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trends and other interesting things from around the world

BODLY

Not wanting to kick off any theological debate or elevate consumerism to an omnipotent level, although!? What we're talking about is the much quoted magic ingredient that lifts a product out of the everyday and positions it amongst the heroes.

The list of these heroes is a short and exclusive one. The names you've all heard before and in some cases you might say that they have become iconic through time or through a massive amount of promotional activity and

or advertising. The likes of 'Coca Cola' with their brand anchor still echoing the heritage of a never was USA, or perhaps 'Vegemite' who's name goes forth from these shores as a cultural ambassador of all that's wholesome about Australia.

These days the heroes are less likely to be the offspring of the corporate giants. The very nature of large companies and the devolvement of personal responsibility to faceless committees has removed the human connection. Perhaps it's not surprising then that more and more people are feeling an emotional disconnect with these companies. There is an ever increasing desire or deeper need to 'feel' a human connection, one that does more than just fulfil a rational requirement but that mentally and physically satisfies. Grey Worldwide commented



on this malaise in their annual review of the national psyche to state that, "Australians are living in an era of self-responsibility, feel abandoned by Government and big business, are anxious and stressed and seek comfort from purchases which reflect quality, soul, trust and innovation and provide a sense of affluent well-being".

Some, regardless of whether they are titled the X, Y or Z generation, have all felt the natural human desire to connect. Therefore the cult of personality and the support of personality for product or brand has become an ever more powerful tool in speaking to consumers who still feel that there must be a balance to the time poor equation. In looking for a solution we turn to the products which, glorified by advertising and endorsed by celebrity appear to offer some relief to the

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pressure of everyday life. These products, which set themselves up as solutions also put themselves up for intense scrutiny. The Information Age and easy access to the web has allowed consumers to probe deeply into a products lineage and values. 'Blog' sites and consumer specific forums can create grass root campaigns to shout out about the deficiencies in a product or a brand. With such informed consumers it's no longer easy or perhaps wise to develop brands with only a thin veneer of personality.

I'm not buying, I'm shopping!

Marc Gobé, partner of D/G* Worldwide, one of our associates, refers to the difference between buying and shopping in his book titled 'Emotional Branding'. "Buying takes place every day across the globe, but the Emotional Economy heralds a much more rewarding and engaging activity - shopping. Buying is an activity understood by economists. Shopping is a phenomenon of interest to anthropologists and sociologists... (which) provides

opportunities for dreaming and playing - it's an escape and, ultimately, an art." He also went on to say that "Vendors who create an atmosphere conducive to shopping give their customers a good reason to leave their homes and, in turn, create opportunities to buy."

A key challenge that we face in our retail design work is in creating areas that allow people to drop out of their rational buying mode into a browse mode, one where they're the silent partner, the audience, the shopper.

Commodity Traders v's Experience Makers

Consider the differences between department stores and supermarkets. The best department stores create as the name suggests areas that allow categories or brands to stand apart and allow people to change modes depending on the area they are entering. It's almost a cliché that people feel that supermarket shopping is a chore performed against the clock. Hard to imagine that much 'shopping' goes on within a supermarket. Yet, the opportunity is there to create 'browsing zones' within this arena. 'Whole Foods', an organic supermarket chain in the US has challenged the prescribed thinking on store layout by creating department store zones, each of which has a distinct feel and style. This is largely derived from the cultural icons associated with the product. As an exercise in semiotics, it's a little on the blunt side, but it's also clear that it's meant to entertain and offer along with the organic products a 'different view' of what grocery shopping can offer. In many ways I believe

it to be a little too 'Disney' like in its approach to be successfully lifted wholesale to these shores but it does challenge the traditional trolley meander approach.

No Passion, no purpose

Tim Pethick, the much vaunted creator of 'Nudie', through developing the cheeky and successful lifestyle brand, tapped a need for honest, personable products. His own passion and belief is there in the product and shouts out from the simple packaging and its greeting card style graphics. He has also used quirky little vans and been strong on forming and maintaining a relationship with the customer. This pushing of the brand has led to Nudie being voted 10th, just behind Qantas in a recent poll by 'Brand-channel' the on-line brand magazine. It's perhaps even more surprising when you consider that Nudie doesn't follow the more typical advertising stratagems and relies on a more gorilla-like and grassroots approach.

A number of these elements were also true of the highly successful surfwear companies. Who are now working hard to keep in touch with the culture and lifestyle that created them. Reflecting the passion for their lifestyle in their products was a crucial part of what made them successful. Once they stood as the antithesis of corporate business, but now they've grown and become International brands with all the incumbent trappings of shareholders, stockmarket analysts and supply chain issues, they've gradually become less and less distinct from their corporate alter ego's.



The passion that often starts companies is by itself not a guarantee of success but it is the ingredient that gives resonance to the product and helps to differentiate it from purely commodity driven offerings.

The attraction of passion

Jo Malone, the London based perfumier, was a company fuelled by passion. Her products were all intensely personal and were creations of her own emotions and the emotions that she wanted the fragrance to convey.

The subtlety of fragrance is in marked contrast to its impact. Our most deep rooted experiences can be re-awakened by a certain scent or aroma. It was Jo's passion and individuality which subsequently drove

Estée Lauder to purchase the company. Upon meeting Jo, Leonard A. Lauder remarked on "her spark, her style, her ambition, the light in her eyes, the lilt to her head - everything. There was a drive to succeed, to do well, to have great products, that I had not seen for a long time, and I was enchanted." Perfume is not alone in touching the senses. Any company that is truly passionate about its product can add that 'magic ingredient' to its own particular mix. To go back to an earlier point on the Nudie brand, it is the on-going communication of the 'passionate brand' and its relevance to the consumer that their commitment to maintaining this relationship make it a living thing in the minds of the converted.

This is our channel for airing opinions; a few of ours, our International Design Partnership friends and if you've got some, yours. Our aim is to start a few fires, kick a few tired ideas into shape and stir up a healthy debate on what we see around us.

If you want to join in the debate or introduce a friend to the channel then you can mail us at the newsdesk@uno.net.au



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