

**Brand Mythology:
Advertising Builds and Maintains Brands
By Creating Mythologies & Mytho-Symbolic Worlds**

From The Mythmakers by Sal Randazzo

A brand is more than a product

An understanding of the unique brand-building power of advertising begins with an understanding of brands. A brand is more than a product sitting on supermarket shelf. A can of Campbell's Soup is only the physical aspect of a brand – it's product and packaging-which is for the most part is static and finite. But a brand also has a definite psychic aspect, which is both dynamic and malleable. A brand ultimately exists in psychological space - in the consumer's mind and heart.

Campbell's Soup is more than a can of soup with a red and white label sitting on a supermarket shelf. When we think of Campbell's Soup, we typically begin with product terms: a quality product, a trusted brand name, etc. But our stronger associations invariably center around images and feelings: children, the Campbell's Soup kids – (See recent Campbell's Soup Kids commercial on youtube), a mother serving a bowl of soup to her child on a cold winter's day, memories of our own mom, a warm secure feeling. Strong, enduring brands learn to create an emotional connection with their consumers. They get the consumer to love their brand.

Advertising is still the most powerful tool we have for building and maintaining strong enduring brands. Advertising builds brands by wrapping products in our dreams and fantasies – by mythologizing them. Advertising is the vehicle that allows marketers to access the consumer's mind, to create a perceptual space for the brand, wherein we can create a unique perceptual inventory of imagery, symbols, feelings and associations. This perceptual inventory helps to give the brand its' own unique identity and mythology.

Advertising is a storied form of communication, a narrative fiction that often uses mythical characters, places and themes to engage and entertain the consumer while communicating information about the product/brand. It often creates mythical characters and mytho-symbolic worlds (imaginary worlds with their own mythology) worlds full of myth and symbolism that help to make brands more unique and appealing. ***Successful brands learn to create and maintain their own mythologies!***

The Marlboro Cowboy is an example of an enduring, albeit controversial, mythical advertising character created through advertising. Marlboro has leveraged the powerful emotional appeal of the cowboy mythology to build one of the most recognized brands in the world. It doesn't matter that there are very few real cowboys. The cowboy is a mythical figure that dwells in a mythological -symbolic world – the world of the Wild West, where cowboy heroes like Roy Rogers and the Lone Ranger roam. This image of the lone cowboy riding into the sunset with his six-gun, has been emblazoned into the American psyche.

McDonald's is yet another brand that has created a very appealing mythical world, a wondrous, magical place where everyone is welcome, safe, happy, loved, kind, sharing and forever young at heart. The McDonald's that exists in the consumers' mind is a microcosm of everything America is supposed to be.

Advertising transforms products into brands by giving brands personalities and identities. Advertising transforms products into enduring brands by creating appealing mytho-symbolic worlds that help give the brand a unique identity and personality.

Brand Identity and Personality

David Ogilvy popularized the concept of brand image and identity in his book, "The Confessions of an Advertising Man." Ogilvy emphasized the importance of the "long view" in building and maintaining a positive brand image. "Every advertisement should be thought of as a contribution to the complex symbol which is the brand image."

A brand's image is a distillation of many factors: advertising, packaging, labels, product experiences, logos, etc.

Brand image and brand personality are often confused or used interchangeably. They are related – but different. Brand personality is only one aspect of a brand's overall image, albeit an important one. For example, Campbell Soup's brand personality would most likely be strongly associated with mothers and children – the image of mother giving her children a bowl of Campbell's soup. A brand's overall image includes the brand's personality, but focuses more on how a brand is ultimately perceived overall.

Although a brand's identity and personality are created and communicated through the combined effects of advertising, packaging, labels, logos, etc, advertising generally plays a key role. It doesn't matter whether it's Budweiser, Starbucks or Dannon Yogurt, smart advertisers transform products into brands by mythologizing them – by wrapping them in our dreams and fantasies – by creating mytho-symbolic worlds that reflect our values and sensibilities, which work to give brands their distinct identities and personalities.

Advertisers generally understand the importance of brand identity.

On some level, brands function as a projection holder into which we project the consumer's values and sensibilities. A brand can also function as a badge, a way of expressing and reinforcing the consumer's personal and cultural identities, and sensibilities.

Consumers need to feel psychologically comfortable with a brand's image and personality. They generally choose brands that they can identify with – brands that are consistent with their own personalities, beliefs and values – or some idealized version.

On some level, consumers realize the brands they choose reveal something about themselves. Brands make statements about who we are. Do we wear a Rolex or a Timex? Do we drink Budweiser or Heineken?

Creating an Emotional Connection with the Consumer

Creating an emotional connection with the consumer is critical in building strong, enduring brands. The importance of creating an appealing brand identity and brand personality is that they work to build an emotional bond between the brand and the consumer. In a world where products look increasingly similar, and consumers may begin to believe that the private label brands are good enough, the importance of creating an emotional bond between the consumer and your brand cannot be over-emphasized. In today's value-conscious world, it is easy to lose sight of the powerful emotional appeal brands can hold.

Motel 6: Creating an Emotional Bond based on two Key Consumer Insights

Several years ago, the Richardson Group, a Dallas based advertising agency, won a Gold Effie for its Motel 6 radio campaign. The advertising campaign helped turn around Motel 6's decline. The advertising used radio and the folksy, down-home persona of Tom Bodett to create an appealing brand mythology – a down-to-earth, unpretentious brand mythology, geared not to the upscale business traveler, but to the budget minded road warrior.

The First Key Consumer Insight is that budget-minded consumers often feel embarrassed about staying in “cheap hotels.” However, further digging revealed that the people who use budget lodgings are generally sensible down-to-earth people who are saving money – not because they are cheap – but because they are saving money for their family and children's education. To counter the “cheap image,” the new advertising promised weary travelers clean, comfortable accommodations at very reasonable prices – ‘it's a smart choice.’ Additionally, Tom Bodett worked well as a spokesman because he comes across like a typical consumer – a no nonsense, unpretentious, sensible guy who doesn't have a lot of money.

The Second Key Consumer Insight – As the campaign evolved, the creators came up with a brilliant insight – a terrific line that captures the down-home appeal of the Motel 6 advertising: **“We'll leave the light on for you.”** What a wonderfully appropriate, appealing image for a motel. *The line has a powerful emotional appeal!* It's welcoming and reassuring. And the powerful appeal of the “we'll leave the light on for you line” is that it speaks to us on an emotional level.

People who travel a lot spend a lot of time alone in motel rooms away from home and family, and they are lonely. Knowing that there is someone there who thought to leave the light on is comforting and welcoming. We are all really kids at heart. **What we are really looking for is a safe haven – a place where we feel safe, and where there are people who care about us.** That brilliant line drove the successful campaign, and provided the emotional connection that made the weary traveler feel safe and welcomed.

Harley-Davidson - *Is an extraordinary example of what happens when consumers get emotionally involved with a brand that has a powerful identity and brand personality.* People who buy Harley-Davidson motorcycles aren't just buying motorcycles, they are buying into the Harley Mystique, it's bad boy, rebel image created by the imagery surrounding the Harley-Davidson brand. Harley-Davidson must walk a fine line because it's fascinating brand mythology also has a powerful underground element which, although it contributes to the brand's mystique, also has a potentially negative aspect that must be kept under control.

It's worth noting that some of the mytho-symbolic imagery associated with the Harley-Davidson motorcycles should be credited as much to Hollywood as Madison Avenue. In any case, Harley-Davidson has created an iconic brand with a very appealing mytho-symbolic world, a world with a powerful identity and personality. Harley aficionados gladly pay to participate in the Harley-Davidson mystique.

Harley Davidson brand loyalty is astonishing. In spite of healthy price increases, the availability of similar, less expensive motorcycles, and a one-year waiting list (three years in Europe), Harley buyers won't even consider other motorcycle brands. And for people who want to participate in the Harley mystique, but can't afford or don't want the motorcycle, they buy lots of Harley-Davidson paraphernalia.

The Harley-Davidson brand name and winged logo has begun appearing on everything from hats and T-shirts to boots and cigarette lighters. You can even grab lunch at the Harley Café, in the heart of Manhattan. Still not convinced? ***Harley owners, tattoo the brand name on their bodies.***