

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, January 30, 2011

“SAME, SAME...BUT DIFFERENT”

If you have ever had the pleasure of visiting Thailand, on business or for holiday, chances are you have spent at least a few days in that most “amazing” of Thai places, Bangkok. And, although most people who visit Bangkok find learning to speak some Thai (with its 5 tones) quite difficult, many end up quickly picking up a few handy words and phrases—some of which are actually English, but not the kind of English heard anywhere else. One of the most commonly used expressions is “same, same.” Its meaning is nearly identical to the more standard English word said only once, “same,” or in everyday conversation something like, “I am or I feel the same (as you).”

Who knows where this strange habit of repeating the word “same” two times came from? But it is so common on the streets of Bangkok that there are even gag t-shirts with “Same, Same” on the front and “But Different” on the back. In a sense, the notion of things being the “same, same” is equally common these days within the world of marketing. You may well recall that, from time to time in these very *Dispatches* pages, we have referred to the all-too-common challenge marketers face today (that we didn’t face so much twenty years ago) of marketing “me-too” products in this *age of sameness*. Because it **is** such a common challenge, it’s no wonder that so many marketers today ask themselves, and often us, “What strategies or initiatives can we employ to create the impression (if not the fact) of meaningful brand differentiation—when we are trying to build a *brand* in a “category or class-effect *product*” marketplace?”

Often, when we are asked such a question, it’s pretty clear that the marketer asking it is, well, not so sure there **are** some viable approaches. But there are—actually, quite a few, all of which can be inferred from the thoughtful observation of me-too- product brands in a wide range of categories. So, for this week’s Boats & Helicopters, we will share some of our observations as a kind of “starter kit” for strategic and tactical approaches that “Same, Same” products can consider in order to become more “But Different” brands.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS: Parity-Performing Products with Effective, Differentiating Moves (Some Strategic, Some Tactical)

DIFFERENTIATION MOVE	BRAND	EFFECT-SYNOPSISIS
1. Go up the Benefit Ladder (Strategic)	MasterCard	After years of standing for “utility & ubiquity” (parity functional benefits) in its positioning, the brand added a higher-order, emotional benefit to the positioning: the feeling of savoring what really matters in life.
2. Change/Add to the Competition, OR Find a “Sub-Class/Category to Beat (Strategic)	Maalox Zyrtec Liquid Gels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to make any speed-of-relief benefit claims against other, same-class antacids, the brand took on the emerging, slower-to-act H2 Blockers (Pepcid Complete, etc.) with “One-Minute Maalox” relief. • Unable to beat <u>all</u> other OTC antihistamines, the brand made a “fastest relief” claim against all other <i>24-hour</i> OTC ones.
3. Lead with Reason Why instead of Benefit (Strategic)	Lucky Strike Schick Quattro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An historic move, faced with no difference versus 5 other popular cigarette brands, the brand trademarked an “It’s Toasted” RW feature (for implied better taste). • Losing out time after time to Gillette’s “more-blades-to-up-the-ante,” the brand became the first with 4 blades—implying, without being able to claim, a closer shave.
4. Find and Exploit a Target that others haven’t (Strategic)	Aciphex (Rx Proton Pump Inhibitor)	Faced with intense competition from much larger PPI drug brands, the brand identified a large and overlooked patient segment—the obese GERD sufferer—to focus its positioning against.
5. Add a New Point-of-Difference Need (Strategic)	Bayer Aspirin	At #5 share among analgesics, the brand added the (only) heart attack prevention need.

