

Private Sector Marketing – Best Practices and Recent Developments

This section outlines best practices and recent developments in private sector marketing. We drew on the team’s professional experience, interviews with 14 private sector marketing practitioners, business publications, and case study research to develop these findings (see Appendixes A and B).

While many of the best practices and latest developments are grounded in the US market, our research suggests that these approaches are foundational, and we find examples of these practices throughout the globe. For example, a recent publication in the *African Journal of Marketing Management* documents the marketing success of Safaricom, with the intention of demonstrating the strategies, similar to those outlined below, that might be successful for other companies.³ We also found concepts such as customer centricity (audience focus), brand purpose, and creating experiences among the top brand trends across leading brands in developed and LMIC markets alike.⁴ Finally, we have been using these concepts (as part of our BAM360 tool) to assess brands and marketing programs in Africa (through a team of African Leadership University students). So far, we’ve found examples of these concepts in use across multiple sectors, including brands such as: Nandos (quick serve restaurant), Vlisco (fashion), Dettol (FMCG), Omo (FMCG), Always S. Africa (FMCG), and MTN (telecom).

We note that the discipline of marketing, whether practiced in the commercial or development sector, is vast, making a complete documentation of best practices and recent developments impractical. We have therefore organized the most important findings into four content areas: (1) consumer (audience) focus; (2) brand strategy (includes brand vision and identity); (3) bringing the brand and marketing program to life; and (4) measurement. Each area, with the exception of measurement, is divided into two sections: “best practices” and “what’s new.” We included brand strategy as a best practice area; however, we recognize that not all marketing includes a brand (e.g., a campaign intended to increase awareness of a disease or health practice). Nonetheless, the best practices outlined in the brand strategy section are important considerations, even for unbranded initiatives.

Finally, there is significant overlap among the best practices and some fall within multiple content areas (e.g. demonstrating relevancy is described below as part of consumer focus, but also belongs in brand strategy and bringing the brand or marketing program to life). For the sake of simplicity, we included the topic only once, where we thought it fit best.

Consumer Focus

A. BEST PRACTICES

Almost all interviewees cited “consumer focus” as the most important marketing best practice. As one interviewee stated, “the brain is an information filter, and it filters based on what’s relevant.” Being consumer-focused increases the likelihood that products, services, and all forms of communication will be relevant, and if the offering is relevant, consumers are more likely to engage. Overall, comments about consumer focus fell into four themes: (1) identifying the target audience and framing the business opportunity (behavior change); (2) understanding the unspoken as well as the spoken; (3) developing insights; and (4) demonstrating relevance.

“No matter the business, it always starts there. What are we trying to do for the business? Who is the consumer? What do they believe today? What do we want them to believe? What is holding them back?”

– Marketing practitioner interview

³ <https://academicjournals.org/journal/AJMM/article-abstract/94A107B65063>

⁴ <https://www.wppwrap.com/brandzindia2018/#p=26>

- 1. Identifying the target audience segment and business opportunity:** This identification involves multiple levels of business and consumer understanding. For example, the marketing team needs to: understand the business situation and consumer segments based on buying behaviors and attitudes; identify which consumer segments are most important given the business situation; understand what motivates their purchase behavior and what other values and factors might influence their attitudes toward the category, product or service; and develop strategies to influence their behavior. While this approach is well known and understood, there is also a tendency to seek silver-bullet solutions. Marketers may find themselves on the receiving end of requests from anxious business leaders and well-intentioned counterparts: “we should do billboards!” or “have we tried Instagram stories?” However, it is the marketer’s job to clarify the strategy (Where does the business stand relative to its goals? What is the best consumer segment to achieve those goals? And how – with what media, messages, and tactics – can the business best reach the target consumer?).
- 2. Understanding the unspoken as well as the spoken:** Marketing practitioners and researchers alike spoke about not only understanding what consumers say – during research for example – but also observing and making connections about what is not said. They described different techniques such as consumer immersions (shopping trips, in home visits, etc.) to observe behaviors and develop empathy, as well as consumer journal analysis, social media listening, and human centered design to get at what consumers leave unsaid. Those working in digital platforms spoke about “focusing on the minutiae of consumer pain points – even if consumers aren’t complaining about them.” As outlined in the above text box, Amazon’s approach, “true customer obsession,” makes a strong case for the value of the unspoken.

“Customers are always beautifully, wonderfully dissatisfied, even when they report being happy and business is great. Even when they don’t yet know it, customers want something better, and your desire to delight customers will drive you to invent on their behalf. No customer ever asked Amazon to create the Prime membership program, but it sure turns out they wanted it.”

– Jeff Bezos, Amazon CEO, 2016 shareholder letter

INSIGHT DEFINITION AND CRITERIA

Insights enable marketers to create products, services, and communications that resonate with the target audience and inspire them to think and feel differently about a situation. Insights are the fundamental building blocks of marketing.

A great consumer insight is one that: (1) involves tension; (2) is true, but not obvious; (3) strikes an emotional response in the intended audience; (4) inspires the audience to think or feel differently.

For an insight to work, it must make sense with what consumers expect of the brand. For example, Airbnb is uniquely positioned to communicate “belong anywhere.”

DISRUPTIVE BRAND INSIGHTS

Always #LikeAGirl

(social behavior change)
Why is the phrase, “like a girl” an insult?

money on fancy razors to be a man.

Airbnb

(brand marketing campaign)
I love to travel but I hate the idea of being a tourist

Halo Top Ice Cream

(new product)
If I could, I’d eat ice cream every day, but I feel terrible about myself when I eat it.

Fenty Beauty

(new product)
If beauty is about creativity, exploration, and self-expression, why isn’t the beauty industry inclusive of all women?

Dollar Shave Club

(new service)
I shouldn’t have to spend a ton of

- 3. Developing insights:** Whether marketers are developing new products or services or seeking to change behavior in some way (e.g., getting more people to buy product A vs. product B, use a service, or stop a behavior), they need to identify insights to make their marketing programs (whether products, services, or communications) relevant, and to inspire their audience to think or feel differently. We believe there is widespread opportunity for practitioners across sectors to develop expertise in recognizing and developing insights and crafting marketing programs to bring them to life, as this is at the heart of great marketing. To illustrate the power of insights, we've highlighted five disruptive brands that are grounded in strong insights. The best insights make sense with what consumers expect of the brand.
- 4. Demonstrating relevance:** Several interviewees described “best in class” as marketing that clearly evokes an emphatic response of “YES!!! That’s me!” or that surprises and delights the consumer through audience understanding. Interviewees cited the brands below as examples of highly relevant marketing.

DEMONSTRATING RELEVANCE – EXAMPLES

Casper Mattress:

Casper not only delights dog owners by launching a mattress for man’s best friend, but also packages it in a way that brings an element of surprise and joy. Specifically, upon opening the box, the dog owner discovers a corrugated face of a dog holding the instructions, aptly titled, “The Snooze Paper,” in its mouth. This example illustrates how a small detail can demonstrate audience understanding, delight the audience, and strengthen brand affinity. It also demonstrates that marketing is not only communication, but all the elements – product innovation, packaging, the instruction sheet, etc. -- that create the customer’s experience with a product, service, or program.

Spotify’s 2016 campaign: “2016, It’s been weird”:

The Spotify team crunched data on user listening habits and published some of the most interesting findings in out-of-home advertising around the world. Examples:

- Billboard in the NYC theater district, “Dear person in the theater district who listened to the Hamilton soundtrack 5,376 times this year, can you get us tickets?”
- Signage in the London tube, “Dear 3,749 people who played, ‘It’s the End of the World as We Know It’ the day of the Brexit vote, hang in there.”
- In a major US city, “Dear person who played ‘Sorry’ 42 times on Valentine’s Day, what did you do?”

This Spotify campaign worked (note that it was updated as “2018 Goals” earlier this year) for several reasons: it’s highly distinctive and ownable (only Spotify can run this campaign), it’s geographically relevant (or chronologically relevant in the Valentine’s Day example), and it’s funny. But all of this is only possible because of Spotify’s creative use of its customer data. It demonstrates how well they know their users and the degree to which they are engaged in understanding their habits.

B. WHAT’S NEW?

While the fundamentals of consumer understanding haven’t changed, technology has created new ways for companies to understand, reach, and serve their consumers, ultimately delivering more relevant products and services. Important developments include: (1) co-creating with consumers; (2) delivering personalized marketing at scale with first-party data; (3) using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to understand and meet consumer needs; and (4) big data.

- 1. Co-creating with consumers:** In 2010, Vogue assistant Emily Weiss observed that cosmetics companies talk at women, not with them.⁵ That idea inspired her to launch Into the Gloss, a beauty blog that quickly became a leading resource where consumer engagement – comments about products and beauty tips – surpassed that of most established beauty brands. In 2014, Weiss harnessed this wealth of consumer information to create a cosmetics line that would meet the wants and needs of her community. And Glossier was born.

⁵ <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-glossier-became-so-popular-2016-5>

“A lot of times people ask me, ‘How do you make your audience feel involved?’ And I find that such a funny question, because we don’t make her feel involved,” Weiss says. “She is involved. It’s not like a gimmick or a marketing tactic. We would be silly not to ask for her input to make a better product.”

– **Emily Weiss**, Glossier Founder and CEO on consumer engagement

Similarly, Native, a direct to consumer (DTC) natural deodorant brand, launched online sales via its website in July of 2015. Customers were asked to provide reviews, which the company used to make product improvements, resulting in 24 product iterations in the first 18 months.

Both Native and Glossier have declined opportunities to sell through brick and mortar retailers or Amazon; the value of owning the customer feedback loop and curating the customer experience outweighs – at least for now – the significant sales opportunity that comes with broad distribution.⁶

2. **Delivering personalized marketing at scale with first party data:** Stitch Fix, a direct to consumer clothing company, launched in 2011 with a simple business model: customers receive a monthly “fix” of five items of clothing. They choose to buy items they want and send back those they don’t. It works (the company sold \$977M worth of clothing in 2017)⁷ because data science and machine learning enable the company to analyze customer likes / dislikes, dimensions, trends, seasonality, clothing attributes, etc., and ultimately predict which items the consumer will purchase, thereby delivering personalization at scale. “There is no selling here, only relevancy,” Colson [Stitch Fix data scientist] says. In other words, Stitch Fix only gets value from its customers if customers get value from Stitch Fix.”⁸
3. **Using artificial intelligence to understand and meet consumer needs:** A recent Harvard Business Review Article, *Marketing in the Age of Alexa*, paints a picture of a not so distant future in which all touchpoints – marketing communications, sales, shopping research (price/ benefit comparisons), customer service, and consumer data – will be centralized in AI platforms such as Alexa. “Over time, it [the AI platform] will learn consumers’ preferences and habits, which will make it even better at anticipating and satisfying people’s needs, which will make consumers use it more.”⁹ This future state presents three implications for marketers: (1) almost perfect consumer data will be available – but owned by third parties; (2) brands risk becoming less important, as the AI platform – not a third party (retailer, health care professionals, etc.) – will make product recommendations and in many cases will be set up with credit card information enabling it to purchase frequently used items based on price promotion or other features; (3) marketing spend will shift to the AI vehicle, where marketers will pay for preferred placement.
4. **Big data:** The term big data refers to the collection and use of traditional and digital data sources from both inside and outside of the company for multiple business purposes, including consumer understanding. Big data is often discussed in terms of its volume, velocity, and variety¹⁰ (structured data such as point of sale and unstructured data such as social media posts); typically, the data sets are so large and complex that traditional data processing tools are inadequate.¹¹ Companies are using big data in a variety of ways, among them to develop deeper customer understanding by combining multiple datasets. Our interviewees discussed three developments resulting from availability of big data:

⁶ <https://www.racked.com/2016/12/29/14082892/natural-deodorant-native>

⁷ <https://hbr.org/2018/05/stitch-fixs-ceo-on-selling-personal-style-to-the-mass-market>

⁸ <https://hbr.org/2015/05/what-stitchfix-figured-out-about-mass-customization>

⁹ <https://hbr.org/2018/05/marketing-in-the-age-of-alexa>

¹⁰ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisaarthur/2013/08/15/what-is-big-data/#4a9ba82b5c85>

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_data

- **Marketing and IT department partnership:** Marketing and IT departments are working in closer partnership than they had in the past; with marketers required to become more conversant in technology and user interface issues, and technologists expected to become comfortable with more conceptual marketing speak. It is not only because of big data that marketing and IT teams are now working in close partnership, but also because of the shift in ad spend to digital platforms, the rise of e-commerce, and other marketing technology investments (app development, etc.).
- **Data overload:** Many marketers find themselves drowning in data but still struggle to identify the insights they need. The ability to quickly and affordably test endless scenarios, while helpful, can also be a distraction.
- **Privacy:** One interviewee discussed the new challenges and responsibilities of appropriate data use, citing the 2012 incident in which Target, having used big data to identify women in the highly profitable life stage of early pregnancy, sent a mailer with discounts on maternity clothing and related items to a teenage girl. The father was irate that the retailer seemed to promote pregnancy among teenagers – until he learned that his daughter was, in fact, pregnant.¹²

Brand Strategy

A. BEST PRACTICES

We identified the concept of “brand orientation” through our literature review and found the premise – that a brand cannot be stronger in the market than it is within its organization – to be both thought provoking and helpful. The term “brand orientation” was coined by Max Urde, a researcher and brand strategist, and refers to companies that invest resources in developing and managing brand strategy at the highest levels of the organization (e.g., brand discussions are just as important as financial discussions). In the Brand Report Card, one of HBR’s *10 Must Reads on Strategic Marketing*, Kevin Lane Keller draws a similar conclusion, stating that strong brands have “...proper support, and that support is maintained over the long haul.”¹³ The advantage of this approach is that brands, when prioritized and managed strategically within the organization, develop into valuable intangible assets that become a competitive advantage (e.g., in the form of premium pricing and the associated ability to reinvest in brand building activities, the ability to attract talent, credibility to launch into adjacent categories, and the ability to advertise more efficiently due to higher levels of awareness and brand strength). The brand orientation approach emphasizes the importance of brand understanding and employee engagement in the brand within the organization. “The passion for brands is a characteristic trait of a brand-oriented approach. This passion lends life and intensity to work with brands.”¹⁴

While our interviewees did not mention the term “brand orientation,” they did cite brand strategy as a best practice, “You have to have a clear brand strategy, to understand the big overarching picture. Brand is about the idea, the culture, what the organization stands for. It gives you clear guardrails and drives innovation.” The brand principles discussed – both in the literature and in private sector interviews – support those included in the accompanying “Marketing Best Practices BAM360 tool,” and can be simplified into the two themes described below: (1) creating a clear brand vision, and (2) developing distinctive executional elements.

1. **Creating a clear brand vision.** Interviewees used different language for this concept (brand promise, brand purpose, brand identity, brand strategy, overall brand equity, etc.), but the underlying idea refers to clarity about what the brand stands for: Why does the brand exist? What is the difference it intends to make in the lives of its customers? Why should you buy it? While interviewees and published thought-leaders alike use a range of different language for this concept, we’ve chosen to describe this as “brand vision” which is language David Aaker¹⁵ uses to describe “the aspirational image for the brand, what you want the brand to stand for in the eyes of customers and other relevant groups like employees and partners” (p. 25). For example, the Airbnb vision is to enable people to “belong anywhere”; Bailey’s is “to make any occasion a delicious indulgence”; and the Panera vision is to make “food as it should be.” A clear vision is one that is simple, memorable, relevant, differentiated from the competition, and executed consistently by the company. Many people confuse brand vision with the tagline. However, the brand vision is typically an internal statement that does

¹² <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-incredible-story-of-how-target-exposed-a-teen-girls-pregnancy-2012-2>

¹³ <https://hbr.org/2000/01/the-brand-report-card>

¹⁴ Urde, M., “Brand Orientation: A Mindset for Building Brands into Strategic Resources,” *Journal of Brand Management*, 1999.

¹⁵ Aaker, David, *Aaker on Branding: 20 Principles that Drive Success*, 2014.

not change, whereas the tagline is an external expression that may evolve over time. For example, while Nike's well-known tagline, "just do it," is the outward expression of its vision (Nike calls it the "mission"), its brand vision is: "to bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete* in the world. *If you have a body, you are an athlete."¹⁶

Brand vision is important because it provides focus, inspiration, and a path for growth. It must be conceived and articulated both through the lens of the target consumer (what is important to them?) and through the lens of the organization (what is the organization best positioned to deliver?). In the classic HBR article, *Marketing Myopia*, the late professor Theodore Levitt advises leaders that the goal is not to sell things, but to satisfy customers. He uses the case of the railroad industry to make his point: the industry failed because it focused on selling railroads instead of providing transportation. Kodak provides a more recent example. Ironically, Kodak had a brand vision – enabling people to cherish the moments of their lives. They failed when they lost sight of the vision and focused instead on protecting their existing product line.

In summary, when companies develop and hold onto a clear brand vision, they think beyond their existing product category and find new ways to delight the customer. Amazon sells more than books, Apple sells more than computers, and Starbucks sells more than coffee.

EXAMPLES OF STRONG BRAND VISIONS*

Amazon

To be the Earth's most customer-centric company, where customers can find and discover anything they might want to buy online, at the lowest possible prices.

Apple

To honor those who see the world differently and inspire others to do the same

Starbucks

To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one cup, one person, one neighborhood at a time

2. Developing a distinctive brand identity: Interviewees used several different words to describe this concept, such as: brand personality, brand expression, brand essence, look and feel, executional assets, etc., but the underlying principle is the same regardless of language: how does the brand vision come to life through all of the brand's elements – the packaging, website, social media tone of voice? While strongly related to brand vision, this concept is intentionally separate, as a company can have a strong brand vision but fail to bring it to life. After all, execution is the only strategy the consumer will ever see.

RXBar makes this point well. RXBar launched into the crowded protein and snack bar aisle in 2013 with limited success, despite the novelty of the brand's formulation (simple, clean ingredients with no added sugar). The brand vision, "stop the B.S. and make 'food is medicine' easy and on-the-go"^{*} is clear in the brand name (RXBar) and formulation, but the company founders hadn't brought the vision to life through a clear brand identity. In 2016 the founders relaunched the packaging and other touchpoints (website, social media, etc.) such that everything about RXbar communicates the brand vision – without having to spell it out in words. The result? RXbar's clear and compelling vision came to life through the brand identity and succeeded. It quickly became one of the best-selling bars in the category and was acquired by Kellogg's for an impressive \$600M in 2017.¹⁷

RXbar's relaunch worked not only because it brought the brand vision to life, but also because it was distinctive. In the highly influential 2010 "evidence-based marketing" book, *How Brands Grow*, professor Byron Sharp advocates for the importance of distinctiveness. "Distinctiveness reduces the need to think, scour and search, thus making life easier for consumers, without them even realizing it" (p. 130). Sharp presents two criteria for distinctiveness: uniqueness and prevalence. Reviews of RXbar's packaging, social media, and even the [latest advertising campaign featuring Ice T](#), demonstrate both criteria.

¹⁶ <https://about.nike.com/>

¹⁷ <https://www.adweek.com/agencies/rxbar-finds-the-perfect-no-b-s-spokesman-in-ice-t/>

* The Amazon and Starbucks examples in the brand vision text box can be found on company websites. We wrote the brand vision for Apple, based on company research, as we did not find an official brand statement. Note that many companies use language other than vision (e.g., Starbucks and Amazon both use "mission").

*Note: "stop the B.S." is part of the brand's outward-facing communication strategy; we derived the "food is medicine" part of the vision based on the RXbar brand name and prescription-style package design

B. WHAT'S NEW

We report on two new areas of thinking regarding brands: (1) brand purpose, which is not new, but seems like it is; and (2) customer centric brand management.

- 1. Brand Purpose:** In the 1994 best-selling business book, *Built to Last*, the authors identified the presence of a higher-order purpose as one of the factors that set the most successful companies apart – many of which were over 100 years old at the time of publication and are still among the strongest companies in the world.¹⁸ In a recent *Forbes* article, Max Lenderman, Founder, CEO, and Chief Creative Officer of School, a purpose-led agency, declared “Purpose is the new digital. It has the same amount of transformative power on brands and businesses as digital did only 25 years ago.”¹⁹ Based on our research, interviews, and professional experience, we believe there are four reasons why brands are turning to purpose: (1) millennials and social activism, (2) technology and transparency, (3) product performance parity necessitates a new point of difference, and (4) new understanding from neuroscience about purpose and emotions.

“Neuroscientists are showing that the emotional and deliberative circuits in the brain are in constant interaction (some would say struggle), and the former, for better or for worse, often holds sway. What’s more, with each new study it becomes clearer just how quickly, subtly, and powerfully our unconscious impulses work.”

– Harvard Business Review

- **Millennials and social activism:** Millennials, the largest generation in history, are significantly more likely than older generations to be interested in social issues.²⁰ To grow and remain relevant with younger consumers, companies are tackling social issues and doing a better job of communicating the issues they support. The millennial generation is also driving this change from the inside. As they gain seniority in the workforce, millennials are creating purpose-driven brands and driving a societal shift toward purpose and values in the workplace.
- **Technology and transparency:** Technology has both enabled and forced more transparency between brands and consumers, as Lenderman explains:²¹

“Before the advent of digital power, traditional marketing relied on perfecting and controlling a consistent message and communicating a well-crafted image. It created a brand promise (real or not) to create a transaction.

Modern marketing is much different. Brands are now built as an interplay of coherent ideas rather than a singular message. Brand trust is now created through transparency – a product of the information age that digital technology enabled – and brands are much more interested in creating community rather than just a transaction. And most importantly, brands and businesses are moving away from delivering a promise and more on adhering to a purpose. They are not answering the question of ‘why should anyone buy us?’ but fixated on answering the question of ‘why should anyone care about us?’”

– Max Lenderman, School, a purpose-led strategic and creative consultancy

¹⁸ Collins, Bill and Porras, Jerry, *Built to Last*, 2004.

¹⁹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/afdelaziz/2018/07/30/brand-purpose-101-advice-from-the-experts/#74318f0137f2>

²⁰ <https://www.fastcompany.com/40477211/as-millennials-demand-more-meaning-older-brands-are-not-aging-well>

²¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/afdelaziz/2018/07/30/brand-purpose-101-advice-from-the-experts/#40f636fa37f2>

- **Product performance parity requires a new point of difference:** In many categories, manufacturers have maximized functional performance to the point where new benefits and features are less relevant and breakthrough than in the past. According to the 2017 Kantar Millward Brown Top 100 Global Brand report, “The cost of entry for a brand in a production-driven economy was that the product needed to work. In a knowledge economy, where technology makes it easy to replicate the product, the cost of entry is to do good.”²²
- **New understanding from neuroscience about purpose and emotions:** In his 2010 TED Talk, *How Great Leaders Inspire Action* (the third most watched TED Talk of all time), Simon Sinek lays out a simple why, how, what framework he calls “The Golden Circles.” Sinek argues that people do not buy products and services, but rather they buy into beliefs. “The goal,” he says, “is not to sell people what you have, but to sell to people who believe what you believe.” Sinek draws on biology to support his theory and make his ultimate point: much of marketing is rational. It appeals to the neocortex, which controls logical thought and language, but not emotions and behaviors. Great marketing, on the other hand, is emotional. It appeals to the limbic brain, which has no capacity for language, but instead regulates emotions and behaviors, and influences decision-making. This link between emotional connection and behavior is consistent with research published in the HBR article, *The New Science of Customer Emotions*, in which the study authors demonstrated that customers who are emotionally connected to a brand, what they call “fully connected,” are 52% more valuable than those who are “highly satisfied.”²³

2. **Customer-centric brand management:** In an IPSOS publication, *Is Your Brand Truly Consumer-Centric*,²⁴ the authors advise brands to stop focusing on what the brand wants to say about itself and start focusing on what consumers want to feel about themselves. Doing so enables brands to broaden their appeal and increase relevance. This shift implies three related directives for marketing practitioners:

- **Focus on consumer need states, not specific consumer segments:** the study authors argue that consumers are not consistent in their wants and needs; for example, sometimes they want healthy options, sometimes they want to indulge. By focusing on need states, brands increase appeal (e.g., Apple’s iPod Silhouette launch campaign welcomed anyone who might enjoy carrying music in their pocket).
- **Focus on the consumer, not the brand:** social media and influencers have changed the brand-to-consumer one-way relationship. Consumers are now in charge. Brands that fail to recognize this and consistently communicate one-way, brand- and product-focused messaging fail to engage consumers, and ultimately lose relevance (e.g., Starbucks “Meet me at Starbucks” campaign celebrates the good things that happen when people come together in 59 Starbucks stores in 28 different countries).²⁵
- **Focus on emotional attributes, not product features.** Consumers want more than one or two product attributes. By focusing on emotional attributes (e.g., Nike “Just Do It”), brands tap into human emotions, expanding beyond narrow functional attributes and increasing relevance at the same time.

Brands that adopt this approach can expand into a wide range of product offerings, further broadening their appeal and further driving brand awareness with each subsequent offering. For example, Amazon expanded from online book sales to online everything sales, and now advertising, cloud computing, and healthcare as well – all while growing not just sales, but also the value of the Amazon brand.²⁶ One could argue that Amazon has been successful because its vision – to be the Earth’s most customer-centric company – enables it to expand into any business opportunity that serves its customers.

In addition to Amazon, there are many other brands that have also successfully expanded into radically different categories by focusing on emotional attributes (Virgin: to unseat the establishment with high quality, fun, innovation and service), Apple (to honor those who think different and inspire others to do the same); and Pantanjali, an Indian FMCG brand, (spiritual transformation through high quality natural products). This multi-category approach seems counter to many classic brand building fundamentals, for example: instead of identifying a specific consumer segment, these brands seem to attract the general market; instead of focusing on a clear, persuasive message, these brands have multiple attributes within a clear overall brand vision.

²² http://brandz.com/admin/uploads/files/BZ_Global_2017_Report.pdf??sa=D?ust=1521194020681000&usg=AFQjCNGkFsw5HGL2UaiU4I3hnBaFtPNzQ

²³ <https://hbr.org/2015/11/the-new-science-of-customer-emotions>

²⁴ <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/knowledge/media-brand-communication/your-brand-truly-consumer-centric-0>

²⁵ <https://adage.com/article/cmo-strategy/starbucks-launches-brand-campaign/295175/>

²⁶ Amazon’s brand value grew 41% from 2016 to 2017. *BrandZ Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands, 2017.*

Bringing the Brand and Marketing Program to Life

A. BEST PRACTICES

Brands and marketing programs “come to life” through a company’s products, services, and communications. The difference between bringing a brand to life and the above “developing a distinctive brand identity” is that bringing it to life requires an ongoing process of developing new products and marketing campaigns to delight consumers, and executing them through distribution channels, marketing vehicles, etc. The best practices in this section largely flow out of those described above. For example, audience understanding enables practitioners not only to understand purchase or behavior barriers, but also to create new products, services, and communications that delight their customers, thereby increasing the likelihood that consumers will proceed along the consumer journey, ultimately becoming brand advocates. Likewise, having a clear brand strategy enables marketers to develop products, services, and communications that are relevant, inspiring, distinctive, and consistent, increasing the likelihood that the brand will stand out and become known.

In addition, we identified three best practices: (1) innovation that delights, (2) consistent and continuous marketing, and (3) getting the right message at the right time in the right place.

- 1. Innovation that delights:** Innovation is a priority focus for delivering sustained growth and maintaining brand relevancy. For example, an FMCG brand team would be expected to develop a 3-5-year innovation pipeline (based on consumer understanding and the brand vision) that satisfies unmet consumer needs, enables retailers to achieve higher margins, and – if all goes as planned – delivers consistent annual growth. When companies do this well, they understand consumer pain points, demonstrate relevancy, and bring a bit of joy to their audience. For example, T-mobile, as part of their “un-carrier” campaign, has redesigned its subscription model to relieve customer pain points (no data limits under the T-mobile ONE plan). That move is a delight in itself, but the company went beyond its main product offering to surprise and delight customers in ways that make sense for the brand. A few examples of T-Mobile innovations that delight include: Netflix at no extra charge, one hour of data on planes, and free gifts on the T-mobile app as part of the company’s T-mobile Tuesday promotion.
- 2. Consistent and continuous marketing:** Consistency refers to using brand assets (sensory cues, tone of voice, brand messages, etc.) so that every marketing element (packaging, videos, pamphlet, etc.) is working together to build and reinforce memory structures. Continuity refers to repeating visual cues and messaging over time, so that the message is more likely to influence future behavior. Sharp explains the importance for consistent and continuous marketing: “distinctive elements... must be consistently communicated to consumers across all media and over time...It is only when there is discipline in consistency that distinctive brand assets build” (p. 131-132).²⁷ For example, Nike has been using “Just Do It” since 1988, the shape of the Coke bottle has remained largely the same since the 1920s, Got Milk ran for 20 years, etc.
- 3. Communication vehicle strategy – getting the right message at the right time in the right place:** This strategy involves: (1) consumer understanding: media habits and receptivity to the brand in various media, the factors or people that influence purchase decisions or behaviors, the barriers and most effective messages along the consumer journey (from awareness, consideration, purchase, repeat, and advocacy); (2) contextually relevant marketing vehicles and tactics (example: the NYC Spotify billboard referenced above, or Oreo’s famous tweet “you can still dunk in the dark” during the 2013 Super Bowl power outage); and (3) ideally, understanding return on investment for marketing vehicles and messages.

B. WHAT’S NEW

While consumer focus and brand strategy have not changed significantly, interviewees cited several changes in how brands reach their target audiences. All of these are at least in some part a result of new digital technologies, and a communication shift from one-way, brand-to-consumer, to two-way brand and consumer interaction. These changes include: (1) the rise of micro-influencers; (2) employees as brand advocates; (3) storytelling; (4) experience marketing; (5) changes in creative agency relationships; (6) performance marketing and marketing technology; (7) pace of change and need for agility.

²⁷ Sharp, Byron, *How Brands Grow*, 2010.

“Brand people are no longer creating the brands, they are guiding them based on what consumers and influencers are doing. Brand people are directing, with less pushing. It’s a new brand lifecycle. Listen, help direct, give excellent customer service, build loyalty through high quality experiences.”

– Marketing practitioner interviewee

- 1. The rise of micro-influencers:** Given the importance of word of mouth and referrals in driving awareness and consideration during the active engagement / research phase cited above, brands have begun turning to micro-influencers to create brand related content that drives awareness, engagement and consideration. While macro-influencers or celebrities (those with millions of followers) can help to drive brand awareness, micro-influencers (those with tens of thousands, or maybe a hundred thousand, followers) are better able to drive brand engagement, as they are invested in catering to their audience of followers and eager to work with brands, and are more credible product endorsers.
- 2. Employees as brand advocates:** While the role of employees as brand advocates has long been recognized in the service industry, it has become more widespread, as research shows that engaged employees are not only more productive and more likely to remain with their employer, but they are also more likely to create better customer experiences.²⁸
- 3. Storytelling:** It seems that every agency touts their storytelling capabilities and every marketing conference features a storytelling keynote. There are many reasons behind the rise of storytelling: new findings on the neurobiology of storytelling demonstrate its utility in making information more persuasive and memorable,²⁹ digital marketing and social media give brands more storytelling freedom than they once had in the 0:30 ad, and most importantly, consumers want to know more about the brands they select – not just the functional attributes, but the inside story: Who created it? Why? And what makes it special?

Brand storytelling takes many forms. Some of the most common include: (1) In the age of transparency and authenticity, every brand needs to tell its “about us” story. This most often shows up as part of the brand’s webpage, social media content, public events, and PR; (2) Marketers must create content not only to engage their audience through social media, blogs, etc., but also to drive the organic (non-paid) search rankings of their brands. These stories can take the form of articles, whitepapers, infographics, etc. Their primary objective is to ensure their brand will feature prominently in search engine rankings by creating brand-related content that is interesting and engaging; (3) By engaging consumers to share their own stories about a brand experience, marketing practitioners create and reinforce emotional brand connections, create marketing content (e.g., for social media), and increase brand awareness through consumer social media outreach.

- 4. Experience marketing:** Brand experience takes many forms. Some of the most common include: (1) Unique experiences designed to drive brand engagement and advocacy, such as pop up stores or virtual reality in-store experiences (e.g., Kellogg’s cereal café in Times Square, where consumers can enjoy cereal all day, get access to new flavors not sold through normal distribution channels, and share photos about the experience on social media); (2) Experiences built into the product or marketing program, designed to delight the user (e.g., the Casper Dog Mattress unboxing experience, described above); and (3) Experiences designed to condense the awareness and active evaluation/research phase of the consumer journey. These experiences often involve digital applications that enable the consumer to experience the product before purchase (e.g., L’Oreal’s Makeup Genius App turns the user’s device into a mirror and allows him or her to experience and easily purchase different make-up “looks”).

²⁸ Arruda, W., “Three Steps for Transforming Employees into Brand Ambassadors,” Fortune, Oct 8, 2013

²⁹ <https://hbr.org/2014/10/why-your-brain-loves-good-storytelling>

- 5. Agency disruption:** The transition from a marketing ecosystem built around 0:30 ads to a marketing ecosystem built around an omni-channel consumer journey, the rise of marketing technology companies (there were 150 such companies in 2011; there are over 5,000 today), and the resulting complexity and costs associated with managing marketing processes and spending, have brought unprecedented disruption to the brand-agency client model. Whereas not too long ago any brand that could afford to do so retained an agency as a strategic and creative partner, now many companies are bringing agency expertise in house (recently both P&G and Unilever announced plans to reduce the number of agencies they work with and bring significant portions of the work in house). At the same time, many consulting companies have built strategic and digital expertise, now competing with creative agencies for fewer client engagements.
- 6. Pace of change and need for agility:** One of the most commonly cited marketing changes our interviewees discussed was the overall speed at which the industry is moving. Not long ago, it was reasonable to deliver a new product and marketing plan in 18-24 months; today the expectation is much faster, as fast as 3-6 months. The old world allowed time to test and revise plans prior to launch; the new world assumes a “minimal viable product” launch, with adjustments to product and other marketing vehicles along the way, based on consumer learning.

Measurement

Performance measurement in private sector marketing, like other topics, is vast. For simplicity, we summarized five performance measures, most of which measure performance inputs.

1. Overall business results, measured by sales: Sales results are the most obvious indicators of program performance; however, sales results cannot help the organization understand the drivers of performance and how best to optimize for the future. For example, are sales up because of new distribution? Innovation or packaging? New marketing campaign or use of new marketing vehicles?
2. Attribution analyses and scenario planning: Marketing mix modeling (MMM) measures the return on investment of individual marketing vehicles, enabling the organization to understand which vehicles were most effective and most cost efficient. To be useful, the organization needs robust sales data (e.g., grocery scan data) and significant marketing spending across each vehicle. It also helps to have marketing quality inputs (e.g., did the advertising or packaging score above average relative to benchmark data?). Similarly, other models, such as digital attribution, offer detailed analysis of marketing investments along the digital consumer journey, enabling marketers to understand how to shift spending to the most effective and efficient tactics.
3. Marketing quality assessments: Most companies test packaging, product innovation, and marketing communications prior to launch. The most robust tests are quantitative, validated based on previous market performance for similar products, and designed to replicate a natural environment where the consumer is not aware of what is being tested. Package testing would likely assess noticeability on shelf, distinctiveness, purchase intent, etc. Similarly, marketing communications would test for the degree to which the advertising is engaging, distinctive, memorable, etc. Lastly, product innovation testing would assess purchase intent based on package noticeability, etc., as well as after use purchase intent. Test results provide insights to: determine whether to launch; optimize the marketing deliverables (product, package, communications, etc.) prior to launch; forecast sales; and allocate marketing investment within a portfolio of products.
4. Brand performance and net promoter score: There are several studies and metrics that practitioners deploy to understand brand performance, including brand equity tracking; customer satisfaction surveys; and brand awareness, trial, and loyalty. Since the early 2000s, companies have been using Net Promoter Score as a simpler, useful and precise measure of brand loyalty vs. previous approaches (tracking customer retention or deriving loyalty from customer satisfaction surveys). The Net Promoter score is one question: “How likely is it that you would recommend [company or product X] to a friend or colleague?” measured on a 10pt scale. This single question is based on the premise that

³⁰ <https://hbr.org/2003/12/the-one-number-you-need-to-grow>

recommending a product is the ultimate act of loyalty, as it puts one's own reputation on the line. This question has been validated in multiple industries³⁰ and in use since 2003.

5. Employee engagement: The Marketing 2020 study, which interviewed over 250 executives and conducted over 10,000 online surveys in 92 countries, identified seven characteristics of winning companies (companies that outperformed competitors based on past three year revenue growth), most of which are cited above (using data for insights, strong brand purpose, experience marketing, broad organizational ownership for marketing, high connectivity between regions and departments, and inspired employees). The study authors note that the "key to inspiring the organization is to do internally what marketing does best externally: create irresistible messages and programs that get everyone on board." As a result, many organizations have begun measuring and tracking employee engagement. While largely the role of HR, marketing plays an important role in defining the brand vision and bringing it to life externally, with customers and stakeholders, but also internally, with employees. ■

Appendices

Appendix A: Marketing Practitioners Interviewed

	NAME	COMPANY	TITLE (previous industry experience in parentheses)
1.	Greg Biddinger	Amazon	GM New Seller Recruitment (digital and FMCG experience)
2.	Emily Chang	Starbucks	CMO Starbucks China (retail, hospitality, tech, and FMCG experience)
3.	Yogesh Chavda	Y2S Consulting	Founder, Consultant (FMCG, tech, FMCG consumer market research)
4.	Sarah Conklin	Hershey	Innovation Director (FMCG)
5.	Chandreyi Davis	Amazon	Brand Purpose Lead (FMCG, retail)
6.	Jennifer Dimaris	JR Simplot	VP Marketing JR Simplot Company (FMCG, retail)
7.	Laura Flessner	Pfizer	Strategic Technical Leader/ Director, New Business Innovation/ R&D (FMCG)
8.	Lisa Hurst	Upshot	SVP (agency and FMCG client experience)
9.	Mark Jeffreys	Digital Agent Now	CEO (FMCG)
10.	Linda Kim	Starbucks	Sr. Manager, Digital Customer Experience (retail and FMCG)
11.	Elizabeth Klein	Mayo Clinic	Marketing Director (retail and FMCG)
12.	Yasmin Madan	ThinkWell Global	Private Sector Lead (nonprofit, global health & development, pharmaceutical)
13.	Lisa Osborne	Ignite 360	Chief Operating Officer/Insights Evangelist (FMCG consumer marketing research)
14.	Alia Seraj	Diageo	Director, Ecommerce (agency)
15.	Sarah Vining	McCann Worldgroup	Associate Strategy Director (advertising – multiple industries)
16.	Erica Yahr	McCann Worldgroup	EVP Strategic Planning Director (advertising – multiple industries)

Stakeholder selection criteria:

- Experienced private sector marketing leaders (minimum 10 years of brand management and marketing experience)
- FMCG brand management and other industries (most stakeholders had experience in FMCG and at least one other type of enterprise, e.g., tech, retail)
- Representation across marketing and related functions (marketing, market research, R&D / innovation, agency account and planning)

Appendix B: References for Private Sector Marketing Best Practices and Recent Developments

The references listed below informed our definitions and findings on private sector best practices and recent developments. Articles were identified through the process described below:

- **Step 1:** Identify marketing best practices and recent developments through:
 - a. Interviews with private sector marketing practitioners (this also include the author's perspective)
 - b. Article headline review of Harvard Business Review and the European Business Review for the past 5 years
 - c. Website review (Campaignlive.co.uk, Adage, American Marketing Association, Kantar Millward Brown)
 - d. Attendance (not funded through BAM360) at the Portland Digital Summit
- **Step 2:** Online research based on the themes and brand examples identified in Step 1
- **Step 3:** This research was complemented with books that were either recommended by marketing practitioners or identified through our case study investigation.

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