

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

February 18, 2007

BREAK-WITH TO BREAKTHROUGH

“Most breakthroughs in life are truly ‘break-withs’.”

Steven R. Covey

Marketers need to distinguish their brands, regardless of whether they are product or service brands, from the competition. This has never been more important than in this *age of sameness* where the brand offerings, the way they are delivered (i.e., distribution, marketing mix elements, execution, etc.) and by whom they are delivered (from huge multi-national corporations, or their wannabees, to the product managers, product research & development personnel, agency creatives, etc.) are essentially the same, or from the same cloth.

We need breakthrough thinking, breakthrough products and services, breakthrough initiatives. We need all things to be *“breakthrough”* if we are going to drive preference and encourage customer affiliation to create brand loyalty with our products and services. We recognize the need for “breakthroughs” and so does your management. We often hear managers exclaim that they need breakthrough thinking and ideas from subordinates to support groups such as their product development teams and ad agencies. Yet the time between so-called breakthroughs are becoming longer despite the explosion in technology and what it enables us to do.

Viva la difference? Breakthrough is not just about doing something different or outrageous. Difference is not necessarily a virtue in marketing. Outrageousness is misguided indulgence. Instead the difference underlying the breakthrough must be relevant to the customer. In other words, it has to be important as perceived by the customer. What’s more it must be meaningfully different so as to make, well, a real difference in offerings. In other words the breakthrough must be *a relevant, meaningfully different* offering or way to make the offering to the customer.

Obstacles to Breakthroughs

Despite the recognition of, and all the talk about, the need for breakthroughs getting there is fraught with obstacles. Among the most significant obstacles are:

- ***The herd mentality*** – Most organizations and their personnel subscribe to “group think.” They tend to drive consensus in insidious ways. If you disagree then you are perceived as not being part of the herd. If you are not part of the herd you don’t get promoted and, worse yet, you are made to feel like an outsider.
- ***Fear of the unknown*** – We derive comfort from doing the “same old, same old.” We fear departing from the same old ways, or the ways of others within our category, because we

don't know what we are going to get for it. And, besides it makes us stand out, apart from the herd and that doesn't feel good. (See above point.)

- ***Absence of consequential thinking*** – The objective of your offering isn't to do something but to do something that makes a difference. This relates to getting predetermined results (i.e., achieving the Marketing Objective) that benefit your offering (e.g., a specific behavior such as motivating conversion of a customer from a competitor's offering to your brand). A key question that must be addressed with all offerings must be "will this motivate the desired customer behavior that I seek in favor of my brand?"
- ***Lack of measurement systems/practices*** – How do we know if we are making a difference if we are not making it a practice to measure the impact of our actions? Are breakthroughs subjective or objective? The lack of spectacular growth (due to the absence of meaningful differentiation) has resulted in a squeeze on marketing support funding which, in turn, has put a stranglehold on, and suffocated the life breath out of, marketing research needed to determine whether the action is generating the desired reaction either in the absolute or relative to other marketing initiatives. Where funding is available the organization may lack the breakthrough thinking to gain true measures of the productivity of the marketing initiative whether it is a product initiative, communications initiative, etc.
- ***Desire to be liked*** – Marketers and their organizations recoil from any marketing initiatives that generate, or they perceive will generate, negative reaction from some part of the prospective customer population. They want *everyone* to like the offering. Not only is this unrealistic but it is irrelevant. Change, particularly from the norm, is difficult for many to accept. Even if they prove longer term to be breakthroughs.
- ***Execution Mandates*** – These are a litany of execution requirements that are believed to be essential for success. In fact, most are based upon the way the category goes to market as opposed to anything that has been demonstrated to produce the desired reaction from prospective, or current, customers. Or, if they were proven to have a positive impact at one time, have outlived their usefulness because it's the same thing everyone else in the category is doing. Mandates are tactical. They miss the really BIG meaning that should drive creativity to produce breakthroughs.

Dove Pro-Age

Here's an ad (on the next page) for the new Dove pro-age skin and hair care product line that graced the back page of the weekend of February 16, 2007, issue of LIFE – America's Weekend Magazine. What is your reaction?

Revulsion?

Fascination?

Bewilderment?

Admiration?



Regardless of what you may think chances are you will admit that this is *very different* from what we receive, and expect to get, from the skin and hair care category. This difference represents a **break-with** the way the brands within these categories go to market.

The first break-with you are likely to register is related to the execution. Specifically, the model, or woman, appearing in the ad is different from what others present. She's not a size two. She's no one we recognize or idolize such as a Penelope Cruz or Catherine Zeta-Jones. She looks as though she may be fifty-something years of age not, some pre-motherhood twenty-something young thing expressing concerns with the faintest signs of living life. This woman could be a (grand)mother, wife, co-worker, anyone but who we would think is some kind of goddess to which to aspire. On top of this, she is naked and doesn't seem to be embarrassed about how she looks. Instead, she appears confident and content with herself. Moreover, what might be considered flaws among many skin and hair care marketers, namely rolls of adipose tissue and graying hair that is far from perfectly coiffed, are obvious to the reader. This is clearly a *break-with* the (tried and true?) formula of these categories' marketers! It's a breakthrough in idea consistent with the Dove campaign for real beauty (show real people not runway models or

celebs and celebrate their real beauty) and the way it is executed.

But there's a product *break-with* that should not be missed. While all competitors in the category tout that their products are for "anti-aging" (i.e., to fight the signs of aging or, more precisely, protect against aging) this product is trademarked "pro-aging." It's a significant *break-with* all other products, and their promise. It's pretty smart if you think about it. If one is engaged in the battle against the inevitability of aging the outcome is most certain to be failure in the form of death. There is no fountain of youth. On the other hand, Dove appears to recognize that we can accept the inevitability of aging and the timeliness of the spirit. We can even celebrate where we are in the maturing process and not bow to the illusory ideals of a shallow society. We can be at our true and beautiful best at any age. What a terrific insight. We baby boomers will not go gently into the night!

Kudos to you Dove marketers for your *break-with* the conventional wisdom of these categories.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS

- 1. Create an environment that invites *break-withs* the conventional wisdom of the organization and category.** Honor and reward people for coming to the table with new and fresh ideas. Hear them out. Importantly, demonstrate your commitment to new ideas by investing in them. Find ways to determine their potential value in the marketplace.
- 2. Do or make something to stand out from the herd.** Finish the statement: "our brand/strategy/idea is the only one to (fill-in the blank)." No, we are not talking about some minor tactical element or mere execution. We are talking about a product, strategy and/or idea that is inspired from the *discovery* of a "legitimate and productive" customer insight. It needs to be consistent with, and fit, your brand positioning to a tee. It also needs to be something that represents "relevant and meaningful differentiation" to your target customer
- 3. Dialogue with customers to adapt the work to ensure that you are capturing the strategy and presenting the idea in the most compelling way.** But don't expect to be liked by everyone or nearly everyone. If everyone "likes" it run away from it. Expect that some people may fear or even hate it. We dare to say that not everyone will find the Dove pro-age print ad to her liking. So what? Who really cares? The relevant issue is that it will lead to the predetermined action (i.e., achievement of the Marketing Objective) you seek for the brand among the chosen target-group.
- 4. Drop the "execution mandates" from your plans and direction to support groups.** The breakthroughs occur through *break-withs*. Yet mandates are not *break-withs*. They represent the conventional wisdom, which, in turn, contributes to homogeneity and reinforces this age of sameness.
- 5. Make everything fair game for *break-withs*.** The focus should not merely be on advertising. It should also consider the target-group, the product, packaging, terms and conditions of sale, pricing, distribution channels and placement, etc. We need to re-

examine the status quo realizing that past success breeds complacency and leaves our brands vulnerable to those competitors that *break-with* one or more ways to market.

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