

---

## Editorial

# Broadening the scope of brand management

*Journal of Brand Management* (2010) 17, 395–398. doi:10.1057/bm.2010.9

### THE ADVERTISING-CENTRIC VIEWPOINT

January 2010. Steve Jobs, Apple CEO, takes to the stage at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, to unveil a new tablet-style computer. The device allows users to access email, photos, eBooks, games and the web. It is hailed as a new way to read newspapers by integrating print and digital content. With WiFi, Bluetooth and 3G options, this device offers state-of-the-art levels of connectivity, and its 10-hour battery life makes it ideal for users on the move. Welcome to the iPad. At its launch we were not only presented with a new gadget but also drawn into a carefully staged managed marketing communications (marcoms) event. The event was covered with anticipation and enthusiasm by newsstations and news agencies around the globe – FoxNews, the Guardian, Reuters and many more. It was deemed important enough to feature on public broadcasting stations as well as commercial stations. The unveiling was captured on video and uploaded onto YouTube, accompanied by live blogs and twitter. Ahead of the launch, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts was painted in the same colours and banner designs as the press announcements and event invitations. Photographic evidence of this investment in pre-event publicity was posted on Flickr and MacRumor.

The razzmatazz of the iPad launch is a well-choreographed example of the popular

view of brand management: an activity built around marcoms to increase brand awareness and, with luck, brand preference. Marcoms have changed dramatically in recent years – there is more talk of integration across multiple platforms; there is widespread use of interactive, digital media; public relations and event management have a prominence today which was not so evident in the past; street-smart communicators have embraced buzz and viral. These transformations have helped to keep marcoms centre stage, as the interface between brands and their publics – irrespective of whether we are talking about existing or prospective customers, lead users or bloggers, media commentators or fans. Marcoms make the brand visible and audible to all these publics. Apple – an archetypal iconic brand, a lovemark<sup>1</sup> – knows only too well the power of marketing communications to create brands that consumers embrace passionately. It was no accident that YouTube videos and Flickr photos appeared at the time of the iPad launch.

This popular view of brand management not only dominates business practice, but also teaching of the subject. The iPad story will be told and re-told as it migrates from MacRumor to the lecture theatres of business schools around the globe. The iPad provides a script for business school instruction. Marcoms are both channels of communication and the subject matter, the

story and the narrative of communication. In doing so, the emphasis shifts from the iPad itself – from the facts of its screen size and battery life – to the re-telling of a quasi-evangelical launch event presided over by a semi-mythological CEO. This verges on theatre. No, this is theatre. It is a sure way to attract the attention and engage the minds of business students.

Through textbooks, the stories are told and perpetuated, refined and elaborated. Much of this re-telling of the story is a straightforward description. At a more sophisticated level, this re-telling is framed in the language of brands as cultural icons, whereby the immersion of the brand team (advertiser, agency, ...) in ‘populist worlds’ enables stories to be co-developed which have meaning for a brand’s publics (initially cultural insiders and lead users, then cultural followers).<sup>2</sup> Such stories are constructed around myths that address contradictions in society. These stories are not about concrete product attributes. It is the myth of Steve Jobs that reverberates through the re-telling of the story, not iPad price points, features and connections. This speaks to the contradiction that, while we demand more functionality from hi-tech gadgets, we also demand user friendliness and funky designs. Potentially, the iPad also speaks to deeper contradictions such as our desire to stay connected in an increasingly impersonal and alienating society. This is a creative haven – what better way to formulate creative advertising material than by shaping myths and exploring contradictions in society?

What we see here is an advertising-centric view of brand management – both in practice and through brand management thought and education.

## BEYOND THE ADVERTISING-CENTRIC VIEWPOINT

Marketing communications matter. The iPad launch built awareness for the brand – there

was considerable recall even before the product was on the shelves of electrical stores and this bodes well for subsequent recognition at the point of purchase. But, this advertising-centric view of brand management presents an incomplete picture. Worse, it may even present a distorted picture. Stories developed and perpetuated through marcoms have the capacity to place the brand in a mythological world; we know that myths can be very powerful, but we should remind ourselves that myths are inventions, imaginary and ultimately non-existent. Brand teams need to be cautious about believing their own myths. They cannot afford to ignore the sometimes harsh realities of having to meet value/volume sales targets, of achieving margins, of product innovation, of securing legal protection and so on. Apple may be iconic, but, like any other business, there are quarterly financial targets to achieve. The iPad is reliant on technical innovation – it would have been a non-starter without WiFi, Bluetooth, 3G or a similar connectivity technology. For eBooks to succeed, there must be technological innovation and access to content that is worth reading. All this needs to be part of the script for business school instruction – the instruction needs to extend beyond the popular advertising-centric viewpoint.

Demanded is a multi-disciplinary approach to brand management that does not deny the importance of marcoms, but which also takes heed of non-marcoms aspects of business: consumer psychology, consumer habit and routine, and social psychology; human resource management (HRM), organizational behaviour and employer branding; management and financial accounting, brand valuation and brand finance, brands on and off the balance sheet, and brands in the boardroom; intellectual property, trademarks, counterfeits and the legal aspects of branding; linguistics, signs, semiotics and symbolic meanings; graphic and product design; and

so on. By way of example, consider employer branding – it is a decade and a half since a number of trailblazing publications appeared, which picked up on trends already occurring in business practice,<sup>3</sup> but only in recent times can we say that employer branding has become a mainstream focus in marketing<sup>4</sup> and HRM.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, neither marketing nor HRM ‘own’ employer branding. Indeed, talk of ‘ownership’ is to miss the point. Owners possess. Whereas for successful employer branding, champions are needed – champions encourage, cajole and lead, and they may reside in either area or in a multi-disciplinary team. It is a similar message if we look at the interface of branding and finance,<sup>6</sup> or branding and trademark law,<sup>7</sup> or brand equity, trademarks and firm value<sup>8</sup> – in all these instances there has been a shift from discipline-specific to multi-disciplinary perspectives.

None of this is easy. To be effective, there needs to be coordination and integration across disciplines – not advertising *or* HRM, but the two disciplines working together. A multi-disciplinary approach, not a multiple discipline approach. Effective brand management should be seen as a silo spanning activity, in which managers are adept at making connections and linkages.<sup>9</sup> The success of iPad is as much about silo spanning across disciplines as it is about marcoms.

## DANGERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

A broader, multi-disciplinary approach holds a number of dangers: if brand management is seen as embracing everything, perhaps it becomes master of nothing; if it is subsumed within corporate management as a whole, perhaps it ceases to have any distinct identity of its own; if it is more strategic, perhaps this leaves a gap for operational specialists to enter and, in time, for them to control the territory of brand management. More specifically, is there a threat

here to advertising-centric marketers and agencies? Perhaps, but it need not be so. It should be possible for them to continue in their traditional role as conductors and orchestrators – *providing* they continue to earn the right to this role. To earn this right they will need vision to see the whole picture and exploit synergies, they will need greater mastery over a broader range of domains of knowledge, and they must be equipped with a wider set of skills than hitherto.

With imagination, dangers can be avoided and significant gains achieved. A multi-disciplinary approach should be seen as liberating and empowering for those actively engaged in brand management. It certainly lifts branding from the realm of ‘logos on business cards’ to address a range of strategic themes, while not ignoring the operational aspects of managing brands. Re-scoping the research agenda is another possibility. To a certain extent this is happening already, as we saw earlier with the examples of employer branding, brand finance and trademarks. Re-scoping curricula also needs to be considered. This means helping students of brand management to become boundary spanners. It means equipping them with skills and competencies that cut across traditional boundaries – for instance, showing them how to shift from a brand positioning statement (a staple of marketing courses) to the development of creative ideas and executions (which requires an advertising focus), to a much deeper consideration of graphic and product design (the traditional realm of design consultancies), to a thorough examination of name/logo/shape registration, protection and non-infringement (which puts the spot-light on legal themes), and so forth. This will not be easy for educators because it requires them to embrace practice-based learning, field-work, team-teaching and multi-disciplinary modules – none of which sits comfortably with the disciplinary silos and funding

models that persist in many educational institutions.<sup>10</sup>

Returning to the example with which we started, the communications razzmatazz of the hyped-up launch remains a central component of the iPad story. Myth making is also central to the story of this brand, as it was previously for Apple, Mac, iPad and iTunes. But, in practice, the management of brands must operate across a broader platform, where external communications align with internal communications, where external brand promises to consumers align with internal brand promises to employees, where consumer-oriented myths align with employee-oriented myths, where advertising scripts align with design elements and where all of this makes a difference in terms of brand performance – value/volume sales, premium pricing, healthy margins, competitive strength and so on. Ultimately, the iPad is not simply about an attention-getting launch, it is about how this product, and the customer franchise who buy and use the product, strengthens firm value for Apple Inc. That requires multi-disciplinary thinking, practice and education.

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

(1) Apple and iPad are ranked numbers 1 and 2, respectively, on the Lovemarks Technology list and

numbers 4 and 11, respectively, on the Lovemarks Master list (as of 1 March 2010), see <http://www.lovemarks.com>.

- (2) Holt, D.B. (2004) *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding*. Harvard, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- (3) Notably, Ambler, T. and Barrow, S. (1996) The employer brand. *Journal of Brand Management* 4(3): 185–206.
- (4) Moroko, L. and Uncles, M.D. (2010) Employer brands. In: M.D. Uncles (ed.) *Perspectives on Brand Management*. Melbourne: TUP, in press.
- (5) Edwards, M.R. (2010) An integrative review of employ branding and OB theory. *Personnel Review* 39(1): 5–23.
- (6) For example, Raggio, R.D. and Leone, R.P. (2009) Drivers of brand value, estimation of brand value in practice and use of brand valuation: Introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Brand Management* 17(1): 1–5.
- (7) For example, George, A. (2006) Brands<sup>TM</sup>: Interdisciplinary perspectives on trade marks and branding. *Journal of Brand Management* 13(3): 175–177.
- (8) See Krasnikov, A. Mishra, S. and Orozco, D. (2009) Evaluating the financial impact of branding using trademarks: A framework and empirical evidence. *Journal of Marketing* 73(6): 154–166.
- (9) Aaker, D. (2008) *Spanning Silos: The New CMO Imperative*. Harvard, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- (10) This echoes sentiments in Aaker,<sup>9</sup> especially Chapter 2, in which the necessity to upgrade the skills of marketing staff is discussed.

Mark D. Uncles  
Editorial Board

School of Marketing, Australian School of  
Business, Sydney, Australia  
E-mail: [m.uncles@unsw.edu.au](mailto:m.uncles@unsw.edu.au)