creating the unique of identity before the bra alycia perry with david wisnom III

# BEFORE THE BRAND

CREATING THE UNIQUE DNA
OF AN ENDURING BRAND IDENTITY

ALYCIA PERRY

with David Wisnom III

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# BEFORE THE BRAND

### **Dedication**

For all the people who create brands and keep their sense of humor.

### Acknowledgments from Alycia

My profound thanks to all the people in my life who enabled this book to be written including my family, friends, and spiritual kins of the 13th Moon Mystery School Kivas. My entrée into product development was thanks to a little company called DFS and particularly Ian Williams. My entrée into brand identity was thanks to Landor and particularly Jean-Marc Bara, Dave Hurlbert, Brett Mangels, Hayes Roth, and Lia Nikopoulou—all of whom I appreciate and admire and thank for believing in me. Love and thanks to my colleagues who let me bend their ears more often than not over the years as both colleagues and friends: Jeff Marcus, Mel Owen, Dean Fernandes, Cynthia Johnston, Tania Leach, Dave, and Lia. And of course special thanks to David Wisnom III for believing in the ability to do it all differently. Thank you, Fire Sparkles The Sky.

# **PREFACE**

My inspiration to write this book was largely a selfish one. Over the years I was increasingly surprised at how little information about the basics of brand identity is available to the business community. It seemed that because I am both a naming and brand identity consultant, education about the basics was much of my job, which frankly made much of the identity creation process more difficult and time-consuming to complete and implement. The fact that the media and many agencies themselves changed the definition of "branding" to mean advertising, marketing, P.R., and everything else related to brand building made the task all the more challenging. I felt frustration more often than not

#### **PREFACE**

that no one could say the words *brand* or *branding* and mean the same thing.

Which brings us to the purpose of this book: to identify and clarify the basics of brand identity. Before the Brand is written about what comprises a brand identity and provides an overview of how to create an effective and enduring identity before the identity is built via advertising, P.R., marketing, etc. Whether managers and executives take on this task in-house or look to outside consultants to create or redefine an identity, the contents herein provide a primer of brand identity knowledge and process. It's my hope that managers and executives benefit from the knowledge so that stronger and more relevant identities are created and built over time. Therefore, we all win.

Alycia Perry

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brand = a partialar type or kind of sth.



# **IDENTITY ABCs**

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, artisans marked walls and wares to establish who owned or made something. The walls of the Lascaux caves in southern France contain not only painted bison but also handprints—a form of ownership marking. It's believed that these handprints date to around 15,000 B.C. The ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and Chinese used seals to mark pottery and other wares to indicate both ownership and quality. If people loved the item, they knew who to praise and buy from in the future. And if there was a problem, they also knew who was responsible. Somewhere along the way, governments decided these markings were a very good thing to

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have on products—not so much because they were champions of consumer knowledge but because it was much easier to collect taxes when products were marked. In 1266, England passed the Bakers Marking Law, which required stamps or pinpricks on loaves of bread to indicate origin. Spirit makers marked their oak barrels of scotch whiskey with a hot iron symbol to indicate the liquor's origins. Yes, it was nice to know which distillery had produced the whiskey, but in truth customs and excises would have it no other way. These markings are some of the first modern occurrences of the commercial brand.

Fast-forward a few centuries and we find ourselves in an age inundated by brands. No longer is a brand merely a burnt-iron mark of origin or pinpricks on a loaf of bread. It has a name, subnames, color, graphic design, sound, vocabulary, and experience. It has its own identity. No longer is the brand seen only in warehouses or store shelves. It's sent out by satellite, network servers, and printing empires to audiences around the world. The identity acquires an animated life to become a three-dimensional image in the consumer's mind.

What is a brand? A brand is a promise of a relationship and a guarantee of quality. It establishes a relationship between a company and its audiences. A strong brand can and will

#### IDENTITY ABCs

- Differentiate
- Create a preference
- Command a premium

A strong brand is the badge, emblem, and global symbol that can bestow credibility and attract instant attention in a new country, category, or industry. It's a powerful way to stand out by being relevant to target audiences and different from the competition. (Please note we stated relevant, then different—and not the other way around.) A brand can be a company, a product, or a service. And since the onset of the high-tech interactive age, it can also be an underlying technology or even a conference.

A brand is all-encompassing. Much like a person, a brand has a fundamental identity, a projected image, perceptions about it held by others, and relationships to parents, siblings, and those we want to get to know and impress.

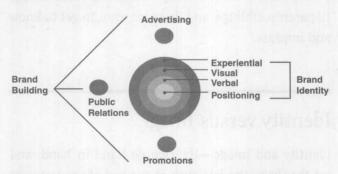
# Identity versus Image

Identity and image—the two go hand in hand, and yet thanks to the late rush at the end of the last century, the two terms are completely misused and

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misunderstood. Whether it's identity, image, brand, brand building, or another "brand" variation, a new generation of journalists, agencies, and consultants have used these terms to mean just about anything and everything.

Part of the present dilemma is human nature. As consumers, we often think of brands as synonymous with the name of that company. Think of Nike, Apple, or Microsoft. These brands evoke a series of thoughts, images, and perceptions that come through our conscious thoughts as one collective impression. It's often difficult to separate a name from its visual identity or from the experience of that particular brand. Nike becomes synonymous with the Nike "Swoosh" and the company's high-tech retail stores, Apple with its once-bit apple and avant-garde computers.



**Figure 1–1.** The relationship of brand identity and brand building.

#### IDENTITY ABCs

For many years, branding simply meant identity. Contrary to what many journalists, agencies, and consultants say, branding does not encompass everything from a name to a banner ad to the kitchen sink. There really and truly is a difference between brand identity and brand building. If you take away one thing from this book, remember this: Without a strong identity, image is nothing. (See Figure 1–1.)

### **Brand Identity**

Think of a brand's identity like that of a person. Initially, a child's identity is made up of a core essence, personality traits, physical traits, a name, and eventually a basic vocabulary. The identity eventually matures with age. Friends and relationships change, interests change slightly or altogether, vocabularies increase, and sometimes even body size and eye and hair color are changed to create a new fundamental look. These changes may range from subtle to radical.

Simply defined, identity is made up of the controllable elements of a company, product, or service brand, such as the core essence, positioning, brand name, tag line, logo, messaging, and experience. These are the fundamental elements that are established to

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stand the course of years, not just the quarterly ad cycle. We say *controllable elements* because any of these elements can be modified at any given point. A company has greater control over creating and finetuning the identity, than over creating or changing an image.

## Brand Building

Once the identity is created, the company attempts to build the brand through marketing-related activities, such as advertising, public relations, and promotions, in order to capture the attention of intended audiences. In other words the company begins to establish the brand identity in the minds of consumers before consumers have direct experience with the brand itself.

If an identity is established before the brand is built, the brand-building effectiveness becomes much more targeted and efficient. With an actual identity in place, it is much easier to articulate the right message to intended audiences and allows for a strong, consistent, relevant, and differentiated brand. Why? Because the image, once created, is subject to target audiences' perceptions. And perceptions, as we all know, are highly subjective and erratic. This is the

#### IDENTITY ABCs

point at which companies lose direct control of their brand—once the brand has entered the intended consumer's experience and mind.

### **Brand Image**

If an identity is the fundamental state of being, then image is the state of perception. The brand image is the collection of largely uncontrollable perceptions of that brand as strengths and weaknesses, positives and negatives. These perceptions are created over time through direct and indirect experiences with the brand. Do you like the name? What do you think of the logo? Has your experience at a store, at a Web site, or with a customer service representative been pleasant and beneficial, your worst nightmare, or somewhere in between? What are your perceptions of the brand based on something you read in the *Wall Street Journal* or *Fast Company*, or even *Consumer Reports*?

Any spin doctor will tell you that an image can be masterfully created and deployed, but it is how the image is received and perceived that ultimately determines its final impact. In other words, the audience's perceptions solidify the brand's image. As perceptions fluctuate and change, so does the image.