



Star Brands

A Brand Manager's Guide to *Build, Manage & Market Brands*

by Carolina Rogoll

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Star Brands

"Tell me your name and your favorite brand."

I ask my students this same question every year on the first day of my class in the Master's in Branding program at the School of Visual Arts. One by one, they begin raising their hands, introducing themselves and sharing their favorite brands. Some seem very excited to associate themselves with a brand, while others are far more reticent, trying to decide on just one.

I've taught this class for several years now, and I continue to be amazed at the consistency of the brands that the students name as their favorite. As you might well imagine, brands such as Coca Cola, Apple, Starbucks, and Nike all make repeat appearances, as do regional fashion favorites and popular "green" brands.

For some students, the enthusiastic supporters, a favorite brand is more than a simple product preference; it is a statement of character. In some way, large or small, the brand has qualities they identify with, the same qualities that they want others to see in them. They love these brands and are proud to be associated with them.

The passion these students exhibit for their favorite brand is the gold standard for measuring a brand's success. Brands that are able to connect with the hearts

and minds of their customers are brands that will thrive. Beyond providing unique and functional benefits, these brands have built relationships with their customers over many years, fostering emotional ties and creating long-term brand loyalty.

The brands that do this consistently year after year, the ones that my students continue to raise their hands for are what I call Star Brands. They are the celebrities of the branding world, the leading lights that we all look to in admiration, and sometimes, a little awe.

Brands don't become stars overnight. Star Brands are a result of many smart and assertive brand choices backed up by a strong and successful business model. Building them requires careful planning and thoughtful execution consistently over many years. The people responsible for building Star Brands have mastered the balance of brand love and business fundamentals. Star Brands are not only loved, they are profitable.

That said, not all Star Brands are the same. Each possesses a unique set of cultures and business practices; for example, no one would ever mistake IBM for Ben & Jerry's. However, for all of their uniqueness, I do believe that all Star Brands possess certain core qualities, in varying degrees, which are:

Core Qualities of Star Brands

- Clarity
- Consistency
- Higher Order Purpose
- Emotional Connections
- Superior Benefits
- Commitment to Learning



McDonald's has historically been very clear about what it sells and to whom.

Clarity

The Ancient Greek maxim of "Know Thyself" speaks to the importance of individual self-awareness and knowledge. This maxim also applies to brands. Star Brands know who they are. They know what drives their success, what limited them in the past, as well as how to grow and thrive in the future. This includes understanding their customers' needs, the insights to connect with them, and the right marketing mix for effective communication. When a brand knows what it stands for and whom it is trying to delight, it can execute its communication plan and product offering with excellence.

Consistency

Star Brands have consistent and recognizable branding and communication. Consistency in communication requires discipline. A brand experience is defined by "touch points," all of the points at which your brand's product or service touches the consumer. Star Brands surround consumers with total brand experiences that not only surprise and delight them, but also look, feel, sound, and smell how the brand intends, consistently, regardless of the touch point.

Consistency pays out. Frequent exposure to the same brand identity and message helps increase brand recognition and awareness. If you have a well-defined and managed brand identity combined with messaging that is compelling and executed consistently, your media investment will also have higher returns and go further in building the strength of your brand. Every time you make a change to your brand message or identity, you will have to retrain your consumer to recognize it. In other words, you must rebuild your consumer's brain to associate these new images and emotions with your brand.

"A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke . . . all the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good" - Andy Warhol



Higher Order Purpose

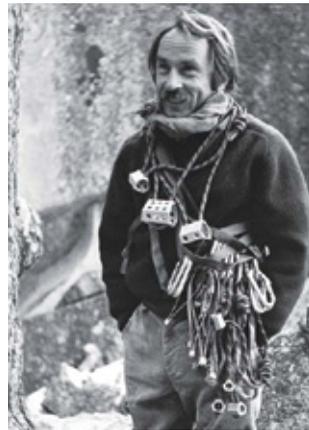
People like people who think like they do, and if given a choice, they will flock to a brand that supports their same ideology. According to a study conducted by research agency Millward Brown and Jim Stengel, former Global Marketing Officer of Procter & Gamble, having a higher order purpose or ideal that the company seeks to contribute to the world was the single most important denominator across the fifty fastest growing brands from 2000–2010.

For the brands studied, their purpose was the core driver of strategy, innovation, decisions, and behavior. Star Brands are intentional with their purpose and aspire to deliver on a higher meaning beyond the product or service they sell. Therefore, it is very common that in the process of reaching stardom, great brands become more intentional about their purpose and actively communicate it.

Emotional Connections

Brand relationships are like human relationships; we become acquainted, we try their goods or services, we decide whether we like them or not, and then we begin to have, or not have, a longer and deeper relationship. Star Brands develop long and meaningful relationships with their customers, and they do this in part by establishing strong emotional connections.

Just as in human relationships, brands cannot, and should not, try to create strong emotional ties with everyone. However, once a relationship is formed, it should be treated with care and nurturing attention. Star Brands don't treat their customers like ATMs or simply as sources of profit. They see them as co-creators in the brand conversation, striving to meet their needs, and satisfy their desires with verve and confidence.



patagonia®

Since its inception, Yvon Chouinard has committed Patagonia to be a valuable resource for environmental activism & advocacy.

Superior Benefits

The benefits a brand offers are what set it apart from its competition. The more distinctive the benefit, the more distinctive the brand, which will in turn attract the greatest number of customers. Benefits don't have to be purely functional. They can also be aesthetic, emotional, or stylistic. How or why a brand delivers a product can be an even more powerful driver of choice than how well that product performs; performance all too often becomes mere table stakes in the competitive arena. Star Brands focus on offering relevant and authentic superior benefits. They excel at delivering, communicating, and nurturing their most distinctive characteristics. This allows them to drive preference among the right set of consumers.

Commitment to Learning

A learning organization, a term first coined by MIT scientist Peter Senge, is one that facilitates the learning of its members to expand their thinking capacity, allowing them to better adapt to the changing market conditions and evolve over time¹. Star Brands have systems in place to document their history and key lessons so they can be shared across the organization to help make better future decisions. They learn from the past and quickly adapt to the future.

A commitment to learning can lead to creative new endeavors such as Google's self-driving car.



Star Brands, as learning organizations, fuel a compelling vision for the future and invest in innovation. They turn their learning into future market leadership with groundbreaking innovation that challenges category norms. Think of Google's 10X projects (those developed with the mindset of making products or services ten times better than what exist today rather than designing only for marginal improvements), such as the self-driving car or the balloon that gives Internet access to remote areas. These ideas push the limit of imagination and

technology to deliver on Google’s purpose and go well beyond its main search engine product and current primary source of revenue.

Star Brands’ relentless commitment to learning guarantees that they will never be stuck in time. If they learn faster than the competition, they will also always come out ahead. If Charles Darwin would apply his evolution theory to brands, he would talk about learning organizations: “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”

THE STAR BRAND MODEL

In the realm of human achievement, the nature vs. nurture debate is long running and not likely to be settled anytime soon. However, brands aren’t born, they’re made, and while certain characteristics of a brand come about out of fortuitous circumstances, most successful brands are the result of following well-defined processes or frameworks.

A brand framework is not a formula, but a guided set of strategic choices that you can make on a consistent basis to increase the odds of achieving brand love from your customers. Over time, these choices are calibrated with failures to achieve strong and consistent market performance. Following a framework to build a brand is known as the brand-building process.

Successful brands often follow a disciplined and consistent brand-building approach. It’s easier to accomplish a goal knowing which steps to follow than figuring it out randomly as you go or trying multiple things at once. Brand building is about creating differentiation in the market place — and communicating those differences effectively, to the right consumers, at the right time.

The Star Brand Model presented in this book is a simple yet powerful five-step process for building brands. My ultimate goal is to offer a strong foundation to those seeking to learn brand management principles to construct robust, effective and successful brands that deliver on a desired business goal. Following the Star Brand Model will not only help you inculcate the qualities of Star Brands within your organization, but it will provide a strategic outline for putting those qualities to work in the marketplace.



The Star Brand Model

The simple five step model for building powerful brands

The Star Brand Model is inspired by the lessons of what Star Brands do best, backed up with real-life brand management experience. It’s a hands-on brand model written by someone who has been on the job for several years. Less theoretical and complex, the Star Brand Model is actionable and ready for you to use.

Using the Star Brand Model to build a brand will also help build the confidence of key stakeholders, including management, clients, and investors. Knowing there is an actionable plan with well-defined metrics gives stakeholders the confidence to take risks with you. This is true for existing companies determining budgetary allocations as well as start-ups looking for funding.

As a brand builder, you won't get all of the choices right or be able to control everything that happens to the brand. However, many brand choices are within your control and with the right attitude, a little bit of luck, and the Star Brand Model, you can build your brand successfully.

How to Use the Star Brand Model

Building a brand is a journey, so I will walk you through a series of steps, a process of discovery, strategy, creativity and action using the Star Brand Model. Following the steps in order will give you the greatest chance of success. If you are already well along in your brand journey, refining the earlier steps will ensure that you have based your strategic decisions on strong fundamentals.

Regardless of where you are in the brand-building process, each step will help you ask and find answers to important questions to further your progress. Answering these questions will give you and your team greater focus and help you make strong strategic decisions to bring your brand to market. Each step will include case studies and real and hypothetical examples to maximize your learning. There are five steps in the Star Brand Model. The first four focus on defining your brand and strategic goals, while the last focuses on building a plan to implement them in the marketplace.

Step 1—Brand Assessment and Goal Setting

In this step, you will learn how to define the market environment you will be operating in, including an assessment of the brand's core strengths and weaknesses via a SWOT analysis. The goal of this first step is to articulate the current status of your brand and to begin to chart your brand-building trajectory. Based on this starting point you will be able to formulate core business challenges and set a vision for your ultimate success.

Step 2—Defining Brand Equity and Target

This step is about defining what your brand stands for and to what group of consumers it most appeals. You will learn how to define your brand equity and select the target audience for whom your brand is most relevant. This step is based on the principle that what your brand offers—your Equity—and the type of audi-

ence you choose—your Target—are highly interdependent.

Step 3—Crafting a Communication Strategy

In this step, you will learn how to discover insights and benefits for your brand, and how to use these to generate new communication ideas. You will also learn how to write an advertising brief—the foundation for effective brand communication. I will also discuss the media world in general, as well as share enlightening case studies about credit cards, beauty products, and beer!

Step 4—Establishing the Marketing Strategy

In this step you will learn how to define the ideal marketing mix by understanding and selecting core components of your brand's marketing strategy. We will also learn how to quantify the impact this mix will have on potential sales and brand growth.

Step 5—Building the Marketing Plan and Measurement

This is the meatiest step of all and where the previous four steps culminate. You will learn how to bring all the elements together into a solid business plan with a well-defined marketing mix. The marketing plan will also include the defined core elements of your brand from the previous steps as well as go-to-market choices for your product or service such as pricing, distribution, and promotion, including communication and media. This step will also include a measurement plan for determining the success of your strategy in market.

You can use the Star Brand Model with any entity, product, brand, or person that you are looking to successfully transform over time. You can even use the Star Brand Model for your personal career development—helping to define your leadership or professional equity in the same way a brand would. After all, throughout your career you are looking to increase your market value and hone in on what sets you apart from other professionals. Just like a brand, having a clear, well-defined equity helps you determine where you want to work and which target companies might be interested in you. You have to break through the clutter in the marketplace when you are trying to build your career.

Ultimately, the Star Brand Model is about success—both for brands and indi-

viduals. Achieving success is a matter of defining: who you are, what you stand for, where you belong, and what to communicate—coupled with a solid action plan. Let’s get started by first looking at the people behind Star Brands, and what they do to build them.



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