

Indestructible Brands

Establishing a truly renowned brand is the goal if you want your product or company to be the best.

But even defunct brands are now being fought over as people see the importance of having a recognised name in the marketplace.

Kieron Hayes examines why global brands are becoming more and more vital by speaking to John Daffern, marketing manager at BT Health and looking at the Global Brands Need Global Champions article by Alexandra Uhlmann, director of marketing programmes at Ashridge.

The indestructibility of certain well-established brands was evident during the legal battle between former chairman Gerald Ratner and the brand's current owners Signet.

The fact that both sides were prepared to go to litigation over a brand that has had its fair share of ups and downs shows despite fluctuations in fortunes established brands can retain a 'stand alone' value which supersedes ownership.

The Ratner example indicates how vitally important it is for brand managers, marketers and indeed every employee to have an understanding of the residual value an established brand possesses and how that value can be leveraged to enhance a brand's reputation.

Maintaining value is never more important than when expanding into new marketplaces. It has become a necessity for everyone connected with brand promotion to be aware of the implications that a global marketing strategy places upon brand development.

The global management of brands is pretty much taken as given in the current economic climate and the debate now centres around 'how' rather than 'whether' to do so. Because of the concentration of the players, the transparency of modern markets and the pressure created by the fact every other brand seems to have a global strategy, you could be forgiven for thinking the globalisation of a brand may follow a predictable route.

According to the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) the most important determining factor in the success or otherwise of global branding is often overlooked – the suitability of the people driving the brand. John Daffern, marketing manager at BT Health and lecturer for the Chartered Institute of Marketing Advanced Diploma at Hertford Regional College, agreed the global marketing of any brand places different demands upon brand managers.

"The most important factor for the management of any brand on a global scale is for those pushing the brand to realise that not all markets are the same. This may sound like an obvious statement, but often the differences can be extremely subtle

and marketing professionals need to take into account that knowledge of the specific market targeted is essential for any successful campaign."

The CIM recognise most companies have a competencies profile for brand managers at different levels of an organisation – based on the company's best practices and experience that has been fine-tuned with expected technical changes in the work of brand managers.

From Cadbury to Unilever, brand marketers will have a competencies profile adapted to the business the company is in and backed by competency development programmes.

Defining a successful strategy

Those profiles are most often based on a definition of success for marketers with national responsibilities, and have only been adjusted for increased global reach. Yet the experience of successful global brand launches indicates challenges thrown up by the global marketplace require a different individual, what they call a 'brand champion'. Brand champions drive brands across geographical borders making the most of local situations, both in external markets and in the internal issues faced by the brand. The CIM has been studying what makes a brand champion

and has assembled a top-ten of qualities that characterise them.

1. Dealing with uncertainty

The Men's magazine Loaded is an example of how a brand with an uncertain place in the traditional marketplace can be promoted with a new set of rules – when traditional sources of reassurance may no longer be valid. It could be argued that before the advent of Loaded, the 'lad-mag category' was an unknown and its founders insist the category was created on the back of 'four blokes having a beer in a Watford pub'.

Loaded Magazine's ad-hoc marketing strategy is a lesson to be learned by all marketers, according to John Daffern. "What Loaded teaches us is that new ideas are of vital importance. The traditional office-bound review of marketing strategy must be tempered with a willingness to try something different. It is of vital importance, however, that marketers maintain a close regard for a brand's traditional identity, yes it's fine to run with a new idea, but the brand 'personality' must be maintained."

What Loaded illustrates for marketers is the role and value of research is changing dramatically in the global marketplace and brand champions can't rely on instant approval from their market. They need to create concepts that benefit from understanding the trends and life-patterns of consumers. Having done so they must then be robust enough to carry the concept over numerous contrary forces to be faced before bringing their brand to market.

2. Managing a market and product portfolio

Brand champions have to carefully allocate resources, be they financial, human or even the capital of existing brands, over a set of opportunities available to them. Resources are necessarily limited and the efficient allocation of them must be channelled into supporting existing brands as well as exploiting new ones. The strategy employed by Walkers when marketing Doritos was an excellent example. It managed to push the new product, and

many would argue a new concept – group snacking – while at the same time maintaining the strength of its existing brands.

3. Balancing the global challenges

The same careful consideration of resource allocation is needed during a global campaign. Where and when to move into new markets and whether a brand should be launched regionally or a lead market chosen to foster brand maturity are all critical factors that brand champions must be aware of. HSBC's recent advertising illustrates the efficacy of keeping an eye on the smaller picture when reaching for the big prize, according to John Daffern.

"They have shown an excellent awareness of cultural diversity and have turned it to their advantage, using it as a positive element of a global brand. This shows that cultural diversity must not only be taken into account but must also be seen as a potential source of brand-enhancement."

4. Inspiring the organisation

Global brand organisation has been one of the most challenging aspects of marketing in recent times. Brands that have grown globally have successfully projected the essence of brand value to the people who take the role of brand ambassadors. As such a Disney employee, wherever they operate, will project a Disney personality. The brand champion seeks to inspire their organisation by creating a dream for their brands and persuading its marketers to live the dream in order to deliver it.

5. Understanding market opportunities

Traditionally, consumer marketers owe their professional success to demonstrating their value to their company in the strong home markets. The brand-champion, especially from a global perspective, also needs to be able to exploit upcoming opportunities. The strength of a Benson and Hedges brand champion lies in their ability to exploit the new eastern European markets while maintaining existing market-share. The skills sets needed in emerging markets are based on initiative and intuition, meaning brand champions need flexibility and adaptability.

6. Leveraging global relationships

Achieving international reach is impossible for companies on their own and choosing whom to collaborate with is vitally important in the opinion of John Daffern. "A reliable and trustworthy source of local knowledge is essential. Regardless of where location-specific knowledge comes from it is essential to obtain it. Often it is the people 'on the ground' that truly understand the market place, they may not necessarily be marketers, they may be the customers."

The best partners are usually large international customers and brand champions will seek to exploit any element of CRM that

helps develop global reach. They will use lead customers in a two-way relationship to help with understanding local markets and broadening the international appeal of the brand. CRM is a vital tool of global brand reach, especially for smaller brands.

7. Showing brand courage

The original success of the big consumer goods companies such as Unilever and Procter & Gamble is due to the autonomy given to each country's marketers in fulfilling expectations of their market in a way that they felt was suitable. "This strategy works to the benefit of General Motors," explained John Daffern. "They have distinct brands for different areas, indicating that in some cases a national-focus on marketing is beneficial – even if backing a global product."

By trying to satisfy all the markets in which brands operate, however, the brand proposition risks losing its sharpness and descending to the lowest common denominator. Successful global brands need to be sharper and more focused than ever.

8. Exploiting global media

By sponsoring the Olympics, Coca-Cola gets into more similar households around the world than through traditional communications and promotions, a sure-fire method of exploiting global media. Yet sponsorship of the Olympics will not be part of traditional budgeting in the experience of the brand champion. Exploiting the global media requires creativity and the will to risk media budget in uncharted territories. The transformation of Lucozade, from a drink that was taken by people who didn't have the strength to eat into a sports drink, has benefited hugely from its brand presence at major sporting events transmitted via global media, without committing to sponsorship on the scale of Coca-Cola.

9. Being financially aware and brave

Financial investment in the brand is an area where brand champions need to be flexible and adopt different regional approaches. Whereas some of the markets are investment/development areas, others will have to provide the source of investment for the future. Balancing expected growth and investment is even more challenging, as the assessment of the brand champion is usually based on

overall performance. It takes committed and visionary individuals to be able to set their own targets on a regional basis.

10. Keep challenging their own success
Success in one market may give a very rapid feel good factor to the brand champion. However, at the global level competition has an easier job of catching up. Local success is nothing if it is not spread to other markets rapidly, achieving leadership for the brand and securing a leading position in the profitable opportunities world-wide.

For further information and to see Alexandra Uhlmann's article in full, visit www.cim.co.uk

Lucozade

The global marketing of Lucozade's brand permeates the company's homepage. Brand-identity is to the fore in the design of the site, yet with a bit of clicking around the multi-national nature of the company's marketing strategy becomes obvious, as do the distinct strategies employed in marketing different products.

Unilever

As the homepage says, 'you may know our brands, but you might not know much about the company behind them.' Unilever's site projects the image of a multi-national company that operates world-wide and gets actively involved in local environmental projects. A fine example of balancing the global with the regional.

