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Running the Brand Up the Flagpole

“Most-Patriotic” Brands Not Always the Biggest or with the Highest Awareness

Zippo, Smith & Wesson, Hershey’s and New Balance on the list

New York NY, July 1, 2013 - With the Fourth of July upon us, many marketers are getting ready to wrap their brands in the American flag. As part of a large-scale quantitative brand values survey, including 4,500 consumers from the 9 U.S. Census Regions evaluating 197 brands and 35 category-specific emotional engagement values, Brand Keys, Inc., the New York-based brand and customer engagement research consultancy (www.brandkeys.com), did a statistical “drill-down” to identify which brands were seen as more associated with the individual value of “patriotism.”

“Lots of values drive brand engagement, of course, and the study looked at them all, but as marketers traditionally operate on the Independence Day theory that a patriotic, flag-waving call-to-emotion will motivate consumers to behave more positively toward their brands, we wanted to see which brands actually led when it came to that particular value,” said Robert Passikoff, founder and president, Brand Keys.

The Value of Patriotism

“Leveraging brand values – in this case, ‘patriotism’ – has always had to do more with believability and emotional brand engagement than company size or brand awareness levels,” Passikoff said. “It isn’t a question of how well-known a company is, or even how successful they’ve been. It certainly isn’t whether they use patriotic themes in their advertising and marketing. Ultimately, whether patriotism can be credibly leveraged to the brand’s benefit is a more a question of whether that value is seen to part of the brand’s equity, whether it’s truly acknowledged on a deeply emotional and engaging basis.”

The brands that showed up in the top-25, large or small, could all reasonably be called ‘American Icons.’ Percentages indicate degree to which the brand was seen to meet consumers’ emotional engagement expectations (benchmarked at 100%) regarding how much patriotism was credited to the brand.

1. Jeep (98%)
2. Hershey’s/Coca-Cola (97%)
3. Levi Strauss/Disney (95%)
4. Colgate (94%)
5. Zippo (93%)
6. Wrigley’s (92%)
7. Ralph Lauren (91%)

8. Kodak/Gillette (90%)
9. New Balance/Harley-Davidson (89%)
10. Budweiser/Marlboro (88%)
11. Ford (86%)
12. Louisville Slugger/Smith & Wesson (85%)
13. GE (84%)
14. John Deere/L.L. Bean (82%)
15. Walmart (81%)
16. Craftsman Tools/ Wilson Sporting Goods/Wrangler (80%)

“As this was a survey about ‘patriotism, we’d be remiss if we didn’t mention that all of the armed service brands – Coast Guard, Air Force, Army, Marines, and Navy were high on the list,” noted Passikoff. “But as this *was* a study to see how the value of patriotism was leveraged by product and service brands in for-profit businesses, we’re calling them out separately.”

“Sports teams showed up too,” said Passikoff. “The Yankees, the Patriots, the 49ers, the Cowboys. There’s a genuine and consonant thematic when it comes to patriotism.” Other brands that appeared in the top-50 included Campbell’s, Gibson, GM, Kellogg’s, McDonalds, the NFL, Playboy, Sears, and Whirlpool.

“Rational aspects like ‘Made in the USA’ and CSR activities play a part in the total make-up of the brand, of course,” said Passikoff. “But with strong emotional engagement, good marketing just gets better. It’s an unbeatable combination.”

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