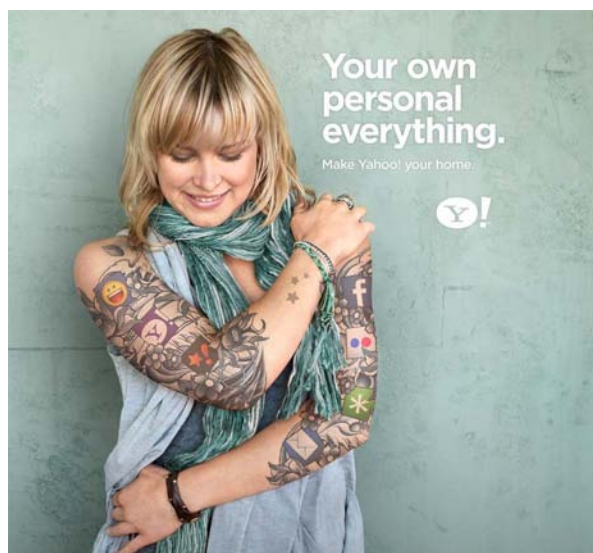


Lovemarks: Engagement Gets Intimate



By Richard Kern

Making an emotional connection with customers and employees is what it's all about these days. Here's a unique and affordable way to take those first, small steps...



Ever since the first crazed fan had the name and logo of his favorite rock band or sports team proudly and prominently tattooed on his arm, the lines between corporate culture, entertainment and consumerism have grown increasingly blurred.

At the heart of this phenomenon is something most businesses crave: Engagement – the kind of fervent, emotional involvement that drives grown men to wear their heart on their sleeve (or the Oakland Raiders logo on their arm, as the case may be).

Richard Young, Founder of the financial services and investment advisory firm Young Research & Publishing, says that motorcycle-maker Harley-Davidson has taught him an important lesson about making an emotional connection: “At the annual Harley-Davidson rally in Sturgis, SD,” he says, “the biggest draw is the tattoo competition, where the Harley logo is permanently emblazoned on every conceivable body part. This, my friend, is loyalty.”

The same goes for Apple Computer loyalists who get inked with the company's multi-hued apple logo, Nike sales reps who regularly opt to get tattoos of the famed “swoosh” and Campagnolo enthusiasts who are similarly devoted to the Italian bicycle parts maker. A recent Yahoo ad features a blonde woman with a tattoo of the company's purple “Y” logo, as well as other familiar Yahoo icons. Rapper Xzibit sports a tattoo of the Hennessy logo (his favorite cognac), but he notes that “[Hennessy] don't pay me s__t. I just love the product.”

THE LOVE/RESPECT AXIS

Kevin Roberts understands. He's the CEO Worldwide of ad agency giant Saatchi & Saatchi, as well as the author of the business best-seller, *Lovemarks – The Future Beyond Brands*. What exactly are Lovemarks? “They're the charismatic brands that people love and fiercely protect,” he explains. “They connect with consumers the way brands can't and inspire loyalty beyond reason. Lovemarks are able to generate emotions among consumers, thereby influencing their choices.”

continued on page 56

continued from page 55

Makes sense. But exactly how do you achieve that emotional connection? First, says Roberts, you need the trust and respect of your audience. “We’ve made huge investments in performance, innovation, quality, trust and all the rest for decades,” he notes. “And we would all agree that we made fantastic progress. But in the twenty-first century, great performance is no more than what consumers expect and demand. Cars start first time, the fries are always crisp and the dishes shine. Today, everyone has to earn respect just to stay in the game.”

So you start with respect as your baseline. Then you need to add love. This is a critical element of the Lovemarks hypothesis – what Roberts calls the “Love/Respect Axis.”

“Your products have to be respected first. They can’t be fake or insincere or just plain cheap and nasty,” notes *Financial Times* Editor Stefan Stern, who is well-acquainted with Roberts’ work, having reviewed his book and written extensively on branding and other marketing topics. “Secretly, privately, we all know why we stick to our favorite cities, consumer goods, restaurants, bars,” he says. “We go back because we love them. We just may not always discuss this in emotional terms.”

THE HEART, NOT THE HEAD

If Roberts’ more emotional approach to branding makes sense to you, there are three key components that must be present in order to lay the groundwork for creating a Lovemark – Mystery, Sensuality and Intimacy.

“A Lovemark can be an object, a product, an experience, a person, a company, even a country – just about anything that can generate emotional heat,” says Roberts. “[And] it’s true that some products and services are better or faster conductors of emotional heat than others. Compare a movie company with a banking corporation. Or a nightclub with a copper mine. A Lovemark defines itself by its emotional connectivity. Mention it and you get an emotional jolt. This translates into huge market advantage. If you have to measure by percentages you can. But the value will shift according to market, competition and the unique emotional heat engendered by each Lovemark.”

Bottom line: It’s about the heart, not the head. And remember that companies don’t bestow Lovemark status. It can only come from your customers and/or employees.

LOVEMARKS BY ASSOCIATION

Speaking of which, there’s a section on the Lovemarks website (www.lovemarks.com) where people can nominate their favorite brands. Here you’ll find the expected – Apple computers, Harley-Davidson, IKEA and Starbucks – as well as a number of companies that are well-known in the incentive/motivation industry: Coleman, Canon, Bath & Body Works, Home Depot, FujiFilm, Nikon, Cuisinart, Le Creuset, TUMI, Lacoste, Swarovski, TJMaxx and Sony, among others.

Wouldn’t it be great if your company’s products or services showed up on a list like this? To have your customers and employees so passionately connected to your brand that they gush

about you in a public forum, using words like “obsessed,” “flawless,” “beautiful,” “mysterious,” “power,” “freedom,” “fantasy,” “adoration,” “warm,” “comforting,” “touchstone” and “sexy”?

It’s not easy, of course. The abovementioned companies spent years building respect and trust. Adding the love. Mixing in just the right amount of mystery, sensuality and intimacy. It required a huge investment of time and effort; a major strategic undertaking. Making an emotional connection. But if you believe in the power of Lovemarks, you need to commit to spending the months and years it’ll take to make it happen.

Or do you?

There is a way to shorten the process – to give your brand the kind of caché that Lovemarks enjoy without waiting for the groundswell to build. Naturally, you still want to reposition your products and services to make them more mysterious, sensual and intimate – hence, more loveable – but in the interim you can also be racking up Lovemark Points by associating yourself with certain passion-inducing brands.

We all know that “trophy value” and “brand recognition” are two of the main reasons that incentive travel and merchandise work so well as motivational tools. Companies that associate themselves with the quality and caché that certain brands carry position themselves as a quality employer – one that understands the power, passion and persuasiveness of such products.

So here’s what you do: Attach your company’s name to some of these vaunted brands – either by using them as incentives and rewards or by actually putting your logo or message on their product – allowing you to bask in the reflected glory of their “Lovemarkishness.”

And it doesn’t require a major investment, either – good news in today’s leaner and meaner economic climate. Here are a couple of examples of how you can piggyback on highly-regarded brands by using them as incentives, rewards, or promotional products – where you go from there is up to you.

THE COLOR OF QUALITY

This is a natural. Let’s start with brand recognition. According to Victorinox’s VP of Marketing, more than 90% of consumers nationwide know the Swiss Army name. Then there’s the product itself.

“My Swiss Army knife, watch and travel gear are abiding reminders of things well designed and well made,” notes a dedicated fan. Aficionados regularly use words like “self-sufficiency,” “self-reliance” and “independence” to describe this near-legendary product. But that’s only one side of the emotional coin. The other is the distinctive look and feel of a Swiss Army Knife – often described as elegant and sleek – a design so unique it’s in the Museum of Modern Art’s permanent collection. Says one loyal knife-lover: “I like to have that unmistakable rich red color somewhere with me at all times. It’s the color of quality, durability,

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continued on page 58

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continued from page 56

efficiency, self-reliance.”
The color of quality.
Now that’s an emotional connection.

Victorinox has a section on its website dedicated to telling the stories of people and their Swiss Army Knives – tales of adversity and heroism that provide an emotional charge and connection, putting a human face on what would otherwise be a cold steel tool.

This is where Victorinox really separates itself from the pack – understanding that it’s not just about quality and functionality. The company’s core philosophy reflects the personal involvement the product engenders, talking about “[giving] our lives deeper meaning and [adding] joy and satisfaction to our work.” Bottom line: These guys get it.

A TRUE TALISMAN

Smooth. Sexy. Seductive. That’s how one Zippo fan describes the infamous lighter, adding that “it’s distinctive and so sensual.” Another calls it “a sign of independence and masculinity.” Polar opposites, it would seem, but they have one thing in common: Both tap into emotions and feelings that transform the product into a true talisman – a physical representation of a mood or state of mind. Who could ask for more?

“People are passionate about the Zippo brand,” says the company’s National Promotional Products Manager. “There’s a real connection.” And keeping that connection front and center is one of Zippo’s key marketing tenets. The firm’s website has a separate section devoted to stories contributed by dedicated customers, thus reinforcing the personal connection and emotion that Lovemarks require.

Concerned that your company’s image doesn’t necessarily mesh with lighters? Relax. Zippo’s recent push to redefine itself as “selling flame” lets you tap into the Zippo name and brand recognition with their line of MPLs (multi-purpose lighters) aimed at the home and recreation crowds (think fireplaces, grills and candles). The firm has also made forays into cutlery (W.R. Case)



and fashion accessories (Zippo Fashion Italia), so there are plenty of ways to piggyback on the Zippo Lovemark.

CREATING ‘INSPIRATIONAL CONSUMERS’

In the 21st Century, the true power brokers won’t be the people who merely respect, trust and prefer certain products. The real power will lie with those who unabashedly love a brand, what Roberts and others call Inspirational Consumers – “the ones who hyperactively defend, promote and connect, as well as hold the brand accountable for creating a better world.”

In other words, Inspirational Consumers are people who can’t stop themselves from spreading the word,

sharing their emotional connection with a brand and trying to actively convert others. To succeed, companies need to locate these evangelical users and listen to what they have to say.

“Inspirational Consumers will lead business into the future,” predicts Roberts. “They will direct and correct the design, manufacturing, marketing and distribution process. They want to feel truly, madly,

deeply loved. And they want to share that world-changing feeling.”

If you think that sounds like true Engagement, you’re right.

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