

The Personal Face of Brands

BRAND

Yesterday I happened to pass an elderly couple whose car broke down halfway up a hill. Their only choice was to push the car uphill so that they could move it out of the rush-hour traffic. But, just behind the unfortunate couple's car were two vans parked on the side of the road. One was a Coca-Cola van and the other belonged to a local plumber. Both drivers helped push the car out of the flow of traffic. It was a lucky break for the elderly couple and not a bad score for the brands these guys represent. Both of them were wearing company shirts.

What an example of good branding!

Every aspect of your brand's identity, including your employees' behavior -- at work, on the way to or from work, or even outside of business hours - has the potential to build or damage your brand. The question is, how do you control and leverage these elements?

The balance is tricky and vulnerable to subjective perception. An action intended in good faith can so often backfire. A recent example was given to us by Australia's largest bank, the National Australia Bank (NAB). Following devastating bushfires in Canberra, Australia's national capital, the NAB announced it would donate money to support the more than 500 families who'd lost their

homes overnight. Now, the NAB has earned the distinction, well known in Australia, of being the most profitable bank in the world. It made several billion U.S. dollars last year. The bank's munificent contribution to the bushfire victims, whose damages add up to nearly a quarter of a billion dollars, was just \$50,000!

How do you think this gesture came across? Would you say it helped build the NAB brand? Or might it have done some damage? Perhaps the latter.

But another brand, Carl Zeiss, the world's largest lens maker, made another type of offer to flood disaster victims in the eastern part of Germany. Carl Zeiss offered to replace any Zeiss equipment -- yes, any -- that had been damaged by the floods, even Mr. Smith's 80-year-old binoculars, no questions asked.

How would you say this influenced consumer perception of the brand?

Building brands is about so much more than controlling colors, fonts, the design of your Web site, and the language of your press releases. It encompasses everything that affects the emotional tie between your brand and its customers. All experience to date shows time and again the most effective way to build brands is to combine traditional communication

channels with alternative forms of communication. The latter is exemplified in the Carl Zeiss story.

One of the many delegates participating at my BRAND sense Symposium told me this amazing story. When he purchased a barbecue grill for his good friend visiting from overseas he encountered a problem. The friend didn't want the grill - arguing that their friendship was enough - no gift was needed. Despite having spent a full day gathering the correct bits and pieces for the grill he now had to return it to the store. He feared that this would be fraught with difficulty. Much to his surprise, the person behind the counter refunded the money without any discussion. And when glancing at refund receipt he noticed they'd given him an extra \$30. When he pointed this out, they explained that this was compensation for the time and effort he'd put in to customizing the grill. Thus when they resold the barbecue, it would make the next customer's life easier!

Just imagine a company that includes in its employee policy a statement that declares an expectation that each



employee do at least one good thing for their fellow citizens every week either on or off duty. Would it cost a fortune? Probably not. But it would likely generate some fascinating brand stories.

The more personal stories that are associated with your brand, the more alive your brand becomes. Brands are almost like people: They reflect opinions, have their individual and often distinctive appearances, possess a unique tone of voice, and express a point of view on life. Personal ties with your brand are the foundation of loyal relationships between you and your customers. And isn't that what effective branding is all about?

Further Information

For more information about Martin Lindstrom, [click here](#).

To start receiving Martin Lindstrom's complimentary online BRAND magazine, [click here](#).

For more information about Martin Lindstrom's Books and DVD's, [click here](#).