

## BRANDS FOR LIFE

We choose **parts to play in our lives**  
according to our **blurred, longterm goals.**

**Brands** can help individuals to  
**strengthen their roles** and confirm  
that their **choices are the right** ones.

## Introduction

If you work with brands you probably want your brands to mean a lot to people, right? That is the principle of branding, to fill a purpose to people at the right moment so that you may attract and maintain your audience's attention and interest. But even though branding basically is about people it may seem like something else to people outside the business, since we talk so much about brands themselves and about models and cases. The fact that it is like this is not that strange, the subject branding originates from economics and marketing and these areas have always been keen on boxes and arrows. We deal with values that you can't touch and to the critics seem to be easy to reject as irrational and therefore irrelevant. If you can't touch it it does not exist and something that does not exist is not worth paying for. We are more or less forced to present branding as something static, to make those with strict economical eyes realize its economical value and defend an investment in branding. But the real strength of branding lies in its dynamic nature and when we accept that we also unleash its whole economical potential.

This paper is about to promote the behavioral science aspects of branding. It is a way to remind you about the only true asset we possess, namely the brains of our audience. We don't really own any brands - our audience do. Therefore is this paper going to be about the human beings and how brands fill a purpose in their lives. The following reasoning does not have its origin in any by me known behavioristic theory, its purpose is to put attention to the urgency in choosing a theory about our most important asset - the human being.

## Life Management

With a company you should have a clear idea about why it exists, you probably have a plan for how you will accomplish what you want and you have a management that is there to show you the way in the operational actions. One management theory after another tells you about possible routes of action and different ways to consider strategy. But what about ourselves? How do we go about to plan and govern our own way to manage our lives? There may be some people who has a very clear vision of what they want to become, but for most of us this road to happiness is more blurred. We rather have a hunch of where we are going, a sense of direction rather than a specific road we will go down. It seems like we early in our lives create a highway for ourselves that we think is going to take us approximately in the right direction. No matter how clear this plan

is to you we all lead ourselves according to some plan, our individual life management theory.

In what way you lead your life is probably caused by many different aspects, for example in which part of the world you were born and raised, who your parents are, which schools you have attended, which values you have been fed and to which degree you consider yourself able to navigate your life in the direction you want. Naturally, we also have our basic human needs that drive us (Maslow's ladder) and sometimes they make a mess of things. You are probably not even aware yourself what it is that rule your decisions but you do adjust and manage your life with some sense of direction, don't you? You choose a highway which you think is going to take you in your wished direction.

### Which role do you play?

No matter which highway you have chosen for yourself, you most probably have adjusted yourself accordingly to be the way you think will grant you the most success. Let us take an example, let us say you have a vague sense that you need to be respected. Further more you look upon money as a measure of success and you feel that responsibility towards other people is fulfilling. You also have an urge to contribute to mankind and you consider yourself to be someone who can do that. In that case, if you choose to become a doctor, as your vehicle on your highway, would not be too far stretched.

The business world is sometimes described as a theatre where each company should seek a scene to act on. Each company has an audience which it should try to entertain in different ways and with the ambition to become the main attraction in the play that is being given. It is the same thing with individuals, each individual plays his part in his life's theatre. When we have chosen our direction, our highway into the future, most of us adapt to play our part as well as we can. We become the person we think is required and expected. The doctor becomes a doctor.

But there is no manuscript in the theatre of life. There is no casting and you are forced to be your own director. What you have is rolemodels, other people who seem to have gone in the same direction as you are going, someone who has taken the same highway before. The problem is to find a rolemodel who has the same characteristics and experiences as you do, which of course is impossible since that person would then be in the same phase as you are and would not have come any further on his

highway than you have. Do you follow? In the end you are left out with your own compass which sometimes shows right and sometimes keeps spinning around as a real compass would do if you were on the North pole. How on earth are you then going to be able to orientate yourself?

Yet another problem is that the view is not very clear, your highway does not have any asphalt and it is not clearly defined. The future is so unknown to us that our highway seems to end somewhere at the horizon. We are simply forced to time limit our horizon. When you are a kid your horizon is to become a teenager, as a teenager your horizon is to become an adult and start to work. After that it seems like there is a horizon at 30 since a lot of people get into a personal crisis at that age, you simply have not planned for your life after 30. After 30 your ability to make plans follow a 10-year interval, with a following big or small crisis at every decade. It is not until you reach your golden age, when you feel that your highway is coming to an end, most of us feel more comfortable with ourselves and start to enjoy looking back at the highway we have taken.

### Why do you play your part the way you do?

During some periods of our lives we think we have a pretty good idea of who we are, and you know why you play your part the way you do. In English we even have a saying for this which goes "he really seems to have his act together", in which we must mean that he really seems to know how to play the act he has chosen to play. But I dare to say that these moments of clarity are quite rare in most people's lives. For the most part we try to make our way with some help from our spinning compasses, sometimes we correct our direction and at other times we just go with the flow. It is in this stumbling where you need support and confirmation that you are heading in the right direction, and you need confirmation that your choices are the right ones.

### Brands for life

Certain roles you play in your life demands certain symbols and thereby certain brands. Strong brands act along with people and their acts, they support and strengthen their play. A human being's engagement in a brand is based upon the brand's ability to support her in the right direction. If we can understand which part an individual has chosen to play, then it is possible to imagine a possible co-part for our brand, otherwise it will just become a temporary extra.

In this perspective it does not really matter if the brand is a consumer brand or a B2B brand, they just play different parts. Among fast moving consumer goods the short part is the most common as a brief relaxation or an escape from the daily routine. A brief flirtation which makes us feel better about ourselves. In B2B the brands take on a more responsible role since it must confirm that the individual is the responsible person which he feels his act is demanding. All depending upon which business and product or service we are talking about of course. But closest to the individual's heart is the brand which best confirms the individual's choice of act and highway. And it does not necessarily have to be about the individual's choice in line of work, although it is likely that he has chosen his line of work according to his chosen highway.

### Life as a process

Life does not let itself to be described in instantaneous images. Imagine you coming home from a vacation and proudly show a friend a picture from a wonderful day at the beach. This picture means a lot to you since it represents a whole process, it represents the emotions you had and you can almost feel what it felt like at that moment, the scents and the sounds. Your friend who was not with you on this wonderful day at the beach may with some imagination understand what it must have been like but he can never understand and feel the whole process. It is the same thing with life, it is going on all of the time, we are constantly plowing new ground and we are constantly at a time where we never have been before. The now.

We are constantly changing and the only thing that connects the one you are at the moment, with the one you were at earlier stages, is your memories and a sense of travelling the same highway into the future as you always did. Sometimes drastic things happen that make you reconsider your direction and maybe change the part you are playing. That may happen when you get a new job or perhaps you do a career change. When you get children your part in your life changes so dramatically that it might be one of the more profound role changes a person goes through. Still, life is something that goes on. Life is a process which never stands still, even though it may feel that way sometimes.

## Strong brands are timeless

We people have trouble dealing with time. During the process we call life time goes on and we need our highway to connect the present with our past. No wonder brands like Coca-Cola and Disney are so strong, they have been around for such a long time that they are part of my own highway. I remember my buddy Coca-Cola from my childhood, through my teens to the present. These brands present a bridge through time, they connect the present with the past, they were then and they are now as parts of our way to experience our world.

A strong brand is not an instantaneous image, it follows us and shows us that it presents something permanent. The personality of the brand can evolve and change but the part it plays can seldom be exchanged.

## Summary

We choose parts to play in our lives according to our blurred, longterm goals. Brands can help individuals to strengthen their roles and confirm that their choices are the right ones.

Life does not let itself to be caught in an image, it is not momentarily but a process. Brands can present a timeless support in this process.

## Theory

This paper is about finding new possibilities by slightly changing my own way to look upon branding. Do you agree or disagree? Do you know a theory that supports this paper or rejects it? Please let me know.

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