



Take the Brand Test

By Paul Friederichsen

Over the years I've learned that brand appreciation can actually be distilled down to how you answer 10 fundamental questions. Do you really understand the meaning of the word "brand" when it comes to marketing?



Test yourself by answering true or false:

1. *Only companies or organisations own brands.*
2. *Real brands are the ones that are advertised.*
3. *Brands have a life cycle.*
4. *Brands can lose their meaning.*
5. *Brands are more than just a name or logo.*
6. *The brand is fundamental to your marketing.*
7. *Every detail makes or breaks your brand.*
8. *When it comes to brands, size does matter.*
9. *The younger generation is less affected by brands.*
10. *"Store Brands" are always inferior to "Advertised Brands"*

1. False. While brands (even retailer house brands) can be one of the most valuable assets to a company (just ask Sears about Die Hard or Craftsman) the true owner is the customer. Disappoint the customer by altering the brand product or promise and the customer will vote thumbs down with its pocketbook. Just ask Coca Cola about "New Coke."

2. False. Although this used to be true as recently as about 30 years ago. Our basic notion of brands is still tied to advertising support, especially TV

ads, but with the advent of online communication and "category killing" retail chains, "real" brands can be quite real without mass advertising support.

3. True. Brands are created, grown, and matured. At some point (depending on the category they exist in) they either evolve with the marketplace or begin their decline until they are absorbed into a competitor, bought and repackaged... or wind up on the wall of your nearest Cracker Barrel.

4. True. Brands can lose their meaning, usually as being a victim of their own success. For example, if not adequately protected, a popular brand can become a generic term and cease having potent value for its marketer. Think Jeep, Jello, Kleenex, Windex, Xerox to name a few. Marketers can also stretch their brands too far, seeking to capitalize on their popularity by extending into adjacent categories where the consumer may choose not to follow. A gambit like this can actually have the opposite effect and weaken, not strengthen, a brand's marketing power.

5. True. Brands are more than just skin deep. They must have meaning to their customer. For instance, the 2000 Super Bowl was dominated by dot coms with clever names and ads, each projecting a certain brand image. It was a monumental disaster because there was no substance to back them up.

6. True. Branding forces you to consider not only the identity of your product or service, but how it's competitively positioned in the marketplace. Positioning drives your marketing so, therefore, branding is fundamental.

7. True. Ever visited the offices of a brand that you had a glowing perception about based on its slick

advertising or website, only to discover dead potted plants, dusty waiting room furniture and a rude receptionist in the lobby? Changes your attitude about the brand doesn't it?

8. False. Unlike the Bible story, Goliath usually beats the crap out of David in today's marketplace, thanks to the giant's ability to outspend and out distribute the little guy. Even so, smaller brands can take their own bite. In fact, being small can have its advantages. A good marketer knows how to leverage those to your advantage.

9. False. Millennials are just as influenced by brand preference as Boomers. Ask Apple or Samsung.

10. False. While still true in many cases, proprietary brands, especially in packaged and soft goods, are equal to or superior to many of their manufactured brand competitors. For example, major retailers like Home Depot have adopted a vigorous proprietary brand strategy across most departments that command very high compliance standards and specifications for their suppliers in order to maintain house brand repeat purchase and loyalty – at the expense of competing chains!

Editor's Note: "Cracker Barrel" mentioned in one of the answers, is a highly popular restaurant and gift shop chain in the U.S. known for its nostalgic decor of old advertising and sign memorabilia.

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About the Author

Paul specialises in marketing strategy and award winning creative direction for the development and launching of brands, and has done so for a variety of category leading clients: The Home Depot, Dixie Crystals Sugar, ITT Technical Institutes, RCA and GE

consumer electronics, Jenn-Air appliances, Beaulieu America carpet, Systems Atlanta military aviation communication, and W.F. Young (Absorbine branded) equine products, to name a few. His background includes executive creative positions at Saatchi & Saatchi (McCaffery & McCall Advertising), Earle Palmer Brown, The Hauser Group and others.

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