BY LINDA TISCHLER

HOW DO I LOVE THEE? *Let me plot the graph.*

Every company wants customers to love its brands. Now some clever marketers have figured out how to measure your real feelings about your latte, your sneakers, and your breakfast cereal.

In a business world relentlessly driven by numbers, the word "love" doesn't roll easily off the corporate tongue. It's too squishy a concept, too touchy-feely compared with nice, measurable things like market share, unit sales, or gross margins. "I've been in some boardrooms where there was a definite, audible gulp when I put the words 'love' and 'business' together," says Kevin Roberts, author of *Lovemarks: The Future Beyond Brands* (powerHouse Books, May 2004). As CEO of the giant global ad agency Saatchi & Saatchi, Roberts has been on a five-year crusade to convince clients and colleagues that in a viciously competitive marketplace, love is not a flaky concept—it's a realistic profit driver for the 21st century.

Lately, even rabid rationalists seem to be getting the message. McDonald's ads blare, "I'm lovin' it!" Jenn-Air urges shoppers to buy its ranges "for the love of cooking." And Honda's "It Must Be Love" campaign invites car owners to send in photos showing how they resemble their vehicles. Why all the public displays of affection? Money may not be able to buy love—but love, it turns out, brings money. Research suggests that brands that engage people emotionally can command prices as much as 20% to 200% higher than competitors', and sell in far higher volumes.

And now, in a breakthrough for market researchers and love bunnies alike, Roberts and a British company, QIQ International Limited, have developed a tool to quantify the emotional power of a brand. QIQ's research technique measures the twin drivers of what Roberts dubs a "lovemark": respect (performance, trust, and reputation) and love (mystery, sensuality, and intimacy). Marketers have long measured performance and trust, but mystery, sensuality, and intimacy are brand attributes few have thought to worry about, let alone quantify. Roberts insists they're vital for generating affection, whether you're selling cars or laundry detergent. "We've put dozens of *Fortune* 100 brands through the Lovemarker," says Roberts. "We've tested Nike and Adidas, Oxford and Cambridge, Bill and Hillary." The former president, he says, scored very, very high on love, and significantly less so on respect.

QIQ gets at the mystery dimension by asking people about the myths and images surrounding a brand. Nike fans cited the swoosh as a modern icon; Guinness is a near religious movement. In the sensuality category, *New Yorker* readers cited jazz as the sound most identified with the brand, and "rich" as what the magazine might smell like. On the intimacy scale, Cheerios lovers recalled eating the cereal as children and the warm memories it inspired.

The Lovemarks Web site, where people nominate their own favorite brands, is a window into just how emotional consumers can get about some brands. Anne, from New Zealand, effuses about Lego: "Lego puts parents and kids where they belong. On the floor. Together, hunched over an embattled castle, heads almost touching. Intimate? You bet." Laura, from the United States, writes about her favorite search engine: "To Google is to love. It's the only search engine that is a verb. I am a Googler. I have been Googled. I will Google."

Wouldn't it be nice to stoke that kind of passion? James Stengel, global marketing officer for Procter & Gamble, knew that selling a product's benefits was just not enough. In the late 1990s, one of P&G's most famous brands, Tide, was at risk of becoming a boring commodity. Instead of focusing on cleaning power, P&G strengthened the emotional imagery that had once driven the brand's popularity—mothers caring for their

[FAST] TAKE
How to put *Love* in your brand

- **Find your most passionate customers and listen to them.** They'll tell you all you need to know about why your brand is a lovemark for them. They'll write your advertising for you.
- **Put your brand through the love-respect axis.** (An abbreviated version is available online at www.lovemarks.com.) Look at how it scores on mystery, sensuality, and intimacy. Make it operate on as many senses as possible.
- **Start telling stories.** Quit talking about benefits and performance. Instead, show your brand as part of an experience, an adventure, a myth, or a dream.

families—but with a message that also showed empathy for women's busy lifestyles. The blend of information and intimacy goosed sales in some markets as much as 25%. "Decisions made about our brands are based on rationale *and* emotion," Stengel says.

But how do you measure emotion, especially in a computer survey? To start, the lovemarks survey shows pictures of various relationships—a grandparent and child, an embracing couple—as a way of delineating the nature of a relationship with a brand. In another exercise, subjects are asked to fill in speech bubbles, describing what, for example, Tide would say to you, and what you'd say back.

All these results are then mapped on a love-respect axis. In the lower-left quadrant—low love, low respect—are commodities such as sand, salt, and brussels sprouts. Roberts says many telcos risk falling into that unlovable hole. On the flip side of the chart—high love, low respect—are fads, fashions, and infatuations: things we love for the moment but soon abandon. Think Beanie Babies and reality TV. Most solid, respectable brands live in the upper-left quadrant, home of high respect and low love: Maxwell House, Dell, Colgate, Holiday Inn. Roberts says even he was surprised at how many products consumers consign to this less-than-desirable class. "Lovemarks might, on first blush, sound sweet," he says, "but the approach is actually ruthless—Darwinian, even."

For brands that make it to the winner's circle in the upper-right-hand quadrant, where high love and high respect combine to form lovemarks, the rewards can be substantial. Think Lexus and Steinway, ESPN and Mikimoto. Barbie and Starbucks. Plus Nelson Mandela, Marilyn Monroe, Italy, and Krispy Kreme.

The good news is that it's possible to move a product to a better neighborhood. "We can tell which dimension is a key influence on love and respect, and, indeed, on sales volume, which is really the exciting thing," says John Pawle, managing director of QIQ. Pawle says researchers have so far conducted about 800 online surveys across four product categories—cars, breakfast cereals, analgesics, and magazines. And because they measure such things as frequency of use and buying intentions, they can show how a brand's sales change as it moves from quadrant to quadrant.

General Mills, for example, was looking for a way to give Cheerios a boost a couple of years ago. After applying the lovemarks research, "we realized there was an opportunity to take Cheerios to a higher emotional ground, moving it from being part of the kitchen cupboard to part of the family," says Mike Burns, co-CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi, New York. To ramp up the brand's love quotient, General Mills replaced the bowl on the package with a heart and retooled its advertising to focus less on the product's functional benefits (oats are good for you) and more on its emotional ones. "It became very much about motherhood and nurturance—that Cheerios is an expression of love and doing the best for your family," says Burns. "That's when the brand took off." Cheerios is now the top cereal brand in the country, and occupies a position that's the equivalent of beachfront property on the lovemarks graph.

Stengel says P&G has now also introduced the concept to its global marketing organization. "The lovemarks approach hasn't replaced our brand-measurement practices, but it has helped us understand more about the relationships consumers have with our brands, and inspired us to think about ways we can develop them into lovemarks," he says.

But what goes up can also come down. Microsoft, a brand most respect but few love, is in danger of slipping even further, says Roberts. "We ran it through the Lovemarker, and it's at risk of becoming a bland, disliked, high-respect" brand. Chevrolet was once a lovemark but lost its cachet. The point is that lovemarks aren't owned by manufacturers. They're owned by the people who love them. "Start thinking of these people who love what you do as inspirational consumers. Help them get behind your brand," he says, "and watch it accelerate into a lovemark." FC

Linda Tischler (ltischler@fastcompany.com) is a FAST COMPANY *senior writer.*

ILLUSTRATION BY OKSANA BADRAK