 variant
Regressive
Tongue in cheek
Online games

Figure III.1 The Lynx molecule

even if we did a good job – and there are no cases that I know of, where *me too* marketing has resulted in gaining brand share from a strong brand that does its core marketing activities well.

If Lynx had rubbish advertising with naff music and so on, that might be the going-in point. But Lynx is very good at all these. It would be wasteful for an existing brand to follow the same course, suicidal for a launch. Lynx is spending £15 million a year on TV advertising, print, online and sampling new variants. It has the volumes to justify these marketing spends, but trying to outspend it on a new product over three years or so (the time it would take to stand a chance of taking Lynx out) would make the financial case on our side look very weak, even if we had dramatically better margins.

We want to take over the role that Lynx claims in young single men's lives, but we do not have to follow the same ideas. I have already suggested that a key weakness is that Lynx is all image and no trousers – it lacks any authentic claim to make men more attractive and it has the fakeness and low cultural status that come with being advertised on TV (anything really special generally does not advertise on TV).

4 *Try Out Ideas from Other Markets*

Lynx has used 6 of our 32 cultural idea headings. Let's see what we can invent by roaming through some of the other 26. When I was working on this I did go through all the headings, but most of them turned up blanks. That would usually be the case: many sorts of ideas won't have a relevant connection with the market in question. But some do.

Faith: examples Nurofen, McKinsey, Atkins Diet

P&G's forte is developing product inventions that deliver real benefits. It seems more than possible that some formulation within fragrances or deodorants could make the wearer of this product smell more attractive to women.

An academic study in 1998[4] demonstrated that women's selections of which sweat (on t-shirts, from male subjects) was more attractive correlated strongly with their visual selections of which men were more facially attractive. The linking factor is thought to be *fluctuating asymmetry* (how symmetrical the left and right body features are), also known to correlate with fitness, fertility, IQ, responses to stress and all-round better genes. If you look good (which means you have good genes), apparently you smell good too. The research also quotes qualitative sources where women have claimed that the smell of potential partners is the single most important factor in mate choice.

The research was statistical and no attempt was made to isolate the actual pheromone that communicates this information, but presumably one must exist and it would be possible to either include it, mimic it or block its uglier variants. As researchers into this area at the University of St Andrews comment in a paper to the Royal Society:

> It is telling that the perfume and deodorant industry attempt to mask or modify the odour of naturally occurring pheromones, yet these compounds provide important information which apparently affect partnership judgments in the same way as facial appearance.[5]

Of course, if a body spray or scent really did make men more attractive it would be a *huge* breakthrough – another Viagra-level blockbuster. That couldn't be ruled out. But as the researchers from St Andrews warn:

> I would not advise men to rush out and buy commercial pheromones to find that perfect partner. Most people find the odour repellent. It isn't that women find men who reek of pheromones more attractive, it is only that individual women who happen to find the male odour more pleasant also tend toward preferring more masculine facial characteristics. In the end, finding the right partner is a lot more complicated than just how we look or how we smell.[6]

Buzz: examples iPod, Gmail, Universal's viral marketing to head girls

Whatever the actual role of scent in mate selection, most women I know do not like cheap, blokey aftershaves, which is a reasonable description of what Lynx smells like, especially when its wearers have applied it heavily. I did a survey in the office at Ministry of Sound and only one girl (out of over 50) said she liked the smell of Lynx. It appears that the Lynx Effect may be more like wrinkled noses than unbuttoning blouses!

What could be more influential for young men than finding out that women preferred another brand than Lynx? There would be various ways of executing this, but a classic version would be the *eight out of ten cats prefer it* strategy used by Whiskas for many years (before it was forced by the Advertising Standards Authority to change it to *eight out of ten owners who expressed a preference said their cats preferred it*).

The R&D challenge couldn't be more clear. Come up with a range of scents that a decent proportion, let's say seven out of ten young women (who express a preference), say they prefer. Do whatever it takes, including using less "masculine" smells – Lynx uses base notes like musk and leather, which are probably pandering much more to male tastes than to the women they are supposed to be attracting.

Lynx has made a great play (in various case studies and awards papers) of how it had to do entertaining ads because it's the only way to get young men's attention. Actually that would only be true in the absence of anything substantial to say. A scent that could demonstrate that women preferred it would be hot news.

What would make the message even more persuasive is if we could use buzz marketing (of the P&G Tremor variety) where young women tell lots of young men that their favourite scent is our new brand. We could design scratch-and-sniff Valentine's cards, samplers that are gifts for girls to give to boys they fancy, and so on.

Social Brands: examples Friends Reunited, Habbo Hotel, dating sites

Young men's objectives could be summarised (on average) as meeting, chatting up and having sex with as many attractive girls as possible. Why not create a community where boys can meet more girls – a dating site?

There are a lot of dating sites out there, but most – like Match.com – seem to target those in their thirties who write those personal ads about "long country walks" and "good sense of humour". The sites that are a little younger and brasher, like Face Party, are so full on (with adult content, ads by prostitutes etc.) that they are pretty sleazy and tend to attract many more 14-year-old boys (or voyeurs of any age) than nubile young women. What is needed is a dating service for young, cool, sociable people.

The ideal service would attract both men and women, would work through mobile phones (using picture and video) and would be fun and entertaining. One way would be to have not only potential couples swapping messages, but an audience who would rate their chat-up lines, their chances, the best of three options and so on – like the TV show *Blind Date* for phones.

Appreciation Brands: examples Nespresso, Johnnie Walker, Oddbins

The dating club could be run as a CRM service, which would ideally be rooted in a product offering, like the Nespresso machine. Why not produce a spray dispenser that is super-cool in look (Philippe Starck could design it) and then sell refills, with a huge variety/rotation of new fragrances. After all, the refill model already works well for Gillette razors with disposable blades, it is not just for yuppie coffee appliances. It could all be done by mail order after the initial spray had been sold. This would revolutionise the business model for fragrances and also lends itself to several other innovations, as alternatives (or complementary ideas) to the dating club concept.

One possibility is to teach men to be better at flirting and seducing women. This would be an added-value service, delivered by text message bulletin. And it would be very valuable, because most men actually do not have a clue. The Social Issues Research Centre has published a very helpful guide to some of the key findings from academic research in this area. Here is just one of its numerous helpful findings:

> When the subject of flirting comes up, most people seem to be obsessed with the issue of "opening lines" or "chat-up lines". Men talk about lines that work and lines that have failed; women laugh about men's use of hackneyed or awkward opening lines, and all of us, whether we admit it or not, would like to find the perfect, original, creative way to strike up a conversation with someone we find attractive.
>
> The answer, perhaps surprisingly, is that your opening line is really not very important, and all this striving for originality and wit is a wasted effort. The fact is that conversational "openers" are rarely original, witty or elegant, and no-one expects them to be so. The best "openers" are, quite simply, those which can easily be recognised as "openers" – as attempts to start a conversation.
>
> The traditional British comment on the weather ("Nice day, isn't it?" or "Doesn't feel much like summer, eh?", etc.) will do just fine, as everyone knows that it is a conversation-starter. If you are indoors – say at a party or in a bar – and nowhere near a window, some equally innocuous general comment on your surroundings ("Bit crowded, isn't it?", "Not very lively here tonight, eh?") or on the food, drink, music, etc., will serve much the same purpose.[7]

Grading: examples eBay, Economist, Money Supermarket

Another educational route – which would blow Lynx out of the water, for cultural impact – would be sex technique coaching. The thing about this sort of knowledge is it would increase confidence, a sense of one-upmanship, which is precisely what young men of the sort who would spray themselves with Lynx generally lack. It would also be the kind of information that men would love sharing with each other. I met a leading sex therapist (about a potential business opportunity, I hasten to add!) and he told me he had a directory of over 400 tips that can qualitatively improve people's sex lives. Most young people are operating "in the dark".

Personalised Brands: examples ringtones, Nike iD, Starbucks

Another possibility if you could get into a Nespresso-style refill system is matching scents to mood, occasion, personality. As with the Clinique skin system, there might be some general guidance about what would suit what type of user.

The ultimate version might be that you could even design scents that were unique to you. Bespoke scents are a luxury idea, but it might be possible to automate the process, along Dulux colour-mixing lines.

Given the desired positioning (of being attractive), perhaps you could design a scent that was scientifically proven (i.e. researched with subjects) to attract certain types? If you like very girly girls (i.e. with more stereotypically feminine features) then perhaps they might be found to prefer a different scent than if you go more for slightly butch, androgynous types. The whole process of discovering your type might itself be fascinating and would make for an interesting website where you had to rate lots of women's faces and bodies for attractiveness. Sites offering that sort of functionality (e.g. HotOrNot) have tended to be hits, checking out and rating women being an obvious draw.

5 *Develop Concrete Proposals*

Those are just a few starting points, from some of the more obviously relevant areas. There would probably be opportunities within others like nostalgia, if you broadened the search to include licensed brands. The next step would be to work up each in detail – the business model, market sizing, product, packaging and channel considerations – as well as testing some creative prototypes in qualitative groups.

My feeling is that there is enough here to indicate that taking on Lynx might just work. And it is one of the stronger (image) brands you could meet in a dark alley. One thing that can be very revealing of the strengths and weaknesses of your own brand is to do this exercise as if you were a competitor, planning such an attack.

As an aid to readers trying out this sort of exercise on their own brands and challenges I am planning to produce interactive tools. One will be a "brand tarot" deck, which you will be able to order so that you can play with the 32 brand ideas and have something fun to use in workshops. Check www.brandtarot.com for details or if you would like to contact me to ask any questions.

Logical Conclusions

> As the poet said, "only God can make a tree" – probably because it's so hard to figure out how to get the bark on. (Woody Allen)

It is difficult to come up with new cultural ideas that feel authentic and work; it is often easier to adapt an idea that already works (like one of the 32 types in this book) than to start with a blank sheet of paper.

I have described brands as *clusters of strategic cultural ideas*. This implies that brand strategy should be fluid, creative, entrepreneurial; like a molecule that is always adding new ideas to keep the brand current, fresh and fascinating. If you analyse things into grids and neat boxes, then you are probably heading for a deeply conventional and hence uncompetitive programme. You need to go with the flow.

The other vital component is a sense of focus and direction. Brand building is supposed to have a point, and your molecule should be more than just a ragbag of ideas; they should all be in the service of an overriding cultural (and commercial) logic.

As an industry, we have allowed our creativity, and our strategising for that matter, to become imprisoned in a bureaucratic structure designed to deliver ideas within certain timescales and to tick certain boxes ("we have the TV ad, now let's do through-the-line materials based on it"). The very notion of a "creative department" suggests that the other 95% of people working in marketing are not supposed to be creative!

The challenge ahead is changing this structure and the arrangements that keep dragging marketing back to the old formulae and media plans. I met a senior corporate executive recently and he asked me why his company's advertising couldn't be more like Dove's *Campaign for Real Beauty*. The answer was that the company had briefed its ad agency, which had come back with a TV advertising idea, not a brand idea.

Most people I talk to about this recognise that marketing has to change its process and organisation. Personally, I decided about ten years ago (at a time when I was one of the people running an ad agency called St Luke's) that it was not my challenge; that I would rather work on the ideas than the management issues. The largest thing I run these days is a bath! And I am happy to keep things that way. So I have to hand the challenge of reforming the structures that are holding marketing back over to you, dear reader.

And best of luck!

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