

Creative B2 Branding (no, really)

Building a creative brand
in a business world


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in a business world

Scot McKee



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C contents

	Foreword	ix
	Introduction	xi
	Prologue	x
1	Getting over the stigma (B2B v B2C)	1
	Selling snow to the Eskimos	1
	The birth of business brands	3
	The importance of reputation	8
	Definition of a brand	11
	Business versus consumer brands	16
	Overcoming the stigma of business brands	21
2	It's just a badge, isn't It? (logo v brand)	26
	Bend me, shape me, any way you want me	26
	The gingerbread man	28
	Selling the dream, not the widget	31
	The importance of the signature line	34
	'Phoowahh – It's a Ferrari!'	39
	Wake up and smell the Java	44
3	The customer's always right (external perceptions)	50
	To look inwards, it helps to look outwards	50
	The jellyfish effect	52
	Crowdsourcing	60
	The C-level audience	63
	See me, feel me, touch me	67
4	Up close and personal (gathering internal support)	70
	Dancing round the handbags	70
	Free the pig within	72
	In the bunker	76
	Brand hierarchy	79
	It's all about them	85
	The end of the beginning	90

5	Forget the product (brand strategy development)	95
	Writing it down	95
	Fresh meat for the balcony	98
	The brand strategy document	102
	Brand values	102
	Brand context	107
	Brand promise	112
	Steam cleaned bottles	114
	Form over function	116
6	The creative platform (managing creative appetite)	121
	It's hardly rocket science	121
	The process of creativity	122
	The importance of being earnest	126
	Message in a bottle	129
	The good book	133
	The Creative Platform®	135
	Your worthless opinions	139
	Shifting perceptions	141
	The 'C' Word	143
7	Publish and be damned (launch)	144
	Learning to let go	144
	Up, up and away...	147
	Out with the old	151
	Brand measurement	154
	Ongoing brand development	158
	Learn from history – why make mistakes twice?	162
8	Crystal balls (predicting the future, digital brands and the end of the world as we know it)	169
	Digital Luddites	169
	Social integration	172
	Adapt and adopt, or die	176
	Brand engagement	179
	The Social Trinity Model: conversation – community – network	182
	Brand amplification	194
	To blog or not to blog? That shouldn't even be a question	196
	Crowdsourcing returns	201
	Mobile convergence – it's the new black	203

9	Bear witness	206
	Context	206
	Software Inc.	207
	Epilogue	221
	Mamma take this badge off of me	221
	The King is dead – long live the King	221
	Repent ye sinners and believe	222
	The whole truth, and nothing but the truth	222
	A view from the bridge	224
	The Beginning	226
	Index	227

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To Charlie who would have loved this. I miss you.

A print-ready PDF with full colour images of the campaign materials shown in Chapter 7 and 9 can be downloaded from Creative B2B Branding area of the publishers website at www.goodfellowpublishers.com.

A about the author



Scot McKee is a B2B Brand Consultant who began his career in advertising and marketing aged 11. Whilst his childhood peers were busy learning the lyrics to Queen’s ‘Bohemian Rhapsody,’ Scot was recording jingles from TV advertisements. This questionable pastime acquired him few friends, but he persisted nonetheless up to and including the 1980 ‘Dancing Woman’ commercial for Shake ‘n’ Vac. To this day he still, disturbingly, is able to sing the theme song from the advertisement for the children’s bubble bath – Matey.

Scot specialized in Advertising, Marketing and Market Research at college and graduated with distinction but little hope of employment. He worked in the Marketing Department of a large electronics company in Paris before returning to the UK where he interviewed a selection of top UK advertising agencies. He decided that he wasn’t prepared to work for any of them. He worked instead, at a number of regional marketing agencies becoming a Company Director aged 24 and the Managing Director of his own agency a year later.

He followed his then girlfriend (later to become his wife) to the US, “on a hunch,” and became an Account Director for a large marketing consultancy in Boston. It was too cold. So he came home.

On returning to the UK in 1994, Scot founded Birddog – the company that was to become the multi-award winning, top 20 B2B marketing agency. As Managing Director of Birddog, Scot has led global brand strategies and pioneered creative change in B2B organisations of all sizes and market persuasions. His role has been to drag, cajole, entice and coerce marketing professionals kicking and screaming into new ways of thinking and communicating brand value. A controversial speaker, he has addressed marketing conferences including PricewaterhouseCoopers, Johnson & Johnson, GeoPost and the IDMF. He has been Chairman of the B2B Marketing Forum and is a regular contributor in the business press. Scot has contributed a monthly column for B2B Marketing Magazine for almost five years.

Most recently, Scot has turned his attention to the relevance and application of B2B brand strategy and creative communications in the digital market. Unlike most self-proclaimed digital 'gurus,' Scot has almost zero experience in the digital industry. He sees this as a good thing. With over 25 years marketing agency and brand strategy expertise, Scot feels almost ready to deal with the onslaught of the digital revolution. He is a confirmed Luddite who has been inexplicably drawn towards the digital channel, probably for personal gain. He provides an essential link between the needs of the brand and its online audience. Already a published authority, blogger and industry speaker on the subjects of Creative Brand Strategy, Social Media, Mobile Internet and Digital Channels, he's looking forward to when the whole digital evolution thing just stops, but isn't holding his breath.

Away from the office, Scot visits other people's offices in an advisory capacity as non-executive director. He also supports the industry by mentoring aspiring talent as long as they're not too good looking. His enthusiasm for guitars is equalled only by his inability to play them and he boasts a collection he hopes his wife will never fully discover. Scot is married with two children and maintains, with a straight face, that they are, "the wind beneath my wings." He currently divides his time between London, New York, Sydney and Cyberspace.

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F

oreword

Joel Harrison ~ Editor, B2B Marketing

By its very nature, B2B tends to be a 'vanilla' environment. The 'poor relation' tag has been long discussed and bemoaned by practitioners and consultants alike. But beyond that, there's a seemingly overwhelming tendency for brands operating in B2B sectors to pull back from brave or bold marketing decisions or radical brand identities. It's an inconvenient truth that, in the final analysis, most B2B marketing practitioners and senior business decision makers default to 'safe' marketing solutions, which are unlikely to be controversial, but at the same time less likely to make their audience truly stop and think.

It takes a very brave and determined marketer to swim against this often overwhelming tide of mediocrity. Step forward Scot McKee.

Scot was one of the first people that I met when we launched the B2B Marketing Magazine back in 2004. As well as being impressed by his considerable passion for anything B2B related, it was readily apparent that he was a man with opinions. Lots of them. Thankfully, he also had a sense of humour.

Since that first meeting, he's demonstrated courage in his convictions to back up his sometimes controversial viewpoints. As you'll discover in this book, Scot does not believe B2B brands, branding or marketing should be vanilla, or run-of-the-mill in any way. Quite the opposite in fact; he believes they should challenge, subvert and upset the status quo at every reasonable (and sometimes not so reasonable) opportunity in order to be memorable and to create a truly effective platform for organisational success.

In my experience, Scot is the guy in the room who will ask the difficult question and not be afraid to upset the applecart – figuratively at least. I'm not saying he courts controversy for its own sake (although he has been known to) but if there's an encapsulation of 'left field' in B2B marketing, it's generally going to be Scot-shaped.

Since our meeting, Scot has become a regular contributor to B2B Marketing, in print, online and at events. He's proven to me that he's one of the clearest and most compelling thinkers, not to mention one of the best writers, operating in this sector. If you're looking for genuine insight and a compelling perspective on a B2B brand or marketing issue, you ignore Scot McKee, and this book, at your peril.

I've been looking forward to *Creative B2B Branding (No, really)* as an opportunity for a deeper insight into Scot's sometimes idiosyncratic philosophy, and it does not disappoint. If – like me – you're interested in how B2B brands can finally find a formula (or at least a methodology) to enable them to achieve the same level of excellence as is regularly demonstrated by consumer-focused organisations, you'll welcome this book with open arms, and consume it voraciously.

The ideas within this book are considered, compelling and clearly expressed, and it is written in Scot's trademark irreverent yet forceful style. As well as being enjoyable to read, I'm sure it will give you a new level of understanding of the challenges facing B2B brands, as well as strategies to help achieve your own B2B brand objectives to best effect.

Creative B2B Branding (No, really) not only functions as a valuable explanation of what good branding is and its relevance in B2B, more importantly it provides a comprehensive and practical roadmap detailing how a company can embrace best practice and leverage the potential of a well defined and thought-through brand, as well as outlining the problems that you'll undoubtedly face along the way. Scot's arguments are illustrated and backed up with numerous useful and insightful examples of branding and marketing challenges that he's faced in his 10 million year career, which bring the points alive and reinforce the messages.

It would be wrong to say that B2B marketing needs more people like Scot McKee to be successful – one of him is probably all we can cope with. What is true, however, is that if more people read this book and were inspired by the ideas contained within it, the standard of business branding would rise significantly. That's good news for all of us.

Introduction

A confession. Try as I might, I've never been able to read a business book of any description from cover to cover. I've dipped into some. I've returned to a few. I've even quoted lines from a couple. But I've never been able to read the whole thing. I've reflected on that and have decided that, either I'm stupid, or the books are boring.

For me to read a book (any book) from cover to cover, it has to tell a good story. I like stories. When I build a brand, I'm telling a story. When I have conversations, I'm telling and listening to stories. The narrative is the interesting part.

This is undoubtedly a business book – you will learn about building business brands. You will also read some stories that, in my mind, are the interesting parts – because, as in life, the stories inform our learning.

Some of you will dip into this. Some will return to it periodically. Who knows, some may even quote lines from it. But I'd like you to read it from cover to cover. Whilst I've never been able to read a business book like that, I hope I've been able to write one.

Finally, this is a social project. I'm interested in your views, your brands and your stories – please share them with me. You'll find me on the web (www.scotmckee.com), on LinkedIn and on Twitter. Google me, I'm there... but I'm not the weird, pervy Scot McKee on the third page of the search results. He's strange. I'm not. (No, really.)

Prologue/executive summary

- ▶ Rule Number One – Pay attention to the details
- ▶ Rule Number Two – Assume nothing

That's it.

Chapter extract

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