Guest Editorial

Branding non-profit and commercial partnerships

Journal of Brand Management (2013) **20**, 159–161. doi:10.1057/bm.2012.56

Over the past decade, tremendous change has come to commercial and non-profit partnerships. Traditionally, mostly philanthropic in nature, partnership in the early twenty-first century has become more of a true collaboration: less one-sided or one-way, now requiring more cross-sectoral players, practices and approaches to achieve and measure results.

Working equally with commercial and non-profit clients at Y&R Group, Geneva over the last 20+ years, I began to see a pattern. The best relationships were functioning as brands, by which I mean those applying the disciplines and best practices commerce has developed over many years to forge relationships and trust with their audiences. We witnessed both corporates and organizations beginning to use their brands, singly or in combination, to find the right partner; define the nature and expectations of new relationships; create new, fully branded programs; communicate branded messages; more fully brand the corporate and organizational partners sponsoring the programs and, not least, more fully brand corporate and organizational sponsors and measure the results and impact against such brand fundamentals as vision, mission, values and promises.

The test case for this idea came at IUCN's World Conservation Congress in Barcelona in 2008. We were asked to hold a session for environmentalists from around the world about the value of branding their organizations. Traditionally, non-profits of

all stripes and colors have been resistant to branding's taint of commercialism, so we were expecting few participants (far less than the 60 person capacity of our room) and lots of pushback. To our great surprise and delight, over 80 people attended the session, hugging the walls and floors when seats were not available, for the entire 4-hour session. We were on to something.

We formalized this session in the article, 'If organizations are from Venus and businesses are from Mars, can branding be the bridge? A 7-step guide to stellar partnerships'. Now, the first article in this special issue, it began the journey that the *Journal of Brand Management* asked us to undertake. What were others saying? What were others doing and finding? What other views of partnership were emerging? If pure philanthropy has exited the scene, what is the state-of-the-art of relationships today? What is the state-of-play?

As we honestly had no idea what to expect beyond the founding article, we were delighted to discover voices chiming in and popping up from among academics, theoreticians and practitioners. All were contributing to what is surely a new and emerging field. To our even greater delight, each contributor could and did approach the subject from the filter and point of view of brand. Thus was born this Special Issue titled 'Branding non-profit and commercial partnerships'. So far, as we know, it is the first snapshot of the state-of-play in the second decade of the second millennium

of commercial and organizational partnerships. And it is surely the first to come at the topic from a branding point of view. The subject matter could not be more significant as the world so needs these partnerships to effect real difference.

The scope of what follows:

In 'If organizations are from Venus and businesses are from Mars, can branding be the bridge? A 7-step guide to stellar partnerships', I lay out the critical steps I believe commercial and non-profit partnerships should take, on the basis of solid branding principles of trust and relationship building, to ensure impactful, engaging partnerships and measurable results. As the article provides a comprehensive definition and philosophy of branding, thus setting the scope and tone for the new discipline of branding commercial and non-profit organizations, we begin the Special Issue with it.

Immediately following this, we wanted to capture some of the very best practices of partnerships today. We thought the smartest way to do this was through dialogue and interlocution, so we offer four interviews with some of the very best practitioners in the field. In 'Philanthropy, charity and CSR at Kimberly-Clark: An interview with Jenny Lewis and Alyson Gomez', Jenny and Alyson detail K-C's evolving partnership policies and practices, with emphasis on Boys and Girls Clubs of America and Medshare International; their objectives are to be increasingly sustainable, measurable, impactful and in full support of the corporate brand with every new project and program. In 'Global sustainability at Kimberly-Clark: An interview with Mike Lloyd, Director of Environmental Services', Mike articulates K-C's goals to reduce water use in their facilities by 25 per cent by 2015, the value that cross-sectoral partnerships bring to their efforts and their vision to engage brand teams around the world for scale and local community impact. In 'Sustainability at

Unilever: An interview with Lesley Thorne, Global Sustainability Manager', Lesley provides another, state-of-the-art perspective on partnerships as she details how Unilever wants to create sustainability and social value at the same time that it builds its brands and businesses. She explains the role of a new publication, 'Inspiring Sustainable Living: Expert Insights into Consumer Behaviour & Unilever's Five Levers of Change', in collectively driving the company's goals. In 'One Planet Leaders, an interview with WWF International and IMD', Carolina Moeller and Michael Yaziji offer fascinating insight into how they created their new partnership 'One Planet Leaders', with the aim of putting sustainability at the heart of business practices. The prominence they give to matching brands and cross-sectoral competencies is nothing short of state-of-the-art partnership formation and practice.

Next, two academic articles explore consumer connections to partnerships and what exactly influences their intentions to purchase products affiliated with the partnerships. In 'Creating Successful Cause-Brand Alliances: The role of cause involvement, perceived brand motivations and cause-brand alliance attitude', Beth Myers, Wi-Suk Kwon and Sandra Forsythe examine the impact of cause involvement and perceived brand motivation both on consumers' attitudes to cause alliances and their willingness to purchase affiliated products. Their findings indicate, among other things, that cause-brand alliance attitude positively influences purchase intentions. In 'For-profit or non-profit brands: Which are more effective in a cause-related marketing programme?' Veronica Gabrielli and Ilaria Baghi investigate the effect of awareness of for-profit versus non-profit brands on consumers' perceptions of cause-related products linking two brands in a co-branding strategy. Their results reveal, among other

things, that awareness of the two partner brands plays a key role in consumers' likelihood to purchase an affiliated product. The striking similarity of these independently chosen topics and the complementarity of their conclusions further suggest the richness of the new field, its emerging nature and the need for further exploration. They create an immediate dialogue with every other contribution in this volume.

Next, two case studies explore the day-to-day realities of what's involved in managing successful partnerships. In 'The brand that gave birth to a movement: The Born HIV Free campaign', Claudia Gonzalez and Jeremy Bogen detail and critique the Global Fund's Born HIV Free campaign, launched in May 2010. The campaign, whose goal was 'no child born with HIV by 2015', brought together media giants, celebrities and artists in partnership. With the campaign's enormous success of creating excitement for getting to an HIV-free generation by 2015, however, came inherent challenges in managing the Global Fund's brand and keeping it an integral part of the narrative. In 'Brand partnerships as joint ventures: A comparison of two partnerships in the small non-profit arena', Martha Reeves explores how non-profits can effectively participate in joint ventures with larger, for-profit institutions. Just as in successful business ventures, Martha demonstrates how these partnerships should build and communicate the brands of both partners, equally. Lessons learned from both cases: have confidence in your brand and the value you bring; be prepared to adjust expectations and

objectives of your partnerships as you're in a powerful new territory; realize you're writing new textbook chapters every day.

We conclude with a grand, sweeping view of the future juxtaposed with a cautionary tale for the present. In 'The future of sustainability-driven partnerships and a new role for brand strategy', Cheryl D. Hicks lays out the complexity on the horizon for partnerships due to the convergence of businesses, organizations and governments around the need for global sustainability. She stresses the importance of branding experts going forward, who will need to interpret this complexity in order to engage global consumers in the challenge, as sustainability in all its facets will be unachievable without them. In 'Ethical brands at long last? Or "too much too little too late" as the song says', Marjorie Ellis Thompson offers a cautionary tale of the present and a reminder that a mark of the best societies will always be how they treat their most vulnerable.

We hope that this Special Issue, a snapshot of today, marks the beginning of branding becoming a widespread discipline throughout the partnership world. The contributors and I are keen for your engagement and comments, and hope further work across fields will take this new and emerging discipline to a real science.

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