

Cool Brand Behaviour

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CoolBrands Council member Ralph Ardill shares some thoughts and observations on what it will take for cool brands to survive and thrive in tomorrow's brandscape.

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The Brand Experience Consultancy brings together an exciting fusion of cutting-edge brand strategy, change management and creative consulting to provide board level advice on how brands can best explore and realise their full potential in the Experience Economy. The focus of the consultancy's work is built around unearthing powerful Organising Thoughts for its clients' brands which epitomise their core purpose and which are then brought to life to drive accelerated, holistic and highly impactful programmes of internal and external transformational change embracing people, products, places and promotions.



As a CoolBrand Council member for several years and as someone who spends most of their time repositioning, reinventing or revitalising brands, I'm often asked to comment on what we can learn from the annual CoolBrands list and of course, what is the secret of CoolBrand success.

Well, unfortunately there's no 'secret' or 'magic formula' but over the years I have de-coded a number of CoolBrand Behaviours that I believe are highly developed and revered within organisations that are capable of achieving sustainable CoolBrand status and success.

So let's take a look at eight of my current favourite CoolBrand Behaviours:

1. CoolBrands will be keeping it real

The balance of power between brands and consumers is shifting in our favour and with the wide-spread rise and mobilisation of consumer pressure groups, along with the increasing popularity of TV and press consumer 'watchdogs', we now have more ability than ever before to 'investigate' the attitudes, activities and actions that brands take behind-the-scenes in keeping these promises.

As a result brands will be looking to develop much stronger values-driven cultures to define, maintain and protect their integrity, which in turn will become an increasingly important dimension

Rough Guides

Keeping it real



of their external dialogue with consumers as they strive to earn our trust and engender loyalty by stronger communication and demonstration of their wider beliefs, values and commitments.

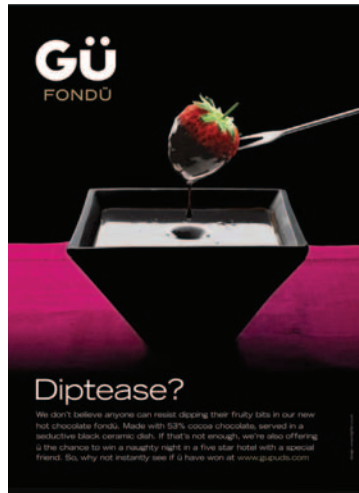
This 'reality-check' for branding is also likely to fuel the rise of more 'authentic' brands with increasing focus on the quality, origins and traceability of real ingredients, the skill of the real designers and craftsmen, more tangible demonstration and proof of reliable, consistent product/service delivery as well as more focus on the warm, genuine nature of the real people who sell, deliver and service them for us.

2. CoolBrands will be telling us stories

With the act of 'communicating' no longer any guarantee that a brand message has been received or understood, it's the age-old art of storytelling that is becoming a driving-force in the way brands will engage with us.

The focus being on the powerful articulation of brand stories – often built around real consumer and corporate characters and situations – that will

Gü Telling us stories



draw us in to create brand content we will want to read and, like all of the best stories, want to recount and pass on to others.

An approach where captivating characters, plot and narrative become more important than the traditional obsession with audiences, messages and media.

Furthermore, where brands increasingly see themselves less as the editors, producers and broadcasters of one-way, pre-determined communication and more the seekers and source of captivating brand stories that are more openly shared with their internal and external brand communities.

3. CoolBrands will be making things simpler

We live in a 'surplus' society. We're spoilt for choice in terms of the products and services available to us, bombarded by thousands of messages daily and have attention spans that are diminishing as we demand more instant gratification from the things we buy and the wider world around us.

We're also recognising that time is one of our most precious resources and are increasingly looking for brands to make things simpler for us.

The pursuit of brand simplicity will not only relate to the creation of products that are easier and more intuitive to use and understand but will also become a wider organisational 'ethos' that

TomTom Making things simpler



extends across the brand value-chain to simplify the total relationships we have with brands.

From the development of products that are simpler to compare, find, buy and use through to plain-speaking contracts, terms and conditions, advertising, packaging and labelling.

Indeed the simplification of the total brand-customer relationship is set to become one of the most highly valued and differentiating points-of-difference amongst brands we highly appreciate and admire.

4. CoolBrands will be changing our lives

Our traditional pillars of society – state, religion, politics, community and the family – are all increasingly being questioned, tested and re-defined.

At the same time, with most of our basic human needs for food, shelter etc, now satisfied we will increasingly turn to brands to help us fulfil our more complex

Fresh & Wild Changing our lives



human needs to belong, feel connected, transform ourselves and experience true happiness and fulfilment in our lives.

In doing so brands will increasingly look to position themselves as the providers of transformational products, services and experiences that are no longer only 'consumed' but that also empower and inspire us with new knowledge, tools, and skills to help us improve the quality of our lives, whilst changing and improving ourselves in the process.

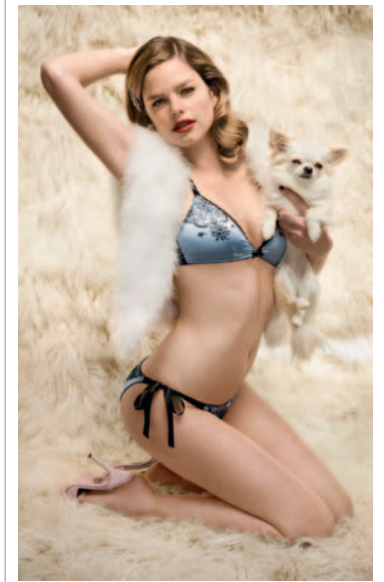
Whether this be helping us to become stronger, more intelligent, healthier, more fashionable, more informed, more attractive, more confident or simply believe we're now ready to put up those shelves.

5. CoolBrands will be feeling the difference

For decades brand owners have wrestled with the desire to 'humanise' the things we buy by giving them 'names', 'personalities', 'attitudes' and 'images' but often at the expense of conveying any true sense of emotion around the brand.

As brands increasingly recognise that it is emotions that drive most, if not all of our decisions they will begin to focus more effort on 'emotionalising' their entire approach to branding to help change our attitudes and behaviours and in turn build deeper relationships and engender our loyalty.

Agent Provocateur Feeling the difference



An approach that will increasingly bring the passion of an organisation and particularly its people centre-stage, that will relish the opportunity to harness the power of design in its widest sense to increase our aesthetic and multi-sensory appreciation of the total brand experience, and that will not only communicate with consumers but also 'collude' with us to co-create and customise the brand encounters we want.

The holy grail of this more emotional focus on branding becoming the creation of brands that ‘fans’ can literally desire, fall in love with, cannot live without and cannot wait to evangelise about.

Eden Project Caring for our communities



6. CoolBrands will be caring for our communities

Our ambivalence towards conventional marketing ‘hype’ and our increasing distrust of big institutions and political ‘spin’ is fuelling our insistence for brands to operate within a much higher set of corporate, social and environmental ethics.

As a result brands will look to invest much more of their time and resources in activities and initiatives that enable, mobilise and nurture our communities of interest. These activities working at many levels from brands targeting global issues such as climate change and sweatshop labour, through to more local and social challenges such as obesity, responsible drinking and improving school facilities.

This renewed focus on community also helping transform the future marketing of brands from an intrusive model of communicating largely un-wanted messages to a more participative genre of marketing focused on engaging consumers with activities and communications that we actively want to seek out.

7. CoolBrands will be getting more experienced

Our service economy has recently started to become commoditised by a more evolved experience economy where brands are going far beyond the basic provision of products and services to develop and ‘stage’ much more immersive, entertaining, enjoyable,

Nokia Getting more experienced



memorable and higher value experiences for consumers.

Starbucks’ transition of the humble coffee bean from a raw commodity bean into a cult coffee empire probably being one of the most impressive demonstrations of the business and branding possibilities that can be explored in the experience economy.

Going forward brands will increasingly look to create more powerful experiential products, services, places, communications and occasions that encourage consumers to want to spend more time and money with them.

This will also challenge brands to ‘produce’ these experiences whether they be in-store, outdoors, online or in-home in a much more holistic and multi-channel fashion to ensure that all operational, product, service and, perhaps most importantly, the human dimensions of these higher experiential promises are carefully orchestrated and consistently delivered.

8. CoolBrands will be daring to dream

Finally, as technology relentlessly drives our digital lives and as our personal information, knowledge, entertainment and communications increasingly become stored in ‘cyberspace’ and managed by computers, society – and in turn brands – will place new value on those human abilities and characteristics that cannot be digitised or automated.

Our myths, legends, stories, rituals, emotions, feelings, desires and dreams.

All will provide new inspiration as brands look to weave themselves into the fabric of our lives by capturing our imaginations, suspending our disbelief and providing new generations of products, services, experiences and spectacle that allow us to escape from the day-to-day and to explore our inner fantasies.

Products that move and mesmerise us, services that astonish and transform us, stories that fascinate and inspire us and experiences that immerse us in real or virtual worlds of possibility will all

become an important part of how brands will evolve.

An evolution where it is imagination not information that becomes the driving force as brands help us satisfy our highest human needs to belong and become all we can be whilst at the same time re-kindling our timeless appetite for adventure, exploration and the great beyond.

Tate Modern Daring to dream



Brands Misbehaving

So there you have it, some thoughts, observations and predictions for the kinds of behaviour that the CoolBrands of today and tomorrow will be exhibiting.

That’s not to say all CoolBrands exhibit all of these behaviours, or even that when they do so it’s a conscious effort. Far from it and indeed it’s the effortless ease with which CoolBrands achieve such engagement that fascinates us.

But going forward the pursuit of such behaviour is not only going to be the domain of CoolBrands and I believe all modern business will be increasingly challenged to come to terms with these ideas and behaviours, not so much in the interest of becoming a CoolBrand but to address the more fundamental questions of sustaining their ongoing survival, growth and prosperity.

Then again, as with many things in life, isn’t it only a matter of time before the maverick misbehaviour of a minority becomes the mainstream behaviour of the masses?

So maybe its time for all mainstream brands and not just their CoolBrand counterparts to loosen-up and to start misbehaving a bit more.

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