

**THE TRUTH  
ABOUT**

# CREATING BRANDS PEOPLE LOVE

“Discover the secrets of  
creating and growing  
world-class brands...”

Brian D. Till / Donna Heckler

By a renowned brand researcher and a Fortune® 500 branding executive

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## Preface

Creating brands people love seems so easy. Just look around at all the wonderful brands that we experience every day. Yet, creating brands people love requires more than simply love of a product and spectacularly creative advertising—it requires intelligent, strategic, and coordinated decisions in many areas of marketing. Packaging, promotion, advertising, positioning, distribution, and pricing are just some of the important functions that, when successfully managed, lead to profitable brands that matter to consumers.

The purpose of this book is to illustrate universal truths about brand management that cover the range of brand-building activities. These truths transcend context, providing important insights irrespective of industry-specific dynamics. The guidelines here are as relevant to a marketing manager for a steel producer as for a cereal maker; as meaningful to a brand manager for coffee machines as for a ski resort; as useful to someone running an art gallery as to someone managing a high-end hotel.

For experienced and well-trained marketing managers, these truths provide a touchstone to those basic principles that are sometimes overlooked in day-to-day decision making. For the up-and-coming brand manager, this book provides thoughtful guidance that will serve you well over the course of a career. For senior executives responsible for the marketing function but not formally trained, the book serves as a framework to think about brand building and from which to challenge your marketing staff. Finally, for students, you will find these truths to be a solid foundation for life-long learning in this fascinating business.

The following chapters cover an assortment of issues regularly faced by marketing and brand managers such as media, taglines, brand extensions, brand names, use of celebrities, packaging, and so on. Importantly, though, none of those decisions will matter unless your basic product or service offering is on target. The product or service itself is the starting foundation of a great brand.

Consider Honda. Certainly there are cars more luxurious, cars that deliver greater thrills, and cars that are more stylish. But Honda nails the essence of a great product—reliability, excellent build quality, comfortable, well-planned ergonomics, and good fuel economy. Although Honda’s brand image is not flashy, Honda’s image does have appeal to a significant group of people. Importantly, the starting point for Honda as a brand is Honda the product.

Gas station and convenience store QuickTrip is another good example of a brand that pays close attention to the little things. The cashiers, in addition to their speedy change counting, are quick with a “Many thanks,” or “Come back and see us soon.” The consistency from QuickTrip is not simple coincidence but rather an intentional focus on speed and pleasantness. At many service stations, when filling to a prepay of \$20, the rate of gas flow drops to a trickle at \$19.80 or so, and then the last twenty cents worth dribbles in. Not at QuickTrip. The gas flow is constantly strong until it hits exactly \$20. A small detail indeed, but a detail that reinforces the promise embodied in their name—quick trip.

Without diminishing the role and importance of public relations, creative TV advertising, an engaging website, captivating packaging, motivating promotions, or any of the other tools that collectively build strong brands and drive profitability, there is tremendous importance in putting first things first—and the first thing is a fundamentally great product. Great products make great brands.

*The Truth About Creating Brands People Love* is a complete toolbox of ideas, strategies, and techniques that can take a great product and transform it into a profitable brand people will love. Each concept has at its core a focus on how to connect with the consumer in a meaningful way. Be empowered, challenge conventional wisdom, think strategically, and use this book as a guide to creating a bond between your customers and your brand.

TRUTH

1

Managing brands is not  
common sense

**If common sense is what most people naturally use in the absence of education and training, then effective brand management is not common sense.**

Certainly the more features and benefits you highlight about your brand, the more attractive the brand will be. The more people you try to appeal to, the more effective your advertising will be. That market share is the most important measure of a brand's success is obvious. And what name you attach to a brand isn't all that important—it's what the brand actually does for the consumer that makes the difference. It is completely obvious that "quality" is an effective marketing message. Brand extension as the best way to introduce a new product seems apparent.

Every one of the preceding statements is either partially or completely false.

Yet, talk to many who claim to be marketers, and they will espouse the validity of these statements. Dig a little deeper, and you will find that their marketing "expertise" is based on their idea of common sense. The difficulty with divining marketing strategy is that people live and breathe marketing every day as consumers. People see advertising. People open packages. People try new products. People participate in promotions. In the course of being consumers, people form opinions about what works, or doesn't work, based on their preferences. Their experience as consumers leads them to believe that marketing is basic common sense.

More often than not, effective brand development is the complete opposite of common sense. But the strong belief in this myth perpetuates bad marketing strategy. There are many instances in which administrative assistants, engineers, salespeople, and so on get moved into significant marketing positions because they are "good with people"; after all, brand management is pretty much just common sense!

How many companies further reinforce this concept by making a marketing position something that their star performers must work through to advance in a corporation? Many companies do not hire marketers; instead, they rotate their sales stars or their finance prodigies through marketing for the experience. After all, since managing brands is common sense, you don't need any special expertise in it, right?

With one company, the marketing department wanted to become more creative. The department had gotten stale. There were no new ideas or creative solutions being offered by the department or by the agencies supporting the business. Digging a bit deeper, management discovered that the marketing department was composed primarily of salespeople. The marketing programs developed were actually trade promotions. The advertising had become a mess, with each ad bearing multiple messages about the various product features—not a benefit to be found.

The problem this company experienced was not that there were no fresh ideas. The problem was that there was no marketing strategy. There was not a thoughtful approach to driving profitable sales from the target audience. In fact, the target audience was not even defined. Relying on common sense, the sales-oriented marketing department offered discounts and sales promotions. As good salespeople, they mentioned every feature in the ad. Unfortunately, the great common sense of the sales organization was not enhancing the success of the business.

For senior managers, a reminder that marketing is not common sense is important. If your rise to the top was not through marketing, consider that your perspective on marketing may be based on your understanding of common sense, not marketing strategy fundamentals. Don't be like the CEO who explained that he knew all about marketing because his father had run a printing company—his idea of great marketing was when PMS colors matched. Color match is important at some level, but surely not a driver of marketing strategy.

Effective marketing strategy and brand building are built on a foundation of principles and guidelines that run counter to our natural way of thinking. For example, building an effective brand requires not only understanding what a brand stands for, but what it doesn't stand for; understanding not only who the brand is for, but who it is not for. Such exclusionary thinking is not natural—after all, it is common sense that our brand should appeal to as many people as possible.

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