

A blog about the art and the science of marketing research.

A Brand By Any Other Name...

November 4, 2011 by [Patty Hannon](#), [W5blog.com](#)

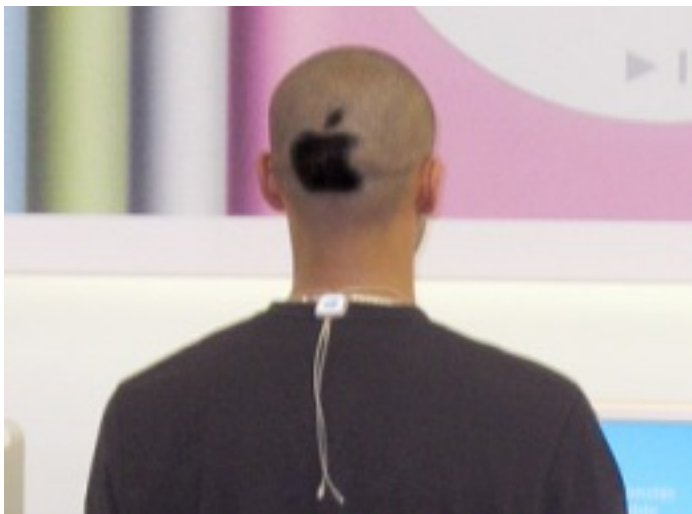
So what constitutes a brand, really?

In [a recent Warc Blog entry](#), author Robert Passikoff (President of firm Brand Keys) gives a good definition: He defines it as “a name, term, symbol, or combination thereof that identifies goods and services so strongly imbued with values, and articulated and emotional meaning, as to be easily differentiated by the public from the competition.”

He then builds on this characterization to question trending industry “chatter” that regards consumers who, in tightening their belts, as having become brand disloyal by transferring purchases from once-favored brands to cheaper alternatives.

And he’s right in one thing, there’s a lot of business reporting lately about consumers’ changing buying habits. Global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company reported as early as 2009 that consumers are purchasing more lower-priced brands that they have in years past (in any given CPG category, an average of 18% of consumers bought lower-priced brands in the past two years). Similar findings have been issued by like organizations (i.e. Bloomberg) since then.

But what are these reports talking about when they say ‘brand’? Consumers, past and present, want value – either in terms of bang for their buck or an emotional reward. Passikoff doesn’t think that today’s consumers are being disloyal; they’re just scrutinizing a brand’s value proposition more closely now than they have in recent past. Brands can’t compete on recognition alone in today’s marketplace; they have to provide some substantial meaning to their customers. Brands with high awareness and little value, he says, aren’t truly brands. They are ‘category placeholders.’



Now that's brand loyalty

His argument is both classic and timely – A brand should always know its core values and meaning, and believe in their proposition well enough to convincingly articulate it to consumers. When things get lean, it means you just have to work harder: to make sure that

a brand's proposition is expressed in a compelling way, and that the brand promise is delivered.

What's tough now is that consumer relationships with media are changing rapidly from passive receptivity to user-controlled experience. Some even anticipate a future where technology and its users will approach a merged experience. So I for one hope that Mr. Passikoff is right and that, as we grapple to understand how people relate to ads differently on TV versus online, in traditional ads versus those in social networking sites, etc., we can rely on some constants. People will always respond to real value.