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Brand and Marketing Trends for 2010

Niels Bohr once noted that “prediction is very difficult, especially about the future,” but then he didn’t have access to predictive loyalty metrics. Happily, Brand Keys does. And as they measure the direction and velocity of consumer values 12 to 18 months in advance of the marketplace and consumer articulations of category needs and expectations, they identify future trends with uncanny accuracy.

Having examined these measures, we offer up ten trends for marketers in 2010 that will have direct consequences to the success – or failure – of next year’s branding and marketing efforts.

1) Value is the new black.

Excessive spending, even on sale items, will continue to be replaced by a reason-to-buy at all. This is trouble for brands with no authentic meaning, whether high-end or low.

2) Brands increasingly a surrogate for “value.”

What makes goods and services valuable will increasingly be what’s wrapped up in the brand and what it stands for. Why J Crew instead of The Gap? J Crew stands for a new era in careful chic—being smart *and* stylish. And the first family’s support of the brand doesn’t hurt either.

3) Brand differentiation is Brand Value.

The unique meaning of a brand will increase in importance as generic features continue to plague the brand landscape. Awareness as a meaningful market force has long been obsolete, and differentiation will be critical for success—meaning sales and profitability.

4) “Because I Said So” is so over.

Brand values can be established as a brand identity, but they must believably exist in the mind of the consumer. A brand can’t just say it stands for something and make it so. The consumer will decide, making it more important than ever for a brand to have measures of authenticity that will aid in brand differentiation and consumer engagement.

5) Consumer expectations are growing.

Brands are barely keeping up with consumer expectations now. Every day consumers adopt and devour the latest technologies and innovations, and only hunger for more. Smarter marketers will identify and capitalize on unmet expectations. Those brands that understand where the strongest expectations exist will be the brands that survive – and prosper.

6) Old tricks don’t work/won’t work.

In case your brand didn't get the memo here it is: consumers are on to brands trying to play their emotions for profit. In the wake of the financial debacle of this past year, people are more aware than ever of the hollowness of bank ads that claim "we're all in this together" when those same banks have rescinded their credit and turned their retirement plan into case studies. The same is true for insincere celebrity pairings: think Seinfeld & Microsoft or Tiger Woods & Buick. Celebrity values and brand values need to be in concert, like Tiger Woods & Accenture. That's authenticity.

7) They won't need to know you to love you.

As the buying space becomes even more online-driven and international (and uncontrolled by brands and corporations), front-end awareness will become less important. A brand with the right street cred can go viral in days, with awareness following, not leading, the conversation. After all, everybody *knows* GM, but nobody's buying the cars.

8) It's not just buzz.

Conversation and community is all: ebay thrives based on consumer feedback. If consumers trust the community, they will extend trust to the brand. Not just word of mouth, but the right word of mouth within the community. This means the coming of a new era of customer care.

9) They're talking to each other *before* talking to the brand.

Social Networking and exchange of information outside of the brand space will increase. Look for more websites using Facebook Connect to share information with the friends from those sites. More companies will become members of LinkedIn. Twitter users will spend more money on the Internet than those who don't tweet.

10) Engagement is not a fad; it's the way today's consumers do business.

Marketers will come to accept that there are four engagement *methods* including Platform (TV; online), Context (Program; webpage), Message (Ad or Communication), and Experience (Store/Event). But there is only one *objective* for the future: Brand Engagement. Marketers will continue realize that attaining real brand engagement is impossible using out-dated attitudinal models.

Accommodating these trends will require a paradigm change on the parts of some companies. But whether a brand does something about it or not, the future is where it's going to spend the rest of its life. How long that life is up to the brand, determined by how it responds to today's reality.