

Building a Brand with a Thousand Songs

by Laura Pasternak

You know you need a brand. But do you know that one of the most effective ways to grow your business is to build on that brand?

In a world of short attention spans and rapidly changing technology, building your brand is crucial to your survival. The most successful companies understand its importance. Here's one brand building success story:

Music to Our Ears

Do you have an iPod? It seems everywhere you look today, someone is plugged into Apple's portable digital music player. The company knows its audience and shrewdly builds its brand around it. As a result, Apple has sold more than 59 million iPods since their inception in late 2001, with 6,451,000 sold in the fiscal 2005 fourth quarter alone¹.

In fact, iPod's branding and subsequent popularity have resulted in 220 percent growth of the units² over the previous year's same quarter. How did Apple do it?

Finding the Right iName

Apple's premier product was the Macintosh computer. As the internet grew, Apple shortened the computer's name to iMac. The nickname represented the personal computer's ability to deliver all the features needed to connect with the Internet. The name stuck.

Over the years, the company introduced numerous products. However, none have been as enormously popular as the iPod. Coincidentally, iPod's target market was being born during much of the company's growth in the late 1980's. Today, this key audience has been dubbed the iGeneration.

The iGeneration has been a boon for iMac, and subsequently, iPod. The company has helped define a "culture" around its brand. The seemingly simple 'i' not only grew to establish the brand for the company but also drove the development of a host of 'i' products like iPod, iTunes, iChat, iMovies, iBook and iSight. Today, the company's brand reflects the attributes of being high-tech, "cool" and creative – exactly what its products and messaging have attempted to convey.

¹ According to Apple's quarterly financial results, October 11, 2005

² According to Apple's quarterly financial results, October 11, 2005

Creating a Halo Effect...And a Thousand Songs

Although the iPod is both Mac and Microsoft Windows-compatible, Apple's branding created a 'halo effect', subliminally reinforcing brand loyalty in its Mac users as well as converting non-Apple users. Today, iPod continues to dominate the industry, with more than 90% of sales in the digital music market for hard-drive players and over 70% of the market for all types of music players³.

Next, iPod created a tagline, "A Thousand Songs, in Your Pocket". You know exactly what the product delivers based on the tagline. Moreover, the tagline is catchy and more likely to resonate in the mind of the consumer. Along with it, iPod created a simple, yet powerful image. Silhouetted people against brightly colored solid backgrounds dance to music via the iPod. The images are strikingly simple, but effectively and prominently focus on the contrasting white iPod and accompanying white headphones. See the white hand-held player and headphone cords, think iPod.

When set to music, the images evoke emotions in the consumer. The classic rock songs iPod uses in its advertisements bring back memories of places, people and times in our lives. We all relate to dancing with abandon to our favorite tunes, and the desire to let loose and dance resurfaces at the sight of the silhouetted dancer.

iPod knows these ads will influence the consumer's psyche. We buy for emotional reasons and then rationalize the purchase with specific benefits like iPod's small pocket size, convenience, cool colors, easy navigation, expanded memory, etc.

Building Buzz and Momentum with U2

Apple could have stopped extending its brand after its initial success. However, the company knows that good branding continues to build on buzz and momentum. Apple expanded its brand on several levels.

First, they introduced special edition iPods featuring the immensely popular rock group, U2. The campaign was two-fold. U2 was able to promote its latest CD "How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb" along with its first single, "Vertigo". Apple was able to generate buzz, and sales, by introducing a special edition U2 iPod in black. Next, Apple created an ad campaign featuring U2 silhouetted against a bright, solid-colored backdrop singing "Vertigo".

The ads were highly effective and precisely targeted at iPod's demographic. If iPod is cool enough for U2, then it's cool enough for me. They generated plenty of buzz and sales continued to grow. Additionally, the ads tapped into the emotional aspects

³ According to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/iPod>

of a consumer's decision-making process to reach the repressed rocker in each of us.

Expanding on your brand to reflect growth and to keep consumers interested is part of the ongoing process of evaluating and building your brand. Apple understands this and has begun to capitalize on the iGeneration's thirst for ever-changing, more advanced technology by releasing other iPod versions including the Mini, Shuffle, and most recently, Nano. The newest iPod will hold 15,000 songs, 25,000 photos and 150 hours of video. Again, it taps into the consumer's psyche by continuously introducing newer, better and cooler versions of predecessors. The company still utilizes cultural icons to tout the product as well, with the latest ad campaign featuring the rapper, Eminem.

Apple also brands iPod in conjunction with iTunes, its music web site where iPod users can purchase and download songs for less than \$1 a piece. The iTunes web site also enables users to download pre-released songs, making its appeal even stronger among the iGeneration.

Partnering to Build Brand Awareness...and Sales

Today, Apple is partnering with automakers to continue building and extending its iPod brand. Working with car manufacturers like BMW, Nissan, Volkswagen and Volvo, Apple and its new auto partners will "create seamless integration between your car and iPod." iPod-ready head units, self-install options and professionally installed interfaces are available for select 2005 and 2006 cars. Apple touts these after-market car integration solutions as a way to customize "your ride, iPod-style". Japan is integrating iPod systems into their 2006 Nissan, Mazda, Daihatsu, BMW, MINI, smart and Alfa Romeo lines. Such partnerships expand iPod's geographic reach and certainly its commercial exposure.

Building Brand One iProduct at a Time

Brand is a work in progress, always evolving. You've got to check the market's pulse on a regular basis to get a reliable read on your brand's value and adjust it accordingly to keep it fresh and in front of the consumer. By continuously leveraging your brand equity—be it through businesses, musicians, the media, customers, employees or the public—it will grow strong and powerful, and will surely resonate with your audience.

So, are you building on your brand? If not, it's time to look at your brand with fresh eyes. Considering the who, what, where, when, why and how of your brand and target audience is an ongoing and essential process. Who are your customers today (they might not be the same customers you had five years ago) and who can you partner with to leverage your brand? What has changed with your customers and what are their needs and wants? Where is the industry going today, five years from

now, ten years? When should you leverage your brand and when should you wait? Why do your customers buy your brand? How has the world and your business changed over the years and how should that be reflected in your brand?

As we become a more global market, with shorter attention spans, building brand is critical to your longevity. Build your brand thoughtfully and its value to your customers, partners and shareholders will increase. That alone will be music to your ears.

Laura Pasternak is President of MarketPoint, LLC, a brand management firm that helps businesses improve results by identifying, integrating and managing customer-driven brand equities and strategies. Visit www.yourmarketpoint.com to learn more, or call 1.866.21POINT toll-free or 410.418.8490.