

CHANNEL UNO 10 AUTUMN

VANILLA BRANDS



Any brand you like
as long as its Vanilla

A while back, quite a while in fact, when I was a teen and looking to both be part of the cool-ish set in school, with what accounted for fashion back then, rolling up the sleeves on my blazer and reversing my tie so that it was a narrow band with the wide portion hidden inside my shirt. You'll be glad I'm not adding any images as the one you're mentally painting is probably bad enough. This creation, with a few distinctive touches, put me as part of the trendy group, but I also added a few touches, which were a little more rock and roll so I could be part of the crowd but also outside of less imaginative Duran Duran clones. Okay, so you're now thinking that was 'a very long while ago'.

A similar, although hopefully less painful story has been re-enacted at every school across the land, where teens are looking to discover who they are and reflect that in the fashions they wear, signalling to those in the know their values and tastes and to bemused parents that they definitely aren't in the know. [Q](#)

The conflict between these competing needs of wanting to be part of the tribe but also want to broadcast our individuality has always been part of what makes us human. The fashion brands are well versed in navigating these apparently contradictory needs and have intertwined their brand personalities with these sub groups and are constantly testing the water to ensure they maintain their relevance.

Brand relevancy within the street fashion category is one of ongoing change for product lines and evolving the brand message through advertising, retail communications and nurturing and sup-

porting the 'right' group of influencers (such as Vans sponsorship of skateboard and bmx professionals and competitions). The Vans product is not unique but by bonding the brand to street sports makes it far edgier and therefore more relevant and definable as a brand. Vans sponsorship, like Ripcurl and Quiksilver, reaches out beyond the main users, such as the skateboarders and bmx kids, but also supports punk rock music festivals, such as the 'Warped Tour'.

The tension between being a commercially successful company, being part of the establishment, and the need to be viewed by their street

savvy users as not having 'sold out' is a careful balancing act, but one where the focus has to be on the consumers rather than the bankers expectations, getting this wrong will lose the consumer and also the banks.

Schizo Brands

This duality that exists in people is also present in many successful brands and here I don't think I'm being too controversial by saying that brands are only those that possess individuality and personality, without these a product is just the sum of its parts and not a brand, and as such can be easily imitated. Recently we have had a mass 



of blonde beers appear, these low carb 'sports beers' have had a great deal of success in fighting back against the trend towards imported beers. So successful have these beers been that they have in fact created a 'Blonde' sub-category within the beer market. Blonde beer is nothing new, 'Beer Blond' is a style of beer produced in Belgium with its opposite being called, in typical no nonsense Belgian, 'Beer Bruin'. The low carb marketing probably wouldn't stand up so well in the land of chocolate, mussels and chain smoking.

The latest additions to this category is Maxx Blonde, and so we have another Blonde which works to the same model as the rest by having a superlative followed by Blonde, so we can no doubt look forward to 'Ultra Blonde' or perhaps you'll be ordering up a bevy of 'Platinum Blondes', or savouring the authentic and unaltered taste of 'Natural Blonde' in their not so distinctive bottle with their strangely familiar label design, proudly boasting the standard low carb but pure taste qualities. 



BREWED LONGER FOR MAXX FLAVOUR AND FUN

MAXX BLONDE - PREMIUM LAGER

When it comes to clean pristine water, wicked snow-capped mountains and extreme wilderness, nothing compares to New Zealand. It's natural to the Maxx. That's why we chose to brew Maxx Blonde there. It's brewed 1/3 longer than regular beers which gives you a guilt-free, low carb lager hit with a crisp, refreshing taste.

There's nothing more gratifying than Maxxing out on life with a Maxx Blonde. Available exclusively at 1st Choice Liquor, LiquorLand and Vintage Cellar stores. Use our handy store locator to find your nearest stockist and grab a slab today!



Un-natural blonde - faked up beer made from 100% pure design



THERE'S BLONDE AND THERE'S PLATINUM BLONDE

KEEPING IT REAL!

AVAILABLE AT NO LEADING OUTLETS, check our fictitious website www.ruforreal.com.au for your nearest stockist and if you find one let us know, as we'll want to invoice somebody





Maxx Blonde does stand out in one very interesting way from the herd of other Blonde beers, in that it has been created by Coles, that's right a supermarket chain with as much brewing know how as my Gran, which despite appearances isn't much. I mentioned earlier that to me this isn't a brand, but as it mirrors all the attributes of the actual brewery made products that in itself poses a quite troubling question; if Maxx Blonde isn't a brand then can other brewery created Blonde beers claim they are?

Instant Brand Mix

Beer is typically a very providence based product, with a direct link to a region or country. Budweiser flies the US flag in its colour and design, Carlsberg makes a point of its Danish design purity, whereas Corona's design reflects the painted signs on Mexican cantina's with a slightly imperfect and naive style. The range of Blonde products have not pinned their national or regional colours to the mast, which was most certainly a definite decision from the brewers and one which we have watched with interest. The upside of this is that it may create fewer barriers to sale, at least nationalistic barriers or ones where a national stereotype could have an adverse effect on the buying decisions.



Unflinchingly American except for the German name!

The decision to create a beer that has no lineage or roots may be strategically sound but which part of the beers personality then makes it relevant to the consumer, given that this language of origin is so deeply ingrained within the beer category?

Blonde beers, as they are currently produced, are essentially designed to be the vanilla of beer, they are inoffensive, easy drinking beers, with no major side issues. The low carb benefit opens the beer to diet conscious drinkers, including but not directed specifically towards female drinkers. The vanilla option makes sense from a number of angles but mostly because when people don't know what to buy, or can't get what they want or are buying to share then Vanilla is the go to flavour. 

This does leave it wide open to cloning, and the Coles version is a wonderfully executed example of how easy it is for supermarkets, who basically have no specific product heritage as, let's not forget they are they are essentially large multi-category retailers, to roll out a 'phantom' brand to compete with the breweries.

Should manufacturers or producers be worried by Coles behaviour? Quite simply yes, but it has been on the cards for a while and has been done before, albeit under the banner of own label products. Supermarkets are very aware of their shortcomings or their 'jack of all trades' approach which leaves a credibility gap in terms of conveying

Dan Murphy's is an excellent example of a retail drinks chain that has successfully married mass with expertise.

Their 'Gentleman's Agreement' wines partner with well regarded growers to essentially create a premium own-label product. Is this good news for growers? It's hard to imagine that giving a retailer added credibility and recognition, allowing them to move into the premium sector, can be viewed with any long term optimism.



DAN MURPHY'S CHANNEL

product heritage. When companies with leading brands devalue their brand equity through tactics such as buying sales by too frequent discounting then they are preparing the soil for the supermarkets to plant their lines. As much as this may sound like a diatribe against the big

two, I am not anti-supermarkets, they are not the anti-Christ, but they do have their own agenda's and their own shareholders and face competition from other supermarkets and specialist retailers. They are a major feature of the retail landscape and their share of the retail dollar is going to grow. Understanding how to work with them for mutual long term success is not straightforward, each decision has to be considered for its long term consequences. Many suppliers have been forced down the path to contract manufacturing, with all the experience and knowledge gained from many hard years, along with all the resulting brand heritage, dissolved in the drive for additional and often short term volume increases.

The introduction of Maxx Blonde may not cause too many raised eyebrows in the boardrooms of Australia's breweries but what is more worrying is that the high frequency of promotion cycles within the beer and wine category is creating an opportunity for Coles to do the same in the branded beer market, an area that they already know from their own exclusive importing of labels such

as Hollandia, Cantina Cerveza, Bavaria, Konig Pilsner amongst others. It also goes without saying that Woolies will be watching the performance of Maxx Blonde and analysing the size of the opportunity for themselves.

The creation of a vanilla retail market is not in the interests of brand owners or supermarkets, as consumers with the financial mobility to shop elsewhere will do so. As a result supermarkets will continue to be open to brands that add colour and personality to their stores. An honest understanding of a brands **vanilla'esque** component and whether this is increasing or decreasing is an early indicator of whether action is required.

The effect of increasing own label presence is an erosive one and brands cannot stand still or they will find rapidly find themselves on the crumbling edge of obscurity. There's no magic bullet to fend off this encroachment except to continually reinforce the brands personality and make it a fully resolved and individual product, hopefully without a dodgy Duran Duran mullet!

**KEEPING YOU
IN THE KNOW**



Vanilla Ice - a warning to us all that brands do better with personality. Ice ice baby!

