



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. September 27th, 2018. © Brand Affairs AG.

Synergistic Brand Partnerships

Working together with someone doesn't add strength to the performance. Working with the right partner, however, is what makes all the difference. The widely spread assumption is that there is power in collaboration. In reality, the actual power is not in the process of collaboration on its own. Exponential power only unfolds if and when the right individuals, organisations, agents or brands collaborate in synchrony for the right reasons.

Constellation vs. Collaboration

A useful way of framing co-branding as in 'partnering' begins with understanding the 'co' in the 'co-branding'. The 'co' should not be seen as a synonym to 'collaboration' but rather for 'constellation'. Since the word constellation means *the alignment of stars to recognisable pattern* rather than simply the act of 'coming together' it carries a nuanced but indeed very different meaning.

When the stars of truly partnership-based co-branding do align, then the benefits and outcomes can become larger than the sum of its parts.

- 1) raising awareness and attractiveness of the brand*
- 2) strengthening the brand identity through semi-juxtaposition (or comparison in relation to)*
- 3) sharing of resources with the other brand*

- 4) *adding value and prestige to one's brand by association*
- 5) *expand the reach to relevant and new target audiences*

However, co-branding efforts are only of real value in practice if the underlying fundamentals for the reason why, upsides and downsides as well as realistic outcome are carefully thought through.



Co-Branding in Practice

There are two main approaches to a strategic brand partnership move: it is necessary to decide between the two in order to more fine-tune objectives and interests.¹ The first approach is based on how co-branding affects the design of an existing product or how both brands co-create a new product. Hermès with Apple or BlackBerry with Porsche Design are examples worth mentioning, for instance. The second approach is based on associating the names of brands in the minds of consumers through communication only without affecting the design. Remember the magical moment when the skydiver Felix Baumgartner jumped from 24 miles above Earth's surface and broke three world records that day? GoPro and RedBull were together in that. Another example is the inclusion of the Orient Express train with its logo in the Patek Philippe ad.²

“The power resides not in the act of partnership itself but in the partnering of the right brands for the right reasons.”

What are the factors that need to be considered when profiling brands for potential co-branding? Looking at some of the best practices of meaningful and mutually beneficial co-branding is a good starting point:

Co-branding checklist:

- ✓ The brand identities complement each other
- ✓ Mutually beneficial brand codes and values
- ✓ From different but relevant areas of expertise
- ✓ Addressing similar or same markets
- ✓ Both brands are long-term oriented
- ✓ Marginal expectations of immediate returns
- ✓ Joining up adds real value for the target audience
- ✓ The partnership is synergistic

It is strategically right to partner with a brand that has focused expertise on something that one's brand doesn't. Complementarity is the key word here. For instance, Porsche Design is a master in aesthetics while BlackBerry is an expert in secure communications technology. Samsonite and McLaren F1 makes for another good duet. Despite the fact that it is better when the two brands have expertise in completely different areas they still need to have some qualities and characteristics in common for a co-branding partnership to be effective.

The respective areas of expertise do not need to be either directly or indirectly relevant to each other's. Let's remember Gucci with Riva yachts. Both carry codes of Italian design and la dolce vita, and yet they are of different areas of expertise, though Riva normally attempts to reach a higher segment than that of Gucci.

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If one's brand has a niche or boutique feel to it then it is best to avoid working together with a mass market brand in order to eliminate the risk of damaging brand perception. Some of the worst cases in history include Target and Neiman

Marcus; Versace and H&M or Shell and Lego. Commenting on the source of damage caused from the Neiman Marcus-Target case, Melanie Trepanier, a brand manager, said "High fashion is about being edgy and standing out from the crowd, which is misaligned with the trend seeking mass market shoppers."³

Synergistic Together?

Synergy is not the same as energy. One plus one doesn't equal two but three or more. When one brand plus one brand equals two brands – that is, by definition, not the kind of co-branding that carries synergistic dynamics. Does the co-branding that you've been planning on have points-of-synergy in addition to energy? Will the brands be synergistic together?

References:

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3. Kosin, Mark. "Brand Partnerships That Failed Miserably (And A Few That Worked)." *Urbo*, Urbo, 5 July 2018, www.urbo.com/content/brand-partnerships-that-failed-miserably-and-a-few-that-worked/.