

Say Goodbye to Brands

I started to talk Love in business because of one big question that would not go away. What comes after brands?

Brands have had a dream run pumping the global economy. They have defined and grown marketing by boosting its complexity and scale. They have spread out around the globe and come back home again. The journey from products to trademarks to brands is one of the great stories of the 20th century. Now this journey is coming to an end and it's far too late for Brand-Aid.

Trademarks have long been table-stakes. Now brands too are table-stakes. Both useful in the quest for differentiation and still vital to survival, but they are not winning game-breakers.

Brands are dead. They are struggling to deal with the demand for innovation, flexibility and speed, together with the necessity to build close relationships with consumers. At the centre of this is commodification. The process that erodes distinctions, rapidly cycles through innovations and pushes for higher standards of performance and quality because that is what everybody else is doing. Everyone in business is wrestling with this problem in one guise or another.

Some brands have escaped the commodity trap and evolved into something different altogether.

Charles Darwin would have got it straight off. Fish to lizard. Monkey to man. Product to Trademark. Trademark to Brand. Brand to Lovemark.

At Saatchi & Saatchi we have been evolving Lovemarks for the past four years. Lovemarks is a game-breaking opportunity to reinvent branding. They place brands where they should be: at the emotional heart.

Lovemarks inspire loyalty beyond reason.

Lovemarks is about attitude, belief and action. The name itself is provocative, non-negotiable. Saying 'love' and believing in love come with the territory. Enjoymarks or Admirationmarks were never going to get the job done.

Lovemarks are personal. They can be local or global or anywhere in-between. What ever the scale, they stand out from the crowd. Lovemarks are the charismatic brands that people love and fiercely protect.

If you made a list of Lovemarks it would be different from mine because that is the nature of Love. We don't all love the same person either! To put my Lovemarks where my mouth is, I love Apple, Cheerios, Mont Blanc, Blackburne tennis racquets, Putumayo World Music, Tide and the Prius.

All the stuff we pushed out of business in the last century needs to be enticed back to the centre. Love is the pathway to deep emotional connections within businesses, with consumers, with partners and allies. Turning up the temperature in business means more energy and inspiration, and nothing turns up the temperature like Love.

Emotional Rescue

Emotion is back in vogue. In the grand old brand days emotion was a clip-on. Brands flourished in the rational world of benefits. The advertising team was there to pipe on some emotional icing - and that was that.

But over the past two decades science moved deeper in the human mind. It turned out that the human brain is more complex, more densely connected and more mysterious than any of us dreamt.

Study after study has proved that if the emotion centres of our brain are damaged in some way, we don't just lose the ability to laugh or cry. We lose the ability to make decisions.

The neurologist Donald Calne puts it brilliantly: 'The essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action while reason leads to conclusions.' More emotion equals more action.

Emotion and reason are intertwined, but when they conflict - emotion trumps. Without the fleeting and intense stimulus of emotion, rational thought winds down and disintegrates.

Emotion is an unlimited resource. It controls our rationality and guides our decision-making. There are no limits to its power. It's always there - waiting to be plugged into. And you certainly can't ignore it by declaring that your products are in a 'low involvement category.' What a cop-out!

We need to jump into the emotion economy. There are many openings in to this economy but it is now obvious that entertainment is gaining ground fast. According to the US Consumer Expenditure survey, the total spend for entertainment per household increased 20.8 percent over the last decade.

Entertainment appeals to our unconscious, intuitive and creative mind that operates beyond rationality and rules. Emotion and story-telling, mystery and metaphor are all central players in Lovemarks.

Beyond Respect

I talk more about Love than Respect because we all do Respect so much better. We have made huge investments in performance, innovation, quality, trust and all the rest for decades. And we would all agree that we made fantastic progress. The problem is that it was all in one direction towards what I call the 'e-r' words. Newer, brighter, stronger, faster. And the really big problem is that they take us head on against the most frightening 'e-r' word of all: cheaper. This is what happens to you when you slip down the value chain. You become eager to give away more for less just to stay in the game. Even worse you put all your effort into what has just become table-stakes. Lots of puff for not much stuff.

In the twenty-first century great performance is no more than what consumers expect and demand. Cars start first time, the fries are always crisp and the dishes shine. Today everyone has to earn Respect just to stay in the game.

Now the new challenge is Love and Love demands the same investment and the same rigour we brought to the capture of Respect. Our client Toyota gets it. Don Esmond at Toyota USA crystallized the new Toyota challenge: 'It's time to move from the most respected car company in America to the most loved.'

Love needs Respect right from the start. Without it we're not talking Love, we're talking a fad or infatuation. Compelling and fun but certainly not capable of inspiring loyalty of any kind.

A Recipe for Love

By focusing on Mystery, Sensuality and Intimacy business-as-usual can be transformed with new emotions and new ideas.

The Stanford economist Paul Romer likes to say that big competitive advantages in the marketplace always come from 'better recipes, not just more cooking.' Love has got to be the most well tested recipe of all.

We all know the power of Mystery, Sensuality and Intimacy from our own lives. The obvious next question then is why should relationships in business be any different? My answer - they are not. Business too needs Mystery, Sensuality and Intimacy.

Not surprisingly, after the metric mania of the 20th century, Mystery is again taking centre-stage. What we don't know starts to be as important as what we do know. Mystery draws together:

- Past-present-future - to locate us in time and space
- Great stories - for context and meaning
- Dreams - which create action which in turn inspires dreams

- Myths and icons - a reference library of the heart
- Inspiration - the spark that sets Lovemarks on fire

Sensuality is a portal to the emotions. This is how human beings experience the world:

- Vision
- Sound
- Smell
- Touch
- Taste

And Intimacy where thinking and feeling come together most closely. Real love needs intimacy - the small moments with emotional resonance:

- Empathy - so that we can understand and respond to other people's emotions
- Commitment - that shows we are in the relationship for the long haul
- Passion - to energise the relationship.

Some companies, like Starbucks, have created experiences that have used Mystery, Sensuality and Intimacy brilliantly. Other companies have created nightmare experiences. Who wants to be squirted with perfume as they walk into a store? Not me, nor not my wife. This formulaic spray-and-bray is a symptom of a much bigger problem. Passion trimmed into efficiency, Inspiration pulled back to a positive attitude and Love diluted to like.

Research Revival

Researchers turned down a dead-end a decade or so ago and they have been struggling to read the signs ever since. Once they had corralled what could be measured, everything that couldn't was simply ignored. The problem was, of course, that everything of value cannot be measured. In fact, not much of value can be.

As the British industrialist John Banham once said, 'We are in danger of valuing most highly those things that we can measure most accurately. As a result we are in danger of being exactly wrong rather than approximately right.'

The problem is that the information gathered by most conventional research methods has become a commodity. All the big players have access to pretty much the same information. And not only do they have the same data, they have the same processes for dealing with it. That's not where the game is going to be won and it is certainly no help to creating emotional connections with consumers.

We need research to help us discover what we don't know we don't know. And then we need research to inspire us to go further and deeper. We need research to absorb many perspectives - and make sense of them. And most of all we need research that puts consumers at the centre rather than at the base of a very large pyramid.

This is the only kind of research that will come close enough to Love and to emotional connections to make a difference. Love is not one-way. You can't analyse their love without committing your own. If you stand to one side as an objective observer you will get the results you deserve.

Audio Connect

Consumers are the heart of any enterprise and, at last, businesses are starting to realise it. People want control over their lives. They are more sophisticated and best of all, they keep changing. This is the new consumer. To respond to this new reality requires a profound shift in how to develop ideas and insights that can truly touch consumers. What has the power to get us there? The emotional connections created by Love.

Our new evolved consumers want to connect in more ways with brands. They are looking for new emotional connections. More people are living alone and it is projected that far more will be alone over the coming decade. In the United Kingdom today, seven million adults live alone - three times as many as 40 years ago - and it is projected that by 2020, one-person households will make up 40 percent of total households.

Forget Robert D. Putnam's famous 'Bowling alone'. People are eating alone, exercising alone, and waking alone.

To touch these customers directly you need to listen to them. That's how you can feel the shifts in temperature - not just read about them in market research reports. Most businesses never get that close. They set up a programme of consumer contact, rather than just hanging out. They take notes rather than taking the pulse.

Invest love and you can connect with people and cultivate enduring relationships. In their most evolved form these relationships give consumers a direct impact on design, production, distribution and marketing. They give you an extraordinary new opportunity to create long-term value.

Lovemarks are a simple idea. They come from deep inside what every human being wants and needs most. Love.