

# Branding 2.0

How the internet is changing consumer expectations and setting new standards for branding.

Such is its increased functionality over the first wave of websites that geeks and commentators talk about Internet 2.0 to make the distinction between now and then. Since the launch of the World Wide Web in around 1994, a vast range of commonly held assumptions have been swept aside on a tsunami of technological innovation. This brave new world calls for a brave new approach to branding, and to borrow the software engineer's terminology, perhaps it's time to upgrade to Branding 2.0 – a new approach to branding for a digital, integrated age.

## Wave of innovation

The phrase “age of unprecedented technological change” is probably the most overused, and therefore preceded phrase we could use to describe the current wave of innovation sweeping the globe. To cut a long, under-researched swathe through history, the current “age of unprecedented technological change” probably compares to the Industrial Revolution, the introduction of the printing press and the Roman Conquests.

Each time there was a huge impact on society and civilization and a change in media that led to a radically changed approach to advertising and marketing – this age is no different.

There is now a whole generation of children growing up who never knew a time when it wasn't possible to go online and book tickets, plan holidays, find films, send emails and research the entire repository of human knowledge. Just as my own 40 something generation grew up with the television and the telephone, the next generation will quickly adapt to Internet 2.0, 3.0 and beyond.

## Where we're heading

To know where the internet is going, we have to understand the assumptions made by the generation who have grown up with it. These assumptions are a lot easier to tap into than you might expect, after all most of the target audience are viewable in videos, blogs, facebook, and a million and one other forms of “user-generated-content.”

So what can we learn from the new consumer's assumptions? And what should strategies should brands adopt to become Branding 2.0 compliant?

### Assumption 1): I will become famous

The brands that don't exist yet aren't coming soon to a television near you. Bands like Arctic Monkey's were famously launched

on MySpace and, as the global agenda gathers speed, you can expect new brands to come from unexpected places building on a wave of common interest and shared enthusiasm. While TV advertising has been quick to jump on the YouTube phenomena, the really successful new brands are still being conceived and adopted by evangelizing consumers. Television cannot match the passion, interaction, size, scale and diversity of the internet audience.

During the Irish Potato Famine in the 1840s, the mortality rate in county Mayo was around 30% but communication of the starving Irishmen's plight was limited to questions in the House of Commons. Now that pictures can roll around the world in less time than it takes to prepare a news bulletin, we have global compassion and can now talk about a global attention span which is forever shrinking. Because of this shrinking global attention span, the young consumers of today are expecting their nanosecond of fame any time soon.

Branding 2.0 means giving your consumers a taste of fame. Whether it be a chance for their photo to appear on packaging as run by McDonalds, or a competition to devise a Dorito's Superbowl commercial. It's no longer enough to develop just one message and pump it out as often as possible. The message needs multiple variations, high-tech and low-tech, serious and spoof, familiar and surreal, to capture the moment in as many ways as possible for the ravenously global attention span.

**Assumption 2):** the more I buy, the better it gets

We talk about surfing the internet because the wave of global attention moves quickly, washing through whichever conduit offers the least resistance. Brands like Ebay, Google, Myspace and Youtube, stay out of the way of their consumers, offering them a repository of data and leveraging that data to make themselves more useful.

Consumer based shopping sites like Amazon have given consumers an understanding of the value of their choices. The compact between Amazon and its customers is that the more people buying from Amazon, the better the aggregated purchase information and the better place to shop Amazon becomes. Just like a Chanel buyer enters into a pact with the brand by proudly displaying the logo, effectively paying to endorse the brand, brands need to let



consumers share their passion, putting them clearly on the product and packaging.

A good example is M&M's facility that allows their consumers

to customize their candy. Simply go on line, type the message you want printed and order your favorite candy in your favorite color with your own name or anything else you want printed on it. The pop diva's legendary back stage rider of a bowl of only blue M&M's need no longer conjure up nightmares for their terrified PA.

Branding 2.0 means providing a way for your consumers to relate and share their pride. Buyer's remorse – the fear that you may have spent too much on the wrong thing, needs to give way to buyer's pride. The more this pride can be shared and fed, the better. Put the “bling” in your brand and let consumers flaunt it.

**Assumption 3):** The truth is out there

Just as the early internet-literate X-Philes were free to obsess about Mulder and Scully's unresolved sexual tension (UST), so today's consumers can obsess about a brand's USP, expressing doubts, researching reality, testing facts, showing video of the product not working or, as in the case of Somerfield Employees, uploading videos of them using pallet lifters to “skateboard” down a multi-story carpark. It only takes one high-profile anonymous blog or video about how the company abuses its employees, consumers or product and the brand is broken.

Al Gore's envirodocumentary “An Inconvenient Truth” is an apt title for the change in the distribution of knowledge since the Internet's introduction. The democratization of information means that brands have a delicate balancing act to



manage while bridging the gap between aspiration and reality.

Branding 2.0 means that brands have to understand that a brand's emotional impact is a product of its history, quality, reputation, impressions and associations. The sum total is a geometric progression rather than an arithmetic one so if you accidentally dial one of your brand values to zero the others lose all value. Just look at Arthur Anderson who put ethical behavior low down on their list of priorities during the Enron scandal. Suddenly employees and customers lost faith was converted into hard fact and the brand became worthless.

The hard fact is that brands now have to own their narrative or be owned by it. That means no ducking out of difficult consumer conversations because silence is tantamount to ignorance. If you can't face the issue then your brand is seen as paralyzed by fear. Take Bernard Matthews during the recent bird flu storm. There was no hiding place for Bernard, the forums buzzing with shared concern weren't interested in corporate "styling" out of the truth.

**Assumption 4):** Always available, always now

The internet is the ultimate service business. There's no "talk to the hand" option for today's brands. If you can't be reached on the phone, there's the website, a text, a blog, a forum. There's no longer an acceptable excuse to keep a consumer waiting for a response. The busy signal has made way for voicemail and voicemail has made way for press 1 for this, 2 for that and 3 for the other – or look at our website.

This "always on" culture has been extended to consumer expectations about products too. Forcing consumers to wait is only acceptable if it is done on purpose to create brand noise and heighten consumer expectation.

The recently announced launch of Guinness flavored Marmite for example is an unholy alliance straight out of the branding 2.0 textbook. A new innovation with strictly limited distribution creates newsworthy buzz and consumer expectation. Those queues round the block to get hold of a jar are just as important as any sales bump.

H&M have been achieving the same thing through cleverly licensing exclusive fashion designers and restricting the amount of product available. So while it may seem strange to talk about limited supply in a chapter about permanent availability it's the exception that proves the rule. No-one's going to admire your brand for being inefficient or slow to take an opportunity unless it's done on purpose.

Branding 2.0 means creating and managing a continually-evolving, customized product or service that addresses clients' needs responsively and efficiently through a

wide range of joined up mediums.

**Assumption 5):** the future is archived

If you store every conversation you will ever have and every picture you will ever take, you will need a disc that can take a terabyte of data. The cost of a disc capable of holding a terabyte at the time of writing is around £480.

Fast forward 30 years. Fond memories of your loved ones no longer gather dust on the mantelpiece, instead your television screen has a searchable family tree complete with video and password controlled archive. Want to know the teenage memories of your late uncle? Tap into his email archive and see his annotated photo album in real time. There are already websites of condolence, how many of these are being built even now?

As Douglas Copeland's Microserfs pointed out, we've reached the point where there is more knowledge available in archives than there is in real people's heads, and the next generation have grown up with this fact. Provided you know the right question, anything is findable.

Information, even the newest information, is no longer enough. Brands need to provoke questions, and provide a forum for finding new answers. This means relinquishing control over the answer and owning the conversation. Forums, Blogs, and Social Networking websites are the medium of choice for an audience aware that everything they say is being recorded for posterity.

A brand launching today needs to provoke the conversation that makes it necessary and own the social issue. Dove's use of real people is a great example of a brand taking hold of the agenda to suggest its own reason for being. Bisto's launch of a campaign based around "our night" and getting families to pledge to eat together puts the brand at the heart of the debate about families no longer sitting down to dinner – it's also a great way to sell more gravy.

Branding 2.0 means managing conversations not answering questions.

**Assumption 6):** there's another one born every minute

The owners of You Tube launched their brand when they couldn't find anywhere to share a video of a dinner party. The owners of Hot or Not launched theirs because they couldn't decide if one of the girls they'd seen was really a perfect 10. According to Eric Schmidt of Google, the internet was around 5 million terabytes of data in 2005. To make a conservative estimate, there are something like 1.7 million new internet brands being launched every year. By the law of averages, some of these are going to be the next big winners of the internet lottery, achieving global status and multimillion price tags and, in the process, changing society.

To keep pace with these overnight

successes, established brands need to adopt a twin and contradictory approach. On the one hand, brands need to ensure that they're history is clearly documented and the past cannot be challenged or

undermined, while at the same time brands need to search for opportunities to be disruptive, challenging the status quo and continually looking for new opportunities to surprise. This powerful combination of history and disruption explains the success of luxury fashion brands like Louis Vuitton – combining the dramatic flair of fashionable innovation with deep rooted quality standards and values. The best example of this is the Louis Vuitton Ipod holder that costs around 5 times as much as the technology it is supposed to be protecting.

Branding 2.0 means searching for new opportunities, while acting as a guardian of the past.

### Summary

When they were filming the original Bewitched it would have taken all the computer hardware on the planet to computer generate the lovely Samantha's nose twitch. Today, it could be done with a basic PC and around £300 worth of software. Technology doesn't change society, however. Society changes society and the introduction of new technology changes how we communicate and what we expect by way of service.

Branding 2.0 means understanding that consumers expectations and needs have moved on. The absence of a website that addresses customer's needs is no longer acceptable for a 21st century brand.

On top of a website, Branding 2.0 teaches us to:

1. Make your consumers famous
2. Let consumers show pride for buying from you
3. Tell the truth and own your narrative
4. Offer a customized approach with maximum service at each level
5. Provide a forum for conversation about your brand
6. Protect the past and watch for opportunities to disrupt the present

Branding 2.0 means accepting that no matter how large your marketing budget, you can no longer dictate to consumers about what they want or when. Failure to upgrade to Branding 2.0 may lead to your company becoming incompatible with its customers and ultimately, redundancy. ■



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