



Insights and thoughts from our Partner Markus Kramer on core branding principles with broad applicability for any marketer, communications professional or business leader. Views are subjective and our own. January 10th, 2018. © Brand Affairs AG.

Strategic Brand & Communication Prognosis 2018

Smarter, better, faster. Acceleration is the new paradigm. And whilst generating and disseminating relevant and timely content remains the priority number one for marketers globally, the actual lines of 'what' content and 'how' it is generated start to blur ever more.



Take the 'what' for instance: in 2018, Virtual Reality content will move into mainstream and Augmented Reality is rising to the next level. Quant-Marketing and AI will start to drive the 'how': gone are the days where the verbal, acoustic and visual stimulus we perceive as content was the result of hard creative thinking. Ahead are the moments in time when the algorithm creates live content, just for us. Underlying this increased velocity is undeniably more complexity and increased informational clutter. In consequence, the 'marketing cut-through' is not going to get any easier, for example.



Digging one layer deeper, I believe there will be an emerging need for more clarity, focus and integrity. And with this a genuine, consumer-driven craving for true differentiation, real meaning – and a slow but healthy return to economies of qualities.

How is demand going to be influenced? What are the key areas to bear in mind when strengthening the brand and creating demand beyond the inevitable, tactical focus of pushing for short-term results? Here are five non-obvious tendencies that will stand out in 2018. Based on deep-seated, unspoken needs of consumers from the standpoint of brand management, these tendencies have the power to shape and direct emotional and unconscious consumer behavior.

Adding Authentic Depth

The need for emotional, artistic and philosophical depth will grow in parallel to the need for authenticity and originality. Human creativity and intelligence lie in the inner depths waiting to turn into meaningful, masterful and mindful works. It is an antidote for oversimplification and meaningless PR, fake views and sensationalist news. Brands that have foreseen this already began fulfilling this need in multiples ways in relation to different contexts. For example, the new LG Signature Oled TV¹ ad employs almost religiously peaceful choir music for its commercial. The menu music for the latest PlayStation is a deep hypnotherapeutic meditative melody. Twitter, too, added depthwent against oversimplification by extending the character limit to 280. These are but anecdotal signs that indicate a pattern of success linked to the depth of what the brand says it is good at. In an overcrowded and over-communicating marketplace, the cultivation of deep work – *approfondimento* – in one's way of living or in an organization's journey is where the value lies.

Rise of The Mastermind

As semanticists' established², meaning is not to be found in the words but in the people using them. The growing interest in 'the mastermind behind the masterpiece' is partly related to the growing tendencies of personal branding and personifying for humanization. As part of the humanization macro-trend consumers in 2018 will be increasingly interested beyond the outer layer of a brand and into the builder of a brand itself: the beauty of the builder will be valued as more important than the beauty of the building. A founder's mentality can create enormous value for a company, and this can be true long after the actual founder is gone. But lose the founder's mentality³ itself, and a company can see its value rapidly destroyed. In 2018 it will be important to see how the source is the guiding force. The founding father or the original creator is the hero on whose shoulders the brand stands to be able to see what is to come. When the founder's philosophy and thus the vision of the future is understood, all decisions become clear and directionally aligned.



Purpose: A Deep Code

87% of business leaders believe that companies best perform over time if their purpose goes beyond profit⁴, brand purpose will continue to be among the priorities in 2018 too. One of the main reasons behind the prioritization of purpose is that without putting it at the core, brands can neither build true, long-term success nor a cultivate a differentiated, bonding and deep internal culture. As Carolyn Ray, Managing Director of Interbrand Canada wrote: “after many years of studying the world’s best-performing brands in our Best Global Brands report⁵, a shared characteristic is clear: brands with purpose rise to the top.” The implication of this for both brands and leaders is that the inner purpose needs to be put at the core of their businesses for it to operate as a deep guiding code, rather than just philosophical blurb on the corporate website. In 2018, the C-Suites will become ever more conscious of how the new know-how is, in fact, the deep know-why.

Humanomics 2.0

Dr. Johann Rupert, Chairman of Richemont, the global Swiss luxury conglomerate, put emphasis on the macroeconomic signs that point to a decrease in the human dimension which will lead to more initiatives and moves in both lowering the machine’s influence (i.e. mass commoditization, efficiency fetishism, robot revolution etc.) and in fulfilling the need for meaningfulness. Job security in an age of increasing AI will depend on how deeply involved professionals are with fields of humanities, arts, aesthetics etc. Many of the automated brand building activities will struggle to replicate human creativity and empathy. Or in the words of Kai-Fu Lee, developer of the world’s first speaker-independent, continuous speech recognition system: “Maybe it’s time for some of us to switch to the humanities, liberal arts, and beauty.”

Culture: New Bricoleurs Rising

Research by AXA Business Insurance⁶ busts some of the myths on being self-employed and reveals that entrepreneurs are less stressed than regular employees. In 2018 the call for brands and their corporations to get their inner culture straight will get even louder. With trust levels in the careerist future through the corporate ladder being at an all-time low, leaders will see an increase in both intrapreneurship and self-employed entrepreneurship. In 2018, organizations in most markets will need to add meaning to what they do in order to attract and retain talent. In other words, Brand and HR will overlap even more. And not just for defining and weaving shared and aligned Purpose into organizations. But also because the workplace is increasingly suited for the 21st-century patchworker. Starting a new job is now also about building an employee’s own brand.



References:

- ¹ LG, Signature OLED, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlufVUt4f_s
- ² Positioning, Al Ries & Jack Trout
- ³ <https://hbr.org/2016/07/how-dell-hp-and-apple-rediscovered-their-founders-vision>
- ⁴ Winning with Purpose, EY, 2016
- ⁵ <http://interbrand.com/views/grow-on-purpose-aligning-brand-purpose-and-culture/>
- ⁶ AXA Business Insurance, 2017, <http://smallbusiness.co.uk/third-workers-unhappy-job-2541575/>