



Creating Brand Meaning

How to Use Brand Vision Archetypes

2nd edition

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INTRODUCTION

COULD WE COUNT brand pyramids amongst the seven wonders of the world of branding? Or are they just reminders of a past civilization that may have been advanced for its time but would not survive today?

In the seventies and eighties – yes, I am talking about last century, should you be a new-generation marketer – brand wheels, brand pyramids and all sorts of other mechanistic planning tools were considered great breakthroughs. They allowed for thoughts to be organized and, importantly, they also made sure that all details were considered.

Over time, clients and their advertising agencies developed more and more complex planning kits and concepts that really just amounted to particular ways of documenting information and conclusions. These developments were largely driven by the multinationals on both the client- and agency-sides. From their point of view, the ‘new planning’ was a means of ensuring reasonable standards across the world. Importantly – more from the clients’ than the agencies’ perspective – standardization also allowed for the aggregation or even just the review of plans across many markets.

Fast forward to today and the world looks vastly different.

Thirty years ago, the operating environment typically changed quite slowly, so adjustments to strategies and plans could be phased in over an extended period of time. Complexity was also quite low – at least by today’s standards. But, just as the world has changed, so our understanding of it has changed too. In particular, neuroscience has provided marketers with new insights into how consumers think and make decisions.

In light of these developments, we might well have expected marketing practice to change. The sad truth is that many companies and their agencies are still wasting time drawing up pyramids and wheels and filling boxes with words – often regardless of knowing that this

practice is not in any way aligned with how consumers really think or make decisions and that it is therefore not a wise strategic direction for marketing initiatives such as building meaningful brands. Surveys such as McKinsey's regular assessment of Chief Marketing Officers show that marketers are very much aware of the higher degree of uncertainty, rapid change and complexity that characterizes today's operating environment. However, while widely acknowledging that the game has changed, there seems to be reluctance when it comes to changing work practices.

But why? Are there simply no better planning tools available? As I will demonstrate, this is clearly not the case. Are the new planning tools too cumbersome and complex, slowing down the planning process adopted? Again, we will see that this is not the case.

On the contrary, we have at our disposal today better, more flexible tools that allow us to align our planning processes with the changed operating environment.

So what is the reason for using outdated tools that are clearly cumbersome and simplistic? We may have to look at another functional area to answer this question. Consider manufacturing practice.

Over the last twenty years, manufacturing practice has changed significantly and dramatically. The same companies that have held on to outdated planning tools in marketing have excelled in the manufacturing area. Their flexibility, effectiveness and efficiency have advanced in leaps and bounds, and supply management has evolved into managing a fully integrated supply chain. Even outsourcing has gone from simple contract manufacturing to developing tailor-made, integrated outsourcing programs that often involve a multitude of parties.

Why has manufacturing developed while marketing has stagnated?

The reason may well be that marketing doesn't suffer the long-term fixed overheads that characterize manufacturing. In times of economic downturns or stagnation, companies need to evolve the operations that cause major fixed costs. Or, put another way, they need to find new ways of operating that allow them to be more flexible and cost efficient.

Manufacturing typically suffers from high fixed overheads that limit flexibility; therefore, economic downturns force companies to develop new manufacturing concepts, technologies and practices – not to prosper but just to survive. Thus, downturns in fortune have made the manufacturing function stronger.

Marketing enjoys much lower long-term fixed overheads. In difficult times, there is no need to evolve the business model; it is simply a matter of shedding some staff and cutting some marketing expenditures.

Advertising agencies are actually the prototype for a flexible overhead operation. As long as an agency keeps reducing staffing levels when accounts are lost or when clients spend less, they are very likely to survive. There is no pressure on an agency – nor on the marketing department – to review and evolve the business model.

So what we are seeing is that while manufacturing is forced by evolution to progress, marketing is not. Marketing largely escapes the evolutionary pressure brought to bear during difficult periods when revenues and margins slide. It may sound like a blessing to be less affected by economic downturns, especially at the time, but it does not pay off in the long term.

Having said that, there is no doubt that some leaders have broken new ground and reinvented their marketing organizations and practices. Procter & Gamble (P&G) serve as a beacon in this area. P&G was a leader twenty years ago and is still a leader today, but you will find hardly any of the marketing practices from yesteryear in today's P&G. Some companies do evolve and break new ground.

So much for the background canvass. Let's now turn to the topic at hand: brand vision archetypes.

In some ways, this topic is incongruous with the idea that we need new methodologies and tools that allow us to compete effectively in today's unpredictable, fast-changing, complex world. After all, archetypes have been around for thousands of years. What's new about them? But archetypes are a great tool precisely *because* they have been around for so long.

As we will discuss, we are all born with an intuitive understanding of archetypes. This means that a brand that behaves consistently like a particular archetype can be understood more easily by the consumer.

But it is not only the consumer who will understand the brand in this holistic, intuitive way. The same applies to parties that contribute to the brand's positioning through communications, research, product development, distribution strategies and so forth.

Clearly, if all these parties understand the brand intuitively, their contributions will automatically be more effectively aligned. This, in turn, means that all touchpoints where consumers (and other relevant parties) experience the brand will be aligned, with the result that the brand is brought alive in a consistent, powerful and meaningful way.

Could brand pyramids achieve this alignment just as well?

The answer is there for all to see. There are very few brands that have a consistent image that is well understood by the consumer or by other relevant parties, and yet the vast majority of brand strategies are being developed with the help of brand pyramids, wheels or similar

rigid planning tools.

My view is that it is time to make the leap and adopt a more promising tool – one that has the potential to deliver the consistency and focus a brand requires to succeed. I feel that this is an important point: what I present in this book is a *promising* tool – not one that has already become part of mainstream marketing practice and proven itself widely.

Brand archetypes were used sporadically in a marketing context during the last century. There are only limited references to such use, but I take it that some of the most iconic brands, such as Marlboro and Green Giant, were developed using brand vision archetypes. More recently, the idea of using archetypes not just as campaign tools or descriptive tools but as strategic-planning tools has surfaced.

With this book on brand vision archetypes, I am putting before you a methodology that has great potential. It has shown great promise in various applications over the years, but it is still in the early adoption phase. You can begin using this tool today and reap the benefits of being one of the early adopters, or you can wait until your operating environment finally renders traditional, elaborate planning-processes totally ineffective.

The choice is yours.