

CHAPTER 1

So Why Can't Johnny Brand?

The last time I looked, the road to brand heaven didn't go through Harvard. In fact, they had a NO TRESPASSING sign.

Guru Mahatma Mahareshi "Mahesh" Goldberg

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?

Three Main Reasons

1. In the twenty-first century, believe it or not, what we're about to show you is 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 you need a USP (*Unique Selling Proposition*)—which today we call a *Dominant Selling Idea*—is nowhere to be found. Academics must think that selling (capitalism) is crass or déclassé, because we've been polling graduates over the past ten years about how much practical branding they're taught and other than Marketing Management 101 and an occasional

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elective, the answer remains nada. This has to be why we've been to so many meetings where the discussion goes like this:

MBA VENTURE CAPITALIST PARTNER:

"We've hired a great new CEO, our third, and we like senior management. The burn rate is down to \$100,000 per month. The technology is great, the product is out of beta and will be 'GA' in sixty days. The only question mark is we're not clear on the value proposition. We don't know if the market wants the product. Other than that, I'd say we're right on plan."

FIVE OTHER MBA VCS (AROUND TABLE):

(Heads nod).

We guarantee you, these people haven't been thinking about the brand. Some eventually learn by trial and error. Most go on like they always have, which is *your* golden opportunity.

2. The tyranny of the Three Ts.

Theories, Trendiness, and Totems are the Three Ts 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, as we'll see on the following pages. But taken alone, none of them are prescriptive of anything. When a consultant tells you, "The answer is brand charisma. \$50,000, please," what do you exactly do?

Too much of the Three Ts leads directly to pseudo-brand-messaging tactics impelled by the same psychological charade. Here's a famous one:

"Sell the sizzle, not the steak."

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This leads some companies to believe, in effect, that they can manufacture sizzle and actually forget about the steak. Have you ever gone to The Palm Steakhouse in New York City and ordered a twenty-four-ounce plate of *sizzle*? It is and always will be about the steak, my friends, when you're building a #1 brand. The steak is the vessel with the vitamins, the protein, the flavor, the color, the history, the process, the culture, and the complexity. Make your steak the idea and the star, and the sizzle will pop and snap better and louder than all the others, by default.

Too much theory, not enough reality, is an obstructive force that keeps Johnny and his good company from developing a good brand.

3. But the biggest reason of all is 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 and images you can use to say it. Amateurs are petrified not to list every possible feature and benefit in every communication, afraid they'll leave something on the table and miss some fraction of the market. But by saying everything, they heave themselves upon the clutter and end up saying 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. They narrow the story all the way down to the big idea and its key associations to create a trim, lean, idea-centered brand. It takes some guts.

Taking the first step of any commitment is the hardest. If you're not sure about this, ask any skydiver. But once you commit, it's amazing how clarifying and empowering that step can be for an entire organization, let alone the marketplace.

Here's a direct challenge: If you have the discipline to follow the principles in this book, if you can trust your instruments in the clouds, as pilots say, to make the hard choices

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that all great marketers make, you'll be in a distinct minority in your industry—with the distinct advantage that comes from an unforgettable, idea-centered real selling brand.

If a Real Brand Is an Asset, What's It Worth in Dollars and Cents?

What's a strong brand worth in monetary terms? What should you invest? A whole subset of the branding industry has formed around the need for some execs to see a spreadsheet before they can justify spending—particularly for something as “soft” and subjective as brand development. The brand economics firms have dozens of benchmarks to measure “familiarity” and “favorability,” in order to determine “brand health” versus competitors' in a category. They have data to support the claim that strong brands can contribute from 5 to 80 percent of the total market value of a corporation when total capitalized value is compared to asset value, for example. You can do this math on any company that has a real selling brand.

But in the spirit of common sense, let's ask it another way:

What's the value of a referral from an old friend versus a cold call?

What's the value of a doctor's reputation?

What's the value of having every employee on the same mission?

What's the value of a Dominant Selling Idea that can set you apart instantly from every other product in the industry—yet is so simple that every manager can repeat it, every salesperson can repeat it, every secretary, every analyst, every trade reporter, and every champion in the customer's organization can repeat it to peers?

The answer is *more*. More market share, more sales, more competitive strength, more growth, and more asset value for your company than you'd have without it. We've seen basic,

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redirected brand positioning based on an authentic Dominant Selling Idea increase sales from 10 to 100 percent. We've seen it transform companies inside and out with renewed energy and purpose. We've seen it determine success versus failure. In all cases, the average time to lay down the rails and get the train on the track is about forty business days. Used as directed, your commitment to this process is never wasted. Between the time investment for you and your staff, and the optional outsourcing of research, copyrighting, and design, we're talking about a cost in thousands. It can easily return millions.

Branding Anything

Finally, we have some good news and some *good* news.

The good news is that you can brand anything. By *anything*, we mean a product, a service, a religion, a nation, a holiday, a movie, a politician, an animal, a celebrity, or yourself if you're in the marketplace. If you ever doubt this, remind yourself that Frank Perdue branded a chicken. Perrier branded water. Florida branded sunshine. Size and wealth do not matter. Some of the biggest corporations with huge marketing budgets are adrift and in deadly default, while some of the tiniest have unique, idea-centered brands that set them apart brilliantly within their domains. You'll see plenty of specific examples when we practice the building blocks at the end of Part One.

Now for the *good* news—and we have to put this delicately: Based on twenty-five years of statistical analysis, you can be reasonably sure that your competition's branding . . . stinks. It's either non-existent, or it's based on internal conceits that have nothing to do with a selling idea or a differentiating value that the customer wants. In other words, most companies breathe their own fumes. For every ten companies, the average is one with a strong brand position, two that get credit for legitimate attempts, and seven that are awash in platitudes and

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puffery. Later, when you're attuned to the process, we want you to do your own survey by flipping through magazines and trade journals or clicking Web sites. Then call us at the house on the weekend if you discover that it's not seven out of ten.

There are a few notable exceptions to this standard. The great consumer packaged goods firms like Procter & Gamble and Masterfoods, whose products line the supermarket shelves, have lived and breathed brand science for nearly a century. They and their counterparts at great ad agencies uncovered many of the commandments we'll honor in the coming pages.

But for the vast majority, real branding eludes them. This is your great opportunity. You don't have to be a branding brain surgeon to make a big relative impact for yourself. You simply have to *do it* to separate yourself from the pack.

With one exception . . .

The One Caveat

To attempt this yourself, you have to have the Big Qualification. Don't worry. We think you have it or you wouldn't be reading this book. (We always wanted to say that.) The Big Qualification is not dramatic, but it's more important than everything else combined. You must, above all, have a genuine, honest love and enthusiasm for your product. This passion outweighs every other talent—and even if you've never created anything in your life, it provides you with at least one creative ticket to build at least one dominant brand, *your own*. Doing the branding for other people's products—as consultants and agencies do, day in and day out—takes deeper professional training and skill that comes from a long-term commitment to the trade. But all the principles and methods are exactly the same.

If you're not sure you have the Big Qualification, our advice is: read the book anyway. Then, using its principles, give the branding process a try. If you can't find your potential #1 brand position in eight weeks, in spite of what "established" consultants may tell you, it can't be done. Your problem is

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more serious than your strategy. Either fix the product, get another product, or get another job. Life is too short to toil for a product or company that's unworthy of your passion, talent, and love.

Three Days from Now at 8 A.M. . . .

On the morning of Day 4, at normal reading speed, you can easily have finished this book. You'll know what the experts know. It'll be Day 1 of the rest of your brand life. If you jump on it, you can only go forward and eventually you can reach this goal—to own a real selling brand that makes you #1 in your target customers' mind.