

Building a Brand's Personality

By Bruce McTague

Brands need some substance. Similar to how well-liked people are rarely shallow or one dimensional, an effective brand needs to have some depth to its personality and character. Finding this personality takes some thought as you seek a combination of energy, substance and a sense of values (not *value* but *values*).

It may seem silly to invest so much energy thinking about something like a 'brand personality' when you are faced with the day to day pressures of selling stuff and stock prices and investor relations, but ultimately the exercise leads to ongoing value. Yes, value. All this discussion about values does lead to value (people willing to pay a higher price and loyalty to the brand). So here are the main elements of building a brand personality:

Gaining energy: A brand's sustaining energy is typically generated through a reflection of conflict and challenge. The energy is created when a brand steps up to meet a relevant need or solve a problem. To sustain the energy the brand must consistently seek out to solve ongoing conflicts and challenges. This translates into an evolving, non-stagnant brand. Energy typically evolves from solving problems. Solving problems takes energy.

Gaining substance: The true substance of personality is to balance that energy with something else. It is often found by having the brand own contradictory elements, for example, *tasting great but less filling* or *natural science*. Owning these contradictions creates dimensions in the personality and generates an interesting dialogue between brand and consumer allowing the relationship to develop.

Gaining character: Once you have energy and substance, think respect. This one is very easy (and very difficult). Try focusing on the core customer group, that 1% which represents 25% of your long term business, and decide how to earn their respect. Actions, words, appearance...all fit into character. What makes this difficult is that often companies want to look at "this is how I want the world to look at me." Well. Unfortunately 50% won't care about you whatever you do, 25% won't like you whatever you do and the remaining 25% will be thinking "why do you care about the other 75%, just focus on what I think." (I made those numbers up)

"Those who stand for nothing fall for anything." Alexander Hamilton

Trust me. If you focus on what kind of character you need to exhibit to gain respect of your core customers, others will gather round (and fortunately for you they will have the same traits as the people you already like).

Gaining dimension: By dimension I mean developing aspects of the personality. Great personalities are not one dimensional. Those people are interesting because they have

different sides to who they are, for example, serious with a sense of humor. Another great way to look at it is “my brand is comfortable wearing a tux at a black tie and wearing jeans to its favorite causal restaurant.” That type of discussion helps you decide the different dimensions of the brand. If the brand were a person what type of hobbies would it have, what type of clothes would it wear and what type of events would it attend. Once again this may seem silly but it assists in some truly practical aspects of the business – where do I put my stores, are there certain types of new products I should be considering, what kinds of events should we be sponsoring, etc.

The power of this dimensionalized brand personality is that different groups of consumers will gravitate to the brand for different reasons. I personally believe understanding your Brand Personality is the most important thing a company can do. Product superiority can come and go but a distinct personality is eternal. It seems to me a good use of time to nail this down early on because, what the heck, the return on investment is...well...forever.

About Bruce McTague:

In a career spanning over 20 years, I've been involved with a wide range of industries including packaged goods, restaurant, pharmaceutical, retail, business-to-business and tourism. I won't bore you with all the details, but the bottom line is I have touched so many businesses across so many categories the headline for my career should probably be "Collector of experiences and knowledge."

If you would like some additional work experience details and see what a number of people have said about me, visit my [LinkedIn Profile](#) my blog, [Enlightened Conflict](#) or contact me directly by [email](mailto:bruce@brucemctague.com) at bruce@brucemctague.com.