

Smash Your Brand

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Let's face it – traditional advertising no longer works. An article in the Times, published in June 2004, reveals that the overall effective influence of television commercials has decreased by some 52% over just ten years. In stark contrast, the cost of producing television commercials has increased by more than 130% over the same period. This is a clear indication that the traditional paths of brand building are slowly drying up, forcing marketers to think of alternatives.

An invention from the early days of the twentieth century might just provide the answer.

In 1915 a designer from the Root Glass Company of Terre Haute, Indiana was asked to design a glass bottle. The brief was pretty straightforward. They wanted a bottle that even when broken, the pieces would still be recognizable as part of the whole. The designer succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. He designed the classic Coke bottle, which has gone on to become one of the most famous glass icons ever. The bottle is still in service, it's still recognizable, and has been passing the smash test for every new generation over the last 80 years.

The Coke bottle story is fascinating from a brand-building perspective. In theory, all brands should be able to pass this test. So, working on this principle, if you removed the logo from your brand, would it still be recognizable? In fact, it would be

worthwhile to know, because to place too great an emphasis on a brand's logo carries risks. Least of all there is a danger of neglecting all the other potential brand-building opportunities. If paid due attention, many other aspects of the product become recognizable in their own right. Color, navigation, texture, sound and shape. Even blindfolded, you'd know you're holding a classic Coke bottle. Would advertising copy enhance it? Will the colors, graphics, images or even packaging design individually pass the smash test?

It's time to kill your logo

Silk Cut a British cigarette discovered the importance of having a smashable brand back in the 1990s when cigarette advertising was banned in the UK. Some brands proceeded using the image of a cowboy, others created clothing lines, and Silk Cut designed the characteristic purple silk to represent their exclusive cigarette brand. Over time the purple silk became a symbol plastered over all racing cars in Europe. Did it work? The numbers tell the story. On the very day cigarette branding was banned in the UK, less than half a per cent of all consumers noticed that the logo had been removed, and all that remained were the smashable brand components.

Smashing your brand requires attention to every detail beyond the logo. It covers every signal, every tone, touch or shape of your product, merchandising and even wrapping. Owning a smashable color can create emotional bonds. Studies show that the well known Tiffany's robin's-egg blue box can cause women's heartbeats to increase by 20 percent compared to an ordinary colourful box. Today the robin's egg blue has its own exclusive Pantone number, a patent of Tiffany & Co., and only available to print office approved by Tiffany's and Pantone.

Tiffany's robin's-egg blue box, Louis Vuitton's brown leather bag, and Gucci's stylish-yet-chic wrapping all can be found on offer at eBay for prices that may shock you. And they're selling nothing but the packaging.

But color isn't the only thing which can create a truly smashable brand, photographs – if done right – can perform the same trick. Just think about the photographs used to promote the United Colors of Benetton. The distinct pictorial style forms the foundation of the brand's image, and works in together with the product marketing. Every Benetton photograph is smashable – and can be recognized as such without the logo. You could in fact even crop the image and you'd still be pretty sure it's from a Benetton picture. However not many brands have achieved this yet. Take the test. A quick visit to your own site and you'll realize that you probably don't pass the picture test. And, as we all know, a good picture is worth more than a thousand words. Every component of your brand can be smashed, not only the color or picture style but your language, icons, rituals well even the brand name you represent.

When the Porsche 911 was introduced in Frankfurt in 1963 the model was called 901. The brochures were printed, the marketing material was all in place but everything had to be urgently changed. Much to Porsche's dismay, they discovered that Peugeot owned the rights to all three-digit model numbers of any combination with a zero in the middle, and this was non-negotiable. Fortunately only 13 models got through the production line with the 901 insignia, thereafter it became known as the 911.

Peugeot has held the numeric name rights for cars since 1963. The middle zero gives them a distinction that automatically identifies their models as Peugeot – even if you're not able to conjure up a mental picture of a 204, or a 504.

A similar strategy has been adopted by Absolut vodka. They deliberately misspell their brand extensions, using English words inspired by Swedish grammar – Absolut Vanilia, Mandrin, Peppar or Kurant.

McDonald's uses the Mac in their name to every possible advantage. Their world is awash with Big Macs, McNuggets, McMuffins and even McSundays. If you happen to receive an email from the cooperation you'll be greeted with the words: "Have a MACnificent Day". McDonald's naming philosophy is an essential part of their brand. This has resulted in many a court case like the one in Denmark. In 1995 McDonald's took Allan Bjerrum Pedersen to court for appropriating their name. He ran a small hot dog stand named McAllan. They failed to succeed in this one. The claim against Pedersen was dismissed, and McDonald's were held liable for all the costs incurred.

Mac-ization of the language was formally recognized when Merriam-Webster added McJob to their collegiate dictionary, defining it as a low-paying job that requires little skill and provides not much opportunity for advancement.

The idea of smashing your brand is simple. It's all about identifying the components you want to be famous for and leverage the fact that the logo is only a very small component of your overall brand visibility. Consider what your brand should be well known for in five years time from today and then consistently begin to build up the

association with your signals. But be consistent and be persistent. Changing strategy half-way can be dangerous. Statistics from my forthcoming book *BRAND sense* (February 2005) shows that a range of brands are failing the task. For example, Coca-Cola no longer owns red – Vodafone is claiming it. IBM is no longer associated with Big Blue – Pepsi has taken over. Why? Because these companies had taken their ownership of these essential colors for granted. Even if this means that you can find the Coca-Cola logo in a blue, green and orange versions in the UK.

Smashing your brand is in fact all about keeping focus on everything beyond the logo, because a good 90 percent of the real estate on your product or service should also be branded. When every other aspect of your product is branded, you have a truly smashable brand.

Martin Lindstrom is recognized as one of the world's primary branding gurus by The Chartered Institute of Marketing. He's next book *BRAND sense* – can be pre-ordered at Amazon. Lindstrom is the author of several best-selling branding books including *BRANDchild* with Patricia B. Seybold (Customer.com), *Clicks, Bricks & Brands* with Don Peppers & Martha Rogers (1to1 Marketing) and *Brand Building on the Internet*. He's an advisor to Fortune 100 brands including Microsoft, Reuters, Pepsi, Yellow Pages, Nokia, Disney and Mars. More information on *BRAND sense* can be found at BRANDsense.com or MartinLindstrom.com

