

Brand Personality

Sensitive management of a brand's archetypal image is critical to the well being of a brand and key to reversing the tide of ebbing brand loyalty.

Cognitive scientists say all our store of personal knowledge is ultimately traceable to brain-mediated models of the self, and of the self in relationship to other things. We use these models as metaphors to help us understand what exists independently of us. Consciousness then, is a sensation of the self.

To illustrate, images represented by the words *up* and *down* draw from our earliest spatial experiences. As infants, help comes to us mostly from *above*—mother reaching down to feed us, play with us, and to take us out of our cribs into her arms. These early life experiences become metaphors that contribute to a more positive bias to the concept of *up* than the concept of *down*. When we are happy, we are *up*. When we are sad, we are *down*. When sales are strong, they are *up*. When sales are weak, they are *down*. We place God *up* in the heavens, and the Devil *down* in Hell. Thus, cognitive scientists propose that *immaterial* thought in our minds is linked to the *material* substance of our bodies.

We have had uneasiness about the relationship between mind and body ever since Rene Descartes put them asunder in formulating modern scientific methodology. In Descartes' schemata, pure mind had no connection with the body. Mind was a misty realm with no temporal foundation, and came to be widely known in philosophy as the "ghost in the machine." It had no corporeal substance. Descartes argued that only when the mind operates independently of emotions can mental output be trusted. So, he separated body from mind, emotion from reason. Reason was *raised up* in human affairs, while emotion was *put down*.

Descartes' Error

In his book, *Descartes' Error*, Antonio Damasio reports intriguing results from over two decades of research into the operations of reason and emotion that have major implications for both customer research and marketing practice. Damasio, who heads up (not *down*) the neurology department at the University of Iowa, studies patients who are rather like *Star Trek's* Mr. Spock. Brain trauma has robbed them of their emotional capacities while leaving reasoning abilities fully intact. Despite normal comprehension, memory acuity and reasoning abilities, Damasio's patients have a hard time making decisions about matters in which they have a stake in the outcome. Their brains cannot form models of self and the relationship of self to the world beyond their bodies. They cannot cognitively connect themselves with others. Their lack of emotionality deprives them of a connectable self.

Marketers should not be surprised that Damasio's patients cannot form relationships with brands. Most seasoned marketers already know that customers' relationships with brands have emotional underpinnings. Customer relationships with brands are never based on reason, yet few organizations strive to understand the emotional dynamics of their customers' relationships with their brands.

Carl Jung's Ideas Gain Credibility

For many decades, the ideas of Swiss psychologist Carl Jung were out at the edges of mainstream behavioral science. His most influential contribution to the study of behavior was probably his construct of basic

personality types that became the foundation of the widely used Meyers-Briggs personality assessment. But relatively few behaviorists gave serious attention to Jung's idea that people come into the world bearing *archetypes*.

Archetypes are not pictures and sounds or other sensory images stored in brain cells like a song stored on tape or undeveloped film stored in a camera. In Damasio's terms, archetypes are modeled in the brain as *dispositions* in clusters of *dispositional neurons*. Like a violin's strings *disposed* to acoustically respond to the stimulus of the violinist's bow, the brain contains myriad clusters of neurons that are *disposed* to respond to given stimuli.

We arrive in this world with vast numbers of clusters of dispositional neurons. When we are hungry as infants, clusters of dispositional neurons that are already organized in our brains prompt us to cry. When hunger is relieved with food, inherited dispositional neurons prompt us to please mother with coos and smiles. In so pleasing mother, we reinforce her caring for us. We trigger the flow of mood uplifting *oxytocin*—sometimes called the love chemical—which mother can get more of by giving us more care. Pictures of infants in family photo albums and also in advertising can trigger oxytocin, although in much lower amounts.

As we develop from infancy, we constantly add to the count of dispositional neurons through the experiences we have and their memorization. But underlying all dispositional neurons acquired by experience are those we are born with, including those that represent Jung's archetypes, awaiting some future time to be aroused. A marketer could view dispositional neurons as "hot buttons," some of which can trigger predisposed responses to the contents of the marketer's message.

Archetypal "Hot Buttons"

In another web site article, *Listening to Customers*, we describe a customer relationship methodology called Developmental Relationship Marketing or DRM. The foundations of DRM are based on archetypal structures that predispose attributes of behavior. A fundamental premise of DRM is that marketers should strive to key into these archetypal "hot buttons" in every marketing campaign to arouse interest among the greatest number of customers.

However, more commonly, product messages mainly key into superficial attributes of customers, attributes that are not archetypal. This narrows a product's market to customers with those attributes. The broader approach of keying into archetypes enlarges a product's market to encompass everyone with a need for the product, regardless of individual, superficial distinctions. In this respect, DRM raises this counterintuitive proposition:

Relationship marketing, especially in its application to mass marketing, is more effective when based on customer commonalities rather than on customer differences as argued by proponents of traditional relationship or one-to-one marketing.

That is not to say that customer differences do not have a role in relationship marketing. They do. In fact, keying marketing communications to customer differences is essential to building strong, enduring relationships with customers. However, the *foundations* of relationship or one-to-one marketing should reflect universal human properties.

Coca-Cola has been particularly effective in building relationships with customers by connecting with their commonalities. In the 1970s, Coke introduced a new theme song with the words, "I'd like to build the world a home and furnish it with love/Grow apple trees and honeybees and snow white turtle doves." The images invoked by those words key to archetypal desires—every normal person has them. The song enjoyed such popular success that it ran for six years.

Michelin also connects to universal commonalities with its depiction of a smiling infant sitting in a tire or in cherubic ascent against a blue sky. Invoking the Infant archetype (a link to the future that must be safeguarded for the good of the species), Michelin's product messages spell "safety" without the word ever being used. It paves the way for an array of motivating responses, such as, "I want to protect my family," or "I want to show that I am a responsible person." Those thoughts may not rise in consciousness,

but they work in the background to help shape customers' *archetypal reactions* to Michelin ads.

Power Brands Project Strong, Unambiguous Archetypal Images

Growing interest in archetypes signals a major transformation in marketers' attitudes about the misty regions behind the curtains of consciousness. Everyone is looking for new answers. Increasing disappointment with traditional customer research is causing greater tolerance of nontraditional ideas and making it more acceptable to talk about archetypes in mainstream business.

In their trailblazing book, *The Hero and The Outlaw*, Margaret Mark and Carol Pearson assert that 12 archetypes dominate brand genre. They base their claim on an extensive quantitative analysis of brand archetypes in which they identified major archetypes and examples of brands that invoke them (Exhibit 1 contains a sampling).

Archetypes and Their Primary Functions in People's Lives

Exhibit 1

Archetype	Helps People	Brand Example
Creator	Craft something new	Williams-Sonoma
Caregiver	Care for others	AT & T (Ma Bell)
Ruler	Exert control	American Express
Jester	Have a good time	Miller Lite
Regular Guy/Gal	Be OK just as they are	Wendy's
Lover	Find and give love	Hallmark
Hero	Act courageously	Nike
Outlaw	Break the rules	Harley-Davidson
Magician	Affect transformation	Calgon
Innocent	Retain or renew faith	Ivory
Explorer	Maintain independence	Levi's
Sage	Understand their world	Oprah's Book Club

Source: *The Hero and the Outlaw* by Margaret Mark and Carol Pearson, McGraw-Hill, 2001

In another web site article, *Speaking with Customers*, we discuss how storytelling is becoming the heart of marketing. Archetypes play critical roles in a storyteller's tale. Stories with characters that have weak archetypal definition lack dimension and will likely not command much of an audience. Similarly, brands with weak archetypal definition are less likely to have strong relationships with customers. Reflecting the idea that archetypes help us find meaning in what we encounter, Mark and Pearson call brand husbandry *meaning management*. Product messages are about managing the meanings of products, including their connections to customers in the deeper zones of their existence where archetypes exist and function. Sensitive management of a brand's archetypal image is critical to the well being of a brand, as a recent Coke ad campaign demonstrates.

Coke's core archetype is the Innocent. Red, white and blue, all things true. (Remember the tagline, "It's the real thing.") In late 2000, Coke left the Innocent archetype reservation, so to speak. Looking to move into Pepsi's youth market, Coke ran several edgy TV commercials showing people throwing ugly tantrums after asking for a Coke and being told Coke was not available. These commercials could have worked for Pepsi with its Jester archetype image. But not for Coke. Coke fans around the country phoned, mailed and emailed their outrage over the compromise of Coke, the Innocent. The spontaneity of negative response indicated that the commercials irritated something deep within people's psyches. It struck them wrong in their gut. The meaning of Coke's Innocent archetypal image was not well managed in this case.

Coke's recent experience with edgy commercials argues a critical truth in marketing that has not been widely understood and appreciated—*customers own brands, not companies*. Companies are only the trustees of the brands they create for customer

consumption, materially *and perceptually*. When a company changes or compromises a brand's persona, it invites negative reactions from customers who have identified with the persona of that brand.

While Mark and Pearson correctly observe that a brand does best by being identifiable with a single, unambiguous core archetype, product messages can also associate the brand with other archetypes. Done in a way that does not compromise the brand's core archetype, this will broaden market appeal. Brands, like people should not be held to some rigid expression of persona. As social beings, we continuously shift from one persona to another in our interactions with others. Healthy brands do the same, frequently through surrogates—human and even animal and cartoon characters in broadcast and print advertising. However, care needs to be taken to avoid surrogates who conflict with a brand's core archetype, as happened in the Coke example above.

Wild About Harry

The California-based HMO, PacifiCare, whose Medicare customers are primarily mid-middle class and a bit lower, ran an astonishingly successful commercial for its Medicare brand, Secure Horizons. In the commercial, a character named Harry projects the Sage archetype, as he tends his plants while talking about how Secure Horizons made it possible to give his wife topnotch care with a minimum of financial and emotional distress. Another Harry commercial was made with similar success. Customers were just wild about Harry.

The success of this customer-to-customer approach in getting its message across inspired PacifiCare to develop several new TV commercials with different actors. In one commercial, the starring character delivered a similar message about Secure Horizons as he handled an ornate clock from his clock collection. In another commercial, the star

character was involved with a horse. When both commercials failed expectations, we were asked to analyze them for why.

The personas of the clock hobbyist and horse enthusiast did not reflect PacifiCare’s core market. Harry’s persona was more in sync with Secure Horizon’s core market. He had an unhoneed earthiness and an authentic personality with a hint of benign blue collar demeanor. Harry was a huggie bear personality the market liked—no, *loved*. The other two characters were too refined. Harry was lovable, the other characters respectable.

The importance of matching actors’ personas to customers seems so obvious as to not warrant discussion. Yet, as Mark and Pearson observe in *The Hero and the Outlaw*, creators of marketing messages routinely fail to do so. This supports the idea that if creators of marketing messages had a better

understanding of human behavior, many disappointing results in marketing could be avoided.

Archetypes need to be chosen and their meanings managed with sensitivity to customers’ season of life. As examples of such sensitivity, Harley Davidson’s “Outlaw” and Nike’s “Hero” clearly are expressed in terms of the behavioral proclivities in late Spring and throughout Summer. On the other hand, Hallmark’s Lover has been developed to appeal to customers in every season of life. Keeping in mind that brand stories with their archetypal characters help customers process their lives, it is critically important that the primary survival focus and story themes of each season of life be taken into account in managing archetypal meanings. To repeat those survival focuses and story themes, which are described in more detail in *Speaking with Customers*:

Season	Primary Survival Focus	Story Theme
Spring	Play (learning)	Comedic
Summer	Work (becoming somebody)	Romantic
Fall	Work-play (search for meaning)	Tragic
Winter	Reconciliation (making sense of life)	Irony

The primary survival focus of each season provides clues as to content of product messages, while the story theme of a season gives guidance for the style of content presentation. It is not uncommon for a product message to use an inappropriate *message voice* for otherwise sound content. A hotel television commercial that yielded unhappy results is an example. The content was sound: a waiting staff and hotel ambiance would help relieve the stress of business travel. But the message voice was wrong. The depiction of an irate business

traveler on his way to the hotel, blocked on a narrow road by the car of an elderly couple squabbling as their vehicle crept along, offended seniors, a significant clientele for the hotel. People don’t lose their sense of humor in Winter, but they do have humor preferences that don’t always coincide with those of young people who create television commercials. Most people in the Winter of their lives generally do not appreciate humor that makes a person or class of people look silly or stupid. This is also true for many who are in the Fall of their lives. The kinder, gentler

edge that commonly emerges in the Fall and Winter of life changes what is considered funny.

The Brand Personality Book: Insurance Against Marketing Blunders

Advertising blunders happen, but a brand personality book can significantly reduce chances of that happening. Large companies take great pains to protect their logos through detailed instructions in manuals of logo presentation, but rarely give such institutionalized attention to protection of brand image in marketing communications. As a result, product messages often contain conflicting personality images.

A brand personality book is a book of personality sketches. It defines the personality attributes of a brand's core archetypes and of the complimentary archetypal characters that may be projected into the marketplace through surrogates. The character sketches should be developed with keen sensitivity to variations in worldviews, needs and motivations between the four seasons of life. For example, if a brand's core archetype is the Hero, the Hero could be suitably projected into youth markets with narcissistic overtones to imply that the brand can augment a customer's social standing. Nike does this as well as any one does.

However, when the Hero represents a brand with a strong customer base in later Summer and older markets, it may be more effective to project the Hero with altruistic overtones. Coke's famous "Mean Joe Green" commercial in which sports bad boy Joe Green is humanized by a small boy's offer of a Coke is a compelling example of a Hero presentation with altruistic overtones.

Conducting an historical assessment of personality attributes can help in the development of a brand personality book. This ensures continuity between the past and the present should a decision be made to

change a brand's personality to any degree. Often, when a brand appears to be losing its edge in the marketplace, the agency of record is fired, and a new one brought in that feels it must redefine the brand. The existing brand persona and customers who identified with it are often ignored in new research that the agency uses to justify a new brand persona. Miller Lite played out this scenario a few years ago when it launched its "Dick the copywriter" campaign in which it lampooned advertising. The campaign hued to Miller Lite's Jester archetype, but went too far into the realm of silliness, and worse, into a farcical regard for advertising itself. Sales continued to fall.

Customer research will obviously be necessary to learn how customers currently perceive the brand's personality. The research may indicate a need to make changes in brand personality along the lines of what Starbuck's Scott Bedbury meant when he said, "A brand is a metaphorical story that's evolving all the time." In some cases, it may be advisable to return to an earlier personality profile as the Jack-in-the-Box brand did a few years ago to rebuild sales after the company served tainted hamburger meat to customers.

Developing a brand personality book is an exercise in applied psychology. Someone should manage the project who has a sound footing in behavior. The advertising agency for any major brand has a team of account planners who are suited for managing the development of a brand personality book. Generally speaking, independent research houses that specialize in quantitative research are not the best candidates for the task, although the project may justify quantitative research.

Account planners, by tradition, tend to have a stronger behavioral orientation than most quantitative researchers. Many account planners are now drawing extensively on anthropological research techniques to observe

attributes of customers' behavior that may not be revealed by their direct testimony. In fact, it would be worthwhile to add a cultural anthropologist to the team developing the brand personality book. The services of a Jungian analyst should also be considered because of his or her intimate familiarity with archetypes and Jungian personality types.

A brand personality book can be invaluable in managing the meanings of a brand by decreasing the influence of raw opinion on marketing decisions. It contains benchmarks against which every campaign and product message can be assessed. Movie producers have directors of continuity to make sure that everything hangs together in a film. The "continuing metaphorical story of a brand" should be given similar attention. The brand personality book is a tool to help maintain continuity in a brand's story because it makes it more difficult to stray from the archetypal reservation without solid evidence for doing so.

Why Brand Loyalty is Falling and What To Do About It

Failure to appreciate the psychological dimensions of brand connections with customers' psyches may well be one of the biggest factors in the widely reported decline in brand loyalty. Broad consensus once held that promoting product features and benefits was key to getting customers to distinguish between brands. It has now become more difficult to distinguish brands by their features and benefits because brands within the same general price range usually have few differences.

Some observers think product parity has eroded the importance of branding products. Most companies and their customers will not be well served by embracing this view. Brand loyalty has fallen largely because marketers, in an era in which product features and benefits have become less influential on customers' decisions, have not developed new

approaches for presenting brands to customers. So, if product features and benefits are not enough to bond a customer to a brand, what will? What is the key to halting decline in brand loyalty?

Customers are attracted to brands with interesting personalities, the same way they are attracted to people with interesting personalities. Steve Jobs brought Apple Computer back from its deathbed by focusing on the personalities of the company and its products. The tagline "Think different" aligned the company with breakthrough thought that reflected its Outlaw archetype. Repackaging Apple computers in fruit colored cases made the product the most visually engaging computer on the market.

Arguments have been waged for years over whether or not customers identify with brands as personalities. New insights into how the brain works and research by media communication researchers Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass, published in their book *the Media Equation*, goes far to resolve the argument. It can now be stated with confidence that brands, like any other inanimate object, are personalities. People react to brands using the same social rules they use in reacting to each other.

Across 12 years of research, which included brain scans and other sophisticated techniques, Reeves and Nass learned that at the deeper levels of brain functioning, people respond to depictions of reality using the same rules they use in responding to actual reality. To the brain, in its preconscious activities, "People presented in media are perceived as actually present," they write. This holds true for what is happening in the environment of people shown in media. A depicted thunderstorm is a real thunderstorm—not to the conscious mind of course, but certainly to the more primitive levels of the brain.

To better appreciate how the brain and conscious mind can differ as to what is real

and what is not real, think about how you react while watching an intense action film or mystery thriller. While your conscious mind tells you it is only a movie, your brain pumps out adrenalin, ratchets up your heart beat, dries up saliva flow, changes your muscle tone—all of which are ancient, predisposed responses to danger. Your primitive brain does not know that what is happening on the screen is not a threat, so it reorganizes your body chemistry to prepare for fight or flight.

Reeves and Nass's work leads to a conclusion of great significance in marketing: people do not consciously anthropomorphize inanimate objects. Inanimate objects enter consciousness already bearing human attributes. The brain divines those attributes before it brings awareness of an object into the conscious mind. Keeping in mind the earlier discussion about how all personal knowledge is traceable to metaphors drawn from our self awareness, it is completely logical that the brain sees inanimate objects in terms of our self-aware humanness. In other words, the

only way we can relate to a brand is by our brain reacting to it as though it were human—like ourselves.

The issue of product parity aside, promoting product features and benefits worked better in the past when markets were youth-dominated. As discussed in our website article, *The New Customer Majority*, young minds operate more objectively; therefore promoting the more measurable aspects of features and benefits in the past was more effective than it is today. Adults in the Fall and Winter of their lives dominate today's customer universe. They have developed into more subjective, more qualitative, and more relationship sensitive customers. They have no compelling interest in staying in relationships with brands that lack interesting personalities. The present condition of declining brand loyalty was predictable for that reason. The remedy for declining brand loyalty begins with giving brands more interesting personalities.



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