



The Bigger Brand By Jim Hughes

A question I am often asked is, “Should we brand our products or the company?” And I most often reply, “The company.” Now there are plenty of reasons to brand products too, and I’ll get to them later, but I nearly always suggest the company. Here’s why: It’s the bigger brand. You see, when we begin the brand building process, our motive should always be to build value in the brand. And if we do a good job of brand building, the products of that brand will inherit the value of the bigger brand.

Here’s an example I always use: Maytag(r) has built enormous value in its brand of washing machines by claiming that their machines don’t break down. For nearly thirty-four years, they have utilized a character (the world’s loneliest repairman) to communicate the Maytag brand franchise, which is simply, higher quality. So if Maytag introduced a toaster tomorrow, you would expect that it too, would not break down. That’s the value of the bigger brand transferring to the product.

Here’s one everyone will recognize. Take a look at a Nissan(r) commercial or print ad or outdoor board. It doesn’t matter which of the many nameplates is being advertised, the ad always ends with the Nissan logo and directly under it, “Driven.(tm)”

What this bigger brand is doing is instilling confidence in the consumer’s mind that Nissan is a manufacturer that is driven. Driven to greater quality. Driven to be more innovative. Driven to be a better value for the money. Driven to whatever. It doesn’t matter. “Driven” is such a powerful word that consumers can make anything of it they wish to reinforce their

purchase decision. But what matters most is that regardless of what new model Nissan introduces, the market perception is that it comes from a company that is very driven. Now, there’s also a double entendre here-The perception that more people drive Nissan cars too. How’s that for buyer reinforcement?

Our agency got involved in a “bigger brand” situation last year. We received a call from Scantron(r) Corporation. (You know who they are, they make all the test forms and scanning machines for schools. If you went to school, you took a test on a Scantron form-a big brand.) However, we were only being asked to provide services for a new division called Scantron Surveys. And although we did initially provide them with some good, sound communications tools, we never let up on the bigger brand concept and the value the surveys division was missing out on. It didn’t take long. The Scantron marketing people are some of the brightest in the business and recognized the thirty years of awareness, the good reputation, and the tremendous value in the Scantron name, and pushed hard to unite all the divisions under one brand umbrella. We conducted our brand discovery process (Turning the Telescope(tm)) and unearthed an amazing amount of information that truly distinguished Scantron from all it’s competitors and we found a lot of commonality in all their divisions. Their unique selling points are:

- Market Leaders
- Proven Solutions Providers
- Operational Excellence
- Scantron People
- Integrity

What all this told us was that Scantron, regardless of the division, was “Counted on most(tm)” by their customers. Here’s what Carolyn Demmerle, marketing director for Scantron says, “This positioning statement says a lot of things to a lot of people and in many different markets. For the educator, it’s the thirty years of flawless testing outcomes, for business people, Scantron is a data collection icon, the same for healthcare professionals, even our government clients. And no longer is Scantron Surveys the new player in the category, they’re the category leaders.”

Recently, Scantron, through acquisition, introduced a new division: Scantron Imaging. And guess what is directly under the logo? You guessed right, “Counted on most.”

Oh, yeah, I said there were some good reasons to brand products too. There are many. One real good reason is product innovation. When you hear or see “Think different,” you do not think of Apple(r) Computers, you think of Macintosh(r) the computers. When Macs were introduced in 1984, Apple was a start-up company that brought little value to the brand in comparison to the revolutionary technology. Had Apple been noted for its revolutionary thinking then it may have been a different story.

Often, product branding is for liability reasons. For instance, a pharmaceutical company may want to limit its exposure by creating drugs that are individually branded, so that if there is a problem with one, the action will be brought, to a greater degree, against the product.

In other instances, market segmentation may drive the branding decision. Such may be the case with General Motors(r). I’m not 100% sure, but perhaps some time ago, GM didn’t want its Cadillac(r) owners to know that they also built Chevys. It’s too bad. Just think of the value that could be transferred. Imagine a Chevy Geo(r) ad that ended with “Chevrolet Geo, the Cadillac of little dinky cars.”

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