

DISPATCHESTM

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, April 26, 2009

SO WHAT ARE YOU ANYWAY?

When I meet people for the first time they usually make a comment regarding my surname, “Czerniawski.” It’s no wonder. It’s long, eleven characters to be exact. It is comprised of some strange consonants strung together in a highly unusual fashion, such as “cz” and “wsk.” Also, my name is difficult to pronounce for virtually everyone. At the very least the proper pronunciation sounds nothing like the spelling would suggest. In short, it’s quite foreign.

I often get asked the question, “so what kind of name is that?” What people are asking is the origin of my name and family. They are inquiring about my nationality. They want to know what I am. So what are you anyway? Well, “Czerniawski” is a Polish name. My father’s family came from Poland. In fact, his sister and a few of his brothers were born there. He was born in the United States. My father was first generation Polish-American, which makes me second generation. That’s what I am, in part.

Another part of me is Italian. My mother’s family came from Italy. To be exact, her parents originated from Sicily. Her maiden name is Napoli. My mother, like my father, was also born in the United States. She is first generation Italian-American, which makes me second generation. That’s what I am, in part.

Put it together and I am second generation Polish-Italian-American. It fits since, as you know, my surname is Polish yet I most certainly look Italian. I resemble my mother more than I do my father.

But when it comes down to it all I’m much more than second generation Italian-Polish-American. I’m much more than my name. It is merely one way to classify what I am. There are other ways to classify people besides their nationality. We may classify them by gender, age, stage of life, religious affiliation, occupation, marital status, race, where they live, and so forth. There are endless possibilities.

Classifications are important. People use classifications to relate and connect. Just recently I stayed in a hotel in London, England. I was checked-in by a clerk who was from Poland. He noted and commented on my Polish surname, which I confirmed for him. Given the Polish connection he upgraded me to a suite. Had my name been “Smith” it wouldn’t have happened. I was glad for the connection.

The classification makes it clear what I am. It also makes it clear what I am not. I am not an Irish-American. Mike Maloney is Irish-American. He dances a jig on St. Patrick’s Day. I am not Irish-French-Canadian. Dave Roche is Irish-French-Canadian. He prefers to drink Molson to

Bud. He also talks funny. And, I am not Finnish-Irish-English-American. My wife is Finnish-Irish-English-American. I guess that makes my daughters Polish-Italian-Finnish-Irish-English-American, or just American. Yet, people will use their surname to inform themselves of my daughters' nationality.

MBT



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I'm walking taller these days. It has nothing to do with pride in my heritage. And, no, I'm not wearing shoes with extra thick soles and heels. In fact, I'm not wearing shoes at all. No, I'm not

going barefoot either. Instead, I'm wearing MBT from the Swiss Masai Company. They claim in their literature that MBT is "the anti-shoe." According to the company they are "the muscle-toning, posture-improving, calorie-burning, joint-protecting, back-relieving bilateral system that you happen to wear on your feet." They vigorously contend they are not shoes, whose purpose is to look good with jeans and merely protect your feet.

Yes, I can say I'm walking taller thanks to my MBT. In part I'm walking taller because of their construction. But I'm also walking taller because my posture is falling into place in a more anatomically correct and natural way. I feel the muscle-toning effect of MBT and a reduction in stress on my joints and lower back. In other words, I think they really work, for me at least.

I was attracted to MBT through a single-page print ad heralding it as "the anti-shoe." It caught my attention. I wanted to know what on earth they were talking about. What is an "anti-shoe?" I found the promise of being pro-body, protecting knees and joints while going easier on the back to be compelling given persistent, nagging low-grade back discomfort from standing for long hours during work and taking a pounding from engaging in martial arts among other high impact athletic endeavors.

Clearly MBT has identified what they are not, just another shoe. Yet when you look at them you would most likely say that they resemble shoes, albeit rather strange looking ones. I can envision an MBT sales person calling on a shoe store buyer (since that is where they are sold) to attain distribution. The buyer, or manager, asks what do you have for me, another shoe? The sales person answers, "No. This MBT, 'the anti-shoe'."

The Perceptual Competitive Framework

This label is what we refer to as the Perceptual Competitive Framework. Most of us are familiar with the Literal Competitive Framework. It is where we compete and source our volume. In the case of MBT the Literal Competitive Framework is "shoes." But MBT is not a shoe but the anti-shoe.

The Perceptual Competitive Framework is critical in creating and establishing a competitive Brand. For one it serves to differentiate your offering versus competition (your Literal Competitive Framework). This is essential if we are to keep prospective customers from commoditizing our product and/or service offerings. We live in an "age of sameness" where products and services are perceived to be basically the same. At least they tend to do the same things and satisfy the same basic needs. Customer dynamics, the way of the marketplace, are to simplify decision making by classifying every offering as the same, lumping everything together. Instead of having to think through several criteria in choosing from among alternate products customers and markets reduce their decision to one fundamental criterion. During these difficult economic times that one criterion is? Price!

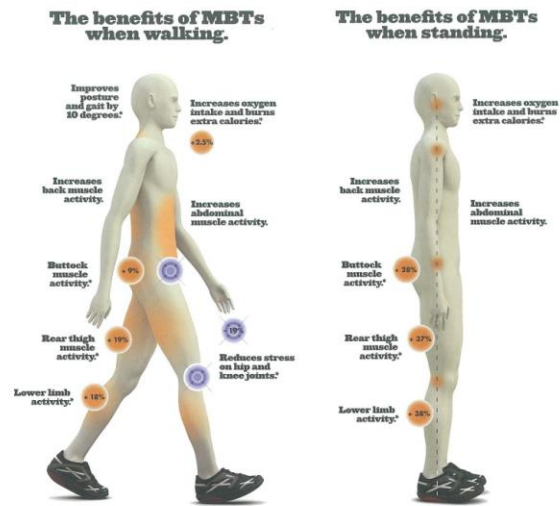
When we willingly use the same classification as our competitors we make it even easier for customers to see us as the same as all the other products in our category. In other words we help commoditize our own product. This is not the way to establish and build a healthy brand.

But this is about more than a new label. Just slapping on a different label doesn't make for differentiation. MBT can actually point to important differences in design, function and benefits

that warrant their unique classification. The label calls attention to its difference in type, not degree. This is not a shoe but “the anti-shoe.” It promotes better body health and function. Among the many claims for MBT are the following:

How the anti-shoe is pro-body.

At MBT we don't believe in shoes. We believe in footwear that makes you better from the ground up. Because of our specially designed sole, wearing MBTs significantly improves your gait and posture and relieves pressure on your joints and back. It also exercises a large number of muscles, whether you're walking or standing. This, in turn, stimulates your metabolism, burns extra calories and speeds up muscle regeneration. In addition, MBTs can have a firming effect on abdominal, leg and buttock muscles.



* According to studies at the University of Gdansk, Gdansk, Poland; Sheffield Hallam University, UK; Rensselaer Institute, OH etc. in comparison to conventional shoes.

The Perceptual Competitive Framework serves as the “North Star” for the brand. It guides ALL future brand developments. It informs ALL actions. It serves as the focal point for the Brand Positioning Strategy. For example, product Research & Development for MBT should have development and clinical testing programs that build upon their therapeutic and health enhancing value. R&D should be working on pro-body health designs and features. If it is not pro-body then R&D should not be working on it. The Perceptual Competitive Framework needs to guide each and every marketing mix element and manifest itself in all tactics.

So What is MBT Anyway?

As mentioned MBT professes itself to be the anti-shoe, which refers to what it is not. But they have not captured what they are (“the muscle-toning, posture-improving, calorie-burning, joint-protecting, back-relieving bilateral system that you happen to wear on your feet”) in a label. What is the label? Well if this were a new category of products what might it be named? For example, MBT is not a shoe but a “Podiatric Pro-Body Health Platform.” What Perceptual Competitive Framework might you suggest for MBT? Let us know.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

1. Create a Perceptual Competitive Framework label for your brand. Get beyond “standard of identity” (legal definition) and category labeling. Think difference in type not merely degree to create a perception of meaningful differentiation.
2. Don't just think different. Think Big. Let the Perceptual Competitive Framework help you create a vision for the brand.

3. Express the Perceptual Competitive Framework as a noun. Put it in quotes in the Brand Positioning Strategy Statement so it is obvious to all. For example Gatorade is the “Ultimate Liquid Athletic Equipment.”
4. Ensure that it sets-up and leads to the benefit of the brand. This needs to be a relevant and meaningfully differentiated benefit. One should be able to look at the PCF and immediately understand what the benefit is for the Brand’s customers.
5. Use the Perceptual Competitive Framework to guide all actions in creating, building and supporting the brand.
6. If you want to learn more about the Perceptual Competitive Framework attend our Open Brand Positioning & Communication College at the Omni-Orrington Hotel in Evanston, Illinois, on 5 – 7 May. **This is the last call for registration. Call Lori Vandervoort at 800 255-9831.**

Employ the Perceptual Competitive Framework to lift yourself above the fray of marketers to distinguish yourself as a “Marketect.”

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If you have signed up yet for the upcoming Brand Positioning & Marketing Communications College May 5-7, 2009 in Evanston, Illinois, please call Lori Vandervoort at 800-255-9831 in the Central Division Offices. Space is limited.



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