

## Nurturing Winning Brands

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Some brands are loved. Some are hated. Some brands are highly valued while others are also-rans. Consumers go all out to acquire certain brands while they are indifferent to others. What does it take to nurture winning brands?

Brands are in a way like living organisms. They have a genetic origin and are nurtured in an environment that supports their evolution. At crucial junctures, interventions are needed to bolster the brand's continued growth and avert any possibility of a decline in the brand's strength.

**At the core of winning brands is a simple question :** What does this brand mean for consumers? If the meaning is clear to consumers the next issue to focus on should be: Is the meaning substantial enough for consumers? For example, brands like Harley Davidson and Starbucks are about consumers discovering their own selves through the brand experience. These brands are iconic because they have made a positive difference in the lives of consumers. Likewise, Lux is not a soap for having a bath but a promise of beauty and attractiveness for women. The issues that need to be managed to nurture brands and create winning brands include:

- **Track customer aspirations :** The targeted customers must be the unwavering focus for brand managers. The strategic tasks for brand managers include: building a relationship with customers through trust and credibility, communicating a key benefit to customers and enabling a price premium<sup>1</sup>. The brands that become winning brands are those that keep track of the customers' changing aspirations. For example, in the 1980s, Surf used Lalitaji (a housewife who bought products that offered good value and not 'cheap' products). This worked well since most Indian women aspired to be good housewives at that time. But in today's changed scenario, the woman of the house is welcomed back from work by the husband and children (as seen in the advertisements of Vicks or Whirlpool). Unless a brand keeps a track of changing customer aspirations it will fall by the wayside.
- **Offer a credible value proposition :** Having ensured that the brand really understands the customer well enough, a credible value proposition should be used to ensure connect with the customers. For example, Tanishq realized that wedding was the big occasion when jewellery was bought by Indian households. But to target the modern Indian girls, the communication had to reflect their psyche. So the advertisement shows a nuclear family where the marriegable girl is not very keen on tying the knot but Tanishq makes

her amenable to marriage. The ad surely resonates in the hearts of millions of young girls in modern India who are putting careers ahead of marriage but Tanishq rekindles their latent desire for getting married. In the late 90s, the Indica promised 'more car per car' and made middle class families sit up and take notice. Likewise, Samsung targets the youth by using the provocative line 'Next is what?' because the youth are restless and yearning for 'something more'. The value proposition should succinctly answer the question 'why should I buy this brand?' for the customer. Actually, the secret to a credible value proposition is to move the brand to an 'enacted' space wherein the focus is more on what it means rather than what it does<sup>2</sup>.

- **Build an endearing image :** The credible value proposition needs to be carried forward to build an endearing image for the brand. The brand needs to occupy a prized position in the customer's mind and heart. The image must be compelling enough for the customer to induce purchase of a brand that holds a premium price. This is the kind of image that has helped to create brands like Rolex, Harley Davidson, Apple, Christian Dior etc. The price becomes incidental for customers as they are willing to invest their life's savings to acquire a Harley and join the HOG (Harley Owners Group). This image is their identity and their reason to be alive and feel good about themselves. Similarly, customers of Apple's i-Pad or i-Phone have queued up through the night outside stores to lay their hands on these prized possessions in the morning when the store opens. This image is created through suitable associations and consistency in delivery of the brand's promise.
- **Get employees to live the brand's promise :** The people representing the brand play an important role in building the brand<sup>3</sup>. Brands like Starbucks, Disneyland or Virgin are the result of the role played by the people who have represented the brand. First and foremost, the brand's values need to be imbibed by the people and thereafter the same needs to be followed through their actions. The greatest test of the brand's promise is the manner in which the employees to the justice (or injustice) to the brand through their actions. For example, the promise of 'fun and excitement' by Virgin is followed up by the way the people behind the brand are attired and through their behaviour. The infectious laughter and informal chatter of a Starbucks associate early in the morning makes the day for the customers who come there for more than just drinking a cup of hot coffee. The engagement of the employees with the brand's promise should be evident from every communication (verbal and non-verbal) and ensure that the customer's experience is consistent with the image of the brand.
- **Show genuine concern for customers :** The brand becomes loved and adored when it is able to win over the trust of customers. This is a hard fought battle since customers are not easy to win over and it takes a lot of sincere efforts on the part of the brand. First and foremost, the brand needs to show genuine concern for customers. Typically, the customer is always asking – why should I trust you? So, the brand needs to be empathetic towards the problems being faced by customers and go the extra mile to address their concerns. Several hospitality providers (such as the Taj Hotels) have taken the trouble of helping customers solve problems that are strictly speaking not really their business. This is when the brand ambassadors need to get into action. As a result of going the extra mile, they win customers for life. And the brand's image gets indelibly etched on the hearts of the customers who thereafter become advocates for the brand. So, one good deed by a brand ambassador spawns several bouts of loyalty and referrals that go a long

way in making the brand stronger and more adorable.

- **Make customers achieve more** : Customers are keen to patronize brands that seem to fulfill their aspirations and dreams. This is why brands like ebay have been able to create a large following since they have virtually transformed the lives of their customers (or partners). Therefore, brands that can create opportunities for customers to become partners and participate in the proliferation of the brand stand a better chance of becoming a winning brand. By focusing on higher order motivations, a brand can create a more adorable image<sup>4</sup>. The Fair & Lovely Foundation offers scholarships to young women to help them pursue their dreams and by empowering the women they are ensuring that the brand helps them to achieve more. This will help in endearing more women to the brand.
- **Go global** : In today's global market, brands that are not global risk going out of the customer's mindspace. The reason for dominance of global brands is the fact that customers are going global and recognizing global brands as the ones that she would like to associate. Research has shown that successful global brands are perceived to have high quality, carry the global symbol and are more socially responsible<sup>5</sup>. This is what explains the power of brands like Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Nike, Microsoft, and IBM. Across cultures and geographies they are symbols that customers recognize and admire. The success of global brands is a testimony to the power of global branding. Therefore, brands need to take the appropriate steps in forging a global brand strategy and ensuring that it becomes a reality.

It needs to be understood that nurturing brands requires a cohesive strategy, inclusiveness of all concerned stakeholders and a well-orchestrated rollout. Brands need to assert their presence across media (especially social media) and acquire omnipresence in their customers' lives. Then and then only can they aspire to become winning brands.

## References:

### End Notes

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