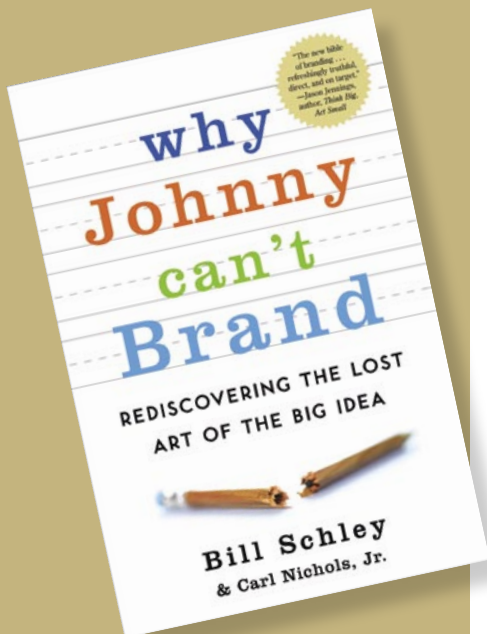


The Granite Pages

You don't need to
invent an iPod to
make your brand #1.

by **Bill Schley &
Carl Nichols**
Principals
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We want to begin our third installment by thanking the legions of loyal HUB readers for your letters and telegrams, telling us that our message of Big Idea redemption is striking a chord—and to reserve our warmest thanks for those of you who also declined to include a death threat.

As promised then, we'll move on to a discussion of where the solution to the problem of misguided, frivolous, wasteful branding can be found, based on our recent book, *Why Johnny Can't Brand: Rediscovering the lost art of the Big Idea* (Penguin 2005).

So, let's ask the basic question: *Why can't 'Johnny' brand?* With everything on the line for today's companies, how can so many smart people in businesses big and small keep missing the boat with their brands? As Dr. Phil will tell you, understanding the psychology behind the disease is the first step toward the cure. The four main reasons for today's problem are as follows:

1. In the 21st century, believe it or not, the real-world, practical rules of branding are still not taught in business schools. If you have a Harvard, Stanford or Wharton MBA, you know what we're talking about. Finance, Accounting and Organizational Theory are drilled into you all day long. But how and why your business needs a Dominant Selling Idea is nowhere to be found.

2. The tyranny of the Three T's. Theories, Trendiness and Totems—the Three T's proffered by consultants, authors and agencies trying to convince the needy that a new, proprietary panacea has been revealed that will float us to Brand Valhalla. Tantalizing coinage like Brand Charisma, Brand Chronicles, Brand Karma, Brand Ethos, Brand Surprise and Brand Warfare are the kind of thing we're talking about. These words describe what you get as a result—*after* building a brand on a real, Dominant Selling Idea and its principles.

3. Fear. Branding and positioning require decisive commitment to a single path and that means risk. The Positioning Paradox is that the power of your message is directly proportional to how simple you can make it and how few words you can use to say it. Amateurs are petrified not to list every possible feature and benefit in every communication, afraid they'll miss some fraction of the market. But by saying everything, they say nothing—too afraid to do the one thing that they must do: choose.

Professionals know branding is about relentless focus on the most singular message, always. It takes some guts. But once you commit, it's amazing how clarifying and empowering it can be for an entire organization, let alone the marketplace.

4. Marketers in surprisingly high places can't agree on the meaning and purpose of the word "branding." Too many folks think "branding" is what airlines do when they re-paint their planes every few years. They spend millions to update the image on the tails of their planes. Then they arrive late, stick you in a cramped seat with your knees bumping the food tray, charge you \$1,000 more than the guy sitting next to you because you committed the crime of not including a Saturday-night stay and lose your %\$#@%!! luggage! The experience and impression of value in the passenger's mind remain exactly the same.

Friends, this is not "Branding" in our terms. This is paint on the surface of branding. Branding is about finding a specific idea that you stand for, finding a way to own that idea in a credible way and ultimately building total trust that

you will always deliver. It's about your walk—well before your talk. You make physical, material adjustments to your product, service and market conduct as necessary to align with that idea. Then you tell the world. And then, if you want to repaint the planes—be our guest.

Introduction to the Granite Pages

So what about these rules for creating #1 brand ideas? We'll introduce them via a little sports moment we've probably all seen: At Wimbledon, the number-one player pauses before the final match to huddle with his famous coach. Tennis fans around the world would give anything to hear the secret advice whispered into the ear of the world's greatest player. What the coach tells him is: *"Bend your knees."*

The best people in any endeavor are distinguished in a one way: they have exceptional mastery of the fundamentals. It's true in sports, art, music, rocket science, and branding. In branding, they're bits of psychological wisdom about what people want, what makes them care, what makes them remember and ultimately, what makes them choose.

Thanks to brand titans like Rosser Reeves and David Ogilvy, who invented these rules at the dawn of the radio and TV age, none of us have to invent them on our own. We call them the Granite Pages. Here's a brief look at just a few of the Granite Pages:

The Number "1" is Holy. In the world of real selling brands, the number "1" and its properties hold all the answers—because if falling in love with a digit is possible, humans have a love affair with the number "1." We reward #1 out of all proportion. The winner of a marathon by a millisecond gets more prize money than all the others combined, plus all the endorsements.

We have One God, we seek to be "at One" with ourselves, we have one spouse, one President and one favorite Chinese restaurant (not necessarily in that order). Our entire cultural and philosophical system is built on being #1 in some area or specialty if we want to be famous, important and influential. Naturally, so must your brand.

And so it follows that people only remember one big thing about your product, company or message, no matter how many features, benefits, PowerPoint slides and happy verbal explanations you offer. Think of it as the "One Item of Carry-On Rule." And if they're going to take away one idea—better make it your paramount idea, don't you think? The one idea that's the most Superlative, Important, Believable, Memorable and Tangible you can find. Something called A Dominant Selling Idea.

- **Superlative:** It promises you're #1 at what you do—the winner at something.
- **Important:** What you're #1 at is something that matters (it doesn't count if you're Long Island's largest dealer in brown ties).
- **Believable:** There has to be a plausible reason why you can claim the above.
- **Memorable:** Your idea has to link to an emotional feeling—the humanizing factor that gives it penetrating power.
- **Tangible:** It must perform in a way that's totally aligned and consistent with all your claims—the ultimate requirement.

In simplest terms, your DSI is the fusion of your name and a #1 specialty in the customer's mind. It's not a tagline—but in the hands of the best practitioners, it certainly can be. For all of us who don't start out as #1, the rules show that there are an unlimited number of specialties to be #1 in if you know a few simple techniques. So the strategy becomes: if you're not #1 now, invent a new specialty to be #1 in.

There are Granite Pages for Naming, Trust, Credibility, Specificity, Simplicity, Eve Hope and Optimism. For example, some brand gurus claim that to win, you have to suddenly cause a revolution or

break all the rules. Just go into the office tomorrow and invent the iPod.

The Granite Pages tell us this notion is false. It's not the world 98% of us live in. All we have to do to be #1 is to win by a nose. That magic 1% differential, the little difference that makes all the difference. The Rule that says in winning, an inch can be every bit as big as a mile. This is within the capacity of every one with an honest, high-quality product.

We'll finish with the secret of that makes you brilliant at the process of creating your #1 brand idea—the reason you should be utterly confident as you set forth. The reason is, you're not going to create it. You're going to ask others to tell it to you—and if you do, they will hand over the keys to the safe. As one of the greatest marketers who ever lived told us:

"A great salesman's secret is the opposite of what you think. He doesn't want to talk—he wants you to talk. He keeps asking you questions and listening to your needs and wishes. He waits until you've given him the answers. Then he tells you exactly what you want to hear."

It is exactly the same in branding. Get out of your chair, go outside your office, and talk to people—customers, prospects, people who didn't buy, an analyst or two and your own employees—especially customer service reps and sales people. They'll tell you what your brand really is. They'll give you great selling language, colorful metaphors and examples, all the creative material you need. Free. They will tell you because people love to talk if you really want to listen. This we guarantee. You'll find that the five most critical words in branding are simply these—ask and ye shall receive.

Start right now by asking yourself this question: What's my Dominant Selling Idea? ■

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