Why Character is a Branding Essential

Author : Ayesha Mathews-Wadhwa

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Russel Davies, a leading ad executive from the UK, is quoted as saying that a **brand**'s first job is to be interesting. While that is true, there is more than one objective when it comes to building a **brand**. I contend that **brand**s also must *deliver* on their promises.

We've seen plenty examples of bad **branding**, but a **brand** approach doesn't have to be poor for the outcome to be weak. Even great **branding** can lead to a less-than-wonderful outcome if the **brand** doesn't convey what it has to offer.

I'm talking about **brand**s like **Vaseline**, **Xerox** and **Kleenex**. In these cases, the **brand** may have hit the jackpot because people say things like "pass the **Kleenex**" instead of "pass the tissues." That's **brand** recognition, right? But it's also *brand ubiquity*. When a **brand** gets to the point of being omnipresent, it kind of fades into the background. Though **Xerox** and **Kleenex** both made the Forbes list of top **brand**s last year, these **brand**s do very little to stand out. They have very little *character*.

Making the case for character

When a **brand** faces ubiquity, that means it is vital more than ever to inject some personality into the platform. Between logos, taglines and color palettes, companies invest a lot in their **brand**s, yet many ignore the quality of character. That charisma is precisely what transforms a **brand** into an icon.

In many ways, the name **Xerox** is very popular and everyone knows what a "**Xerox** machine" is—even if it is, in fact, a Canon. On the flip side, though, no one knows what the character is of the **Xerox brand**, it's just become another name for copy machine! The **brand** doesn't deliver—how can it effectively compete in today's crowded marketplace?

Beyond unique

How do **brand**s avoid landing in the black hole of ubiquity? They have to differentiate themselves and show how they deliver. We wouldn't dare confuse an **Apple** with a computer because **Apple** computers stand in a league of their own for performance and aesthetics—they are not necessarily better than other products, but they do have their own edge. No one ever

says, "I have a Mac" when in fact they have a PC. You expect a superior **Apple** product that offers innovative features—and you get it. (**Apple** topped Forbes list of World's Most Powerful **Brand**s in 2012…it's so easy to reference this particular **brand** because it's a glowing example of good **branding**.)

Even when you go to [Best Buy](#) to shop for an **Apple** product, the **brand** has differentiated itself with spacious, modern sleek display areas—while the rest of the computers are lumped together on standard store shelves. It shows how it delivers something special. You step inside a world of **Apple**, even though you can just as quickly step back out into an aisle in the store. This is just one way that **Apple** stands out and has infused character into its **brand**. That personality is more than just an appearance; it's an experience.

Dig deeper—and ask more of your brand—to build character

How can you build character, or **brand** personality? It involves more than just visual appeal, it requires thinking about [human characteristics](#). Will your **brand** be a Puffs, which is known for soft-as-a-cloud texture and beyond-soothing moisture that really comforts congested consumers, or will it be a **Kleenex** that simply lets them blow their noses?

Some questions **brand**s need to ask themselves in order to identify and formulate their personalities include:

- What do you want your audience to see or feel when they connect with your **brand**?
- If your **brand** were a car/magazine/public personality/music genre, what would it be?
- What colors, textures and visual components do you connect strongly with when you think of your **brand**?
- What is your **brand**'s sweet spot?
- What are some of the words that come to mind when people think/ see your **brand**?

And for fun, does your **brand** pass this [personality test](#)?

Think about **brand**s that have an edge, then pinpoint the characteristics of that personality. I like how Open Sky's model manages to stay fresh in a world of e-commerce, or how Nike inspires us go be adventurous—even if we don't buy their sneakers.

How does your **brand** connect with consumers in a way that ensures it will never fade into gray? What can it do to add another layer of color?