

Indelible Branding



How do you define extreme brand loyalty? There's one unusual way of measuring a brand's popularity that might take even the savviest marketers by surprise.

My latest book, "BRAND Sense," includes the most extensive branding research study ever. Conducted by research institute Millward Brown and 600 researchers across 13 countries, it sought to define brand loyalty. How is brand loyalty manifested, and how are these various manifestations any measure of comparative brand loyalty? Would anyone, for example, be prepared to tattoo a brand's logo onto his arm -- permanently?

Asking consumers what brands they would be prepared to indelibly tattoo on their body takes you to the cutting edge of powerful branding. It points to a new way to demonstrate extreme brand loyalty. Astonishingly, 18.9 percent of respondents

declared their willingness to be tattooed with their favorite brand's logo. The most-favored brand was Harley-Davidson. Disney followed with 14.8 percent, Coca-Cola with 7.7 percent.

The fourth brand was the most surprising: Google. In just seven years, the global search engine has captured the hearts of 6.6 percent of consumers who would seriously consider getting a Google tattoo. Microsoft didn't make the list. Neither did eBay, Hotmail, or any other online brand. Why was Google the only online brand to rate in this extreme test of consumer loyalty?

In my travels, I have the opportunity to ask thousands of executives this question: Do you feel a special relationship with Google? They do. The reasons why could be useful to marketers:

- **Google: by the people, for the people.** We all feel we own a small

stake in Google, emotionally and perhaps even financially. Google doesn't assume a "them versus us" relationship in its dealings with users. It's owned by the people, not by the company itself. Not many consumers would say the same of Microsoft, for example. Ownership may have something to do with the empathy Google inspires.

In contrast, you face a barrier every time you call a telecommunications provider. You deal with an operator to whom you mean nothing. Local banks no longer recognizes individuals



nor do insurance companies. These corporations have only one thing on the agenda: to refute any claim you might make against them.

On the other hand, most of us feel we disc-overed Google on our own. Despite its enormous growth and turnover, we somehow feel Google stands as David against the Goliaths of Microsoft or Yahoo! The IPO underscored that perception. "Public ownership" is frequently



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reflected in Google's habit of sharing its latest inventions with the public in its beta area. There are (almost) no secrets here: Google has made the world its research and development (R&D) lab rather than innovate in secret.

- **The opinion-nated search engine.**

Google also shares its opinions, a quality successful branding is increasingly adopting. The days of fence-sitting and bland responses are over for brands. We expect brands to exhibit opinions and values. Undoubtedly, Google has displayed its colors through statements and actions regarding political and human rights issues.

- **Ongoing inventiveness.** Google manages to

underpromise and overdeliver. It constantly surprises me with its ongoing inventiveness. Its mission is consistent: to help users make efficient that way until it can ensure the product isn't substandard when it finally leaves quality control.

- **Balance between editorial and comm.-ercial.** Google has stuck to its word not to become too commercial while maintaining a clear path for ads. Google achieves an important balance between editorial and commercial message content.

Brands must secure substantially stronger consumer ownership than ever before. Develop that sense of ownership by constantly engaging users in every process -- before, during, and after the sale. The days of

corporate obfuscation and secrecy are over. Everything you do, from R&D to site design details, must reflect the brand's core values. Involve consumers in the entire development process. Invite them into the idea-generation process, and let them observe the testing process. Most important, maintain an unswerving commitment to this mantra: underpromise and overdeliver. That way, consumers will always sympathise with the brand. If consumers have been with you along the way, they're unlikely to complain about a product when it's finally released. After all, they'll have tested it for you. Getting your brand tattooed onto the collective arms of the world's population is not, of course, the aim. But it's a metaphor



worth remembering for your real goal: to build strong brand loyalty. If you do notice your brand tattooed on someone, you'll know you're on target.

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