

WALLY OLINS SAFFRON BRAND CONSULTANTS

# ALL CARS HAVE 4 WHEELS

And they manage to differentiate themselves, argues Wally Olins, by the way that they present themselves. Olins underlines that a brand has to be very clear about what it stands for

There are lots of words that are used around the idea of belonging, and being seen to be something in the world outside. Some people talk about corporate identity, some talk about image, some about brand while others talk about reputation. If you look at Oxford or Harvard university, they are clearly a brand in the sense that they both have a very strong image, a strong identity. Here, the chances are that I am more likely to use the word reputation of the organization as a brand. Increasingly, as is the case, a brand represents a product, service or organization with a particular personality and style. And the point about the brand which is like the identity is that, it underlines and emphasizes the particular aspect of the organisation that makes it different from its competitors.

In most organisations, the similarities are much greater than the differences. Look at cars as a category. At its most basic, all cars have four wheels, an engine etc. The differences between them are, however, underlined and emphasized by the way in which they present themselves, by what you call their brand.

Brands emphasize the difference between different products or services and people associate themselves with that brand or identity because it means something to them. It gives them a feeling of belonging and warmth. When a man walks on the street wearing a t-shirt with a Nike swoosh on it, he is identifying himself with the idea of what Nike stands for.

You can look at the whole world of branding in quite a direct and straight-forward way but there are

certain rules that you have to understand. There is a difference between the brand that you invent and a brand that already exists.

I was involved in the creation of a brand called Orange. It was created because there were already a number of brands in the marketplace that existed which either based their idea around technology or price. We believed there was an opportunity in the marketplace for a brand that had a personal relationship with the consumer because it was so close to them. We believed there was an opportunity there to create an entirely new brand. We found an idea around optimism and out of that we created the whole brand 'Orange'. That meant thinking about a way in which we could encapsulate the idea of optimism powerfully. Not just visually, but also powerfully in communication and with the staff of the organization. In a service brand, by far the most important audience that one has, is their own people. The customer only knows the brand through the organization's employees.

In this case, the client was extremely brave and was prepared to move in this direction even though the brand idea failed when it was tested on focus groups. The client believed in it and there was a period of intense internal education and working through all levels of the organization. The brand did astonishingly well. If you can get the client, the brand strategy consultant, the ad agency and all the other communication suppliers working very closely together on a really good idea, you can make it very effective.

But that was an inventive brand, started from scratch. That does not happen very often.



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What does happen very often is that you are working with an organization it could be TATA or an Apollo, who have been around for years and they have a reputation. Very often they have dealers, communication suppliers, customers etc and if you have a brand that's already very strong in the market place, you have to ask why they want to change that brand. The answer very often is that, it isn't so much wanting to change as wanting to stay where they are. The world is changing and they need to stay in the same position. If they don't change what they look like and feel like, they will begin to look very old-fashioned. So sometimes it is to do with an evolution to stay in the same place.

Sometimes, it is about what part of the business name/identity it is that you want to retain. This was the case with Akzo Nobel, the largest paint and coating company in the world. In 2007, they bought ICI Dulux. Now ICI is a very well known name all around the world, including in India. There are issues there, do we keep the name, do we change it? You have to make your mind up about the extent to which this completely changed organisation (which has taken over a very large competitor) is seen to be changing both internally and externally. Internally there are a whole lot of people who have arrived from another company—what message do you want to give them? You want to give them the



message that they have been taken over? Do you want to give them the message that you are coming together and this is a whole new exercise? Do you want to give them the message that they make a big difference to who you are? This has to be worked through.

Then there is the issue of the brands that they own, like Dulux. To what extent should they keep them, to what extent do they want to change them? What signal do you want to make to people? A very powerful signal that you make to people is the visual signal. The visual signal that we made for Akzo Nobel was 'We are changing and you are a part of our family.'

Now that is a very carefully thought through way of manifesting

your new identity, of course, to the world outside but also to your suppliers, your customers and to your own people.

Then an organization, say in India, might decide that it's moving from being in one market to being global. In this case, does it emphasize that it's being Indian or does it hide it?

If I see Jet Airways, there is quite clearly a deliberate policy not to be seen to be Indian. The name of the organization, the way it presents itself does not relate nationally. But if you look at some other companies, you may find that the country of origin effect is very powerful. If you are BMW, the strength of being German is very strong. If you are a wine brand, the country of origin effect is so

apollo  
Virgin

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strong, it's everything. When you are looking at identity, there are issues around the country of origin effect that are very significant.

Another area of significance is whether companies use their main corporate identity to go with a number of their brands. Or should they use a whole series of brand names that are independent of each other? Hindustan Unilever has recently done this and it is increasingly happening all over the world. They are associating the corporate name with their brands. This is because people are getting more and more interested in corporations and demanding that organizations behave in a way that is socially responsible. If they like one brand from a company, the chances of them liking another brand from the same company are much higher. This is why the relationship between the corporate brand and the product or service brand is becoming closer.

If you take the banking and the financial sector, it happens quite often. HSBC uses the same brand name wherever they go, when they acquire a company. RBS buys other brands and keeps their names. This is not an issue that is easily resolved. What can be said is that in certain situations, having a monolithic identity (in other words, one name that can be used everywhere) has huge advantages. The advertising and communication power that you have is enormous because everything is focused around one name. On the other hand, it's very difficult if you have that kind of imagery to have any nuances. In some categories, the monolithic identity dominates. Look at the Virgin brand, it's

fascinating. You can use that brand on anything, they have it on an airline, on a mobile, in the financial services business.

The Virgin brand means one thing in particular, namely one man grinning away, purporting to be very friendly and relaxed. The power of that brand is so great that the idea that they would have a whole series of sub-brand names is absolutely absurd because the whole power of the brand is what Virgin means in any context. There are very few brands that can do that. Virgin is an example of the monolithic brand which you can stretch a long way.

Vodafone is an example of a brand that you cannot stretch a long way. Vodafone is a very powerful brand, and it wins because it's ubiquitous. Successful brands have a very strong personality. Virgin has a very strong personality. Everything that it does is outsourced. The airline is taken care of by Singapore airlines, the trains are run by somebody else. What they have is the brand, they don't have much else.

You got to have a very clear idea of what you stand for and if you don't have a strong idea, then all the advertising communication in the world will not help. There are some brands that are completely communication driven. Coca Cola has a very clear idea about what it stands for, which is all to do with love, so does Nike. To be successful in the consumer world, it's useful to have a very clear idea of what your brand stands for.

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