

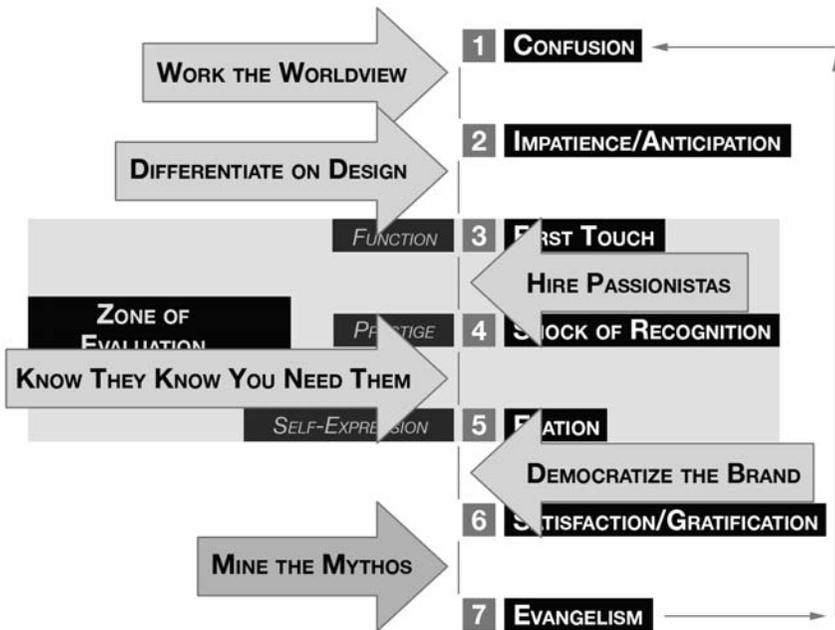
Chapter 7

MINE THE MYTHOS

F Scott Fitzgerald wrote in *The Great Gatsby* that personality is forged by an “unbroken string of successful small gestures.” As with people, so with brands. Brand personality takes root in the soil of its own heritage and history. Some brands have to make up a past. Others have ancestry galore to properly utilize if the brand’s stewards can find the right tone to strike without relying too much on pure nostalgia, thereby foregoing the relevance to today that any great brand needs. I’m calling this the brand’s mythos—the backstory that is archetypally true, the mythic legend of itself told to itself and its fans.

The rule here is to “remember” but not to be slavishly tethered to mythos. Crest started out life as a cavity-preventing toothpaste, but it’s grown and evolved into an “oral care system” with whitening, tartar control, breath freshener, and a host of other related benefits that appeal to nearly every age and stage. It’s a fine line to walk, the organic trajectory of the brand’s DNA, staying within a logic that consumers can follow

BRANDING PROCESS STEP 6



and the bounds of believability, while allowing the brand to be alive, vital, and delighting. So we honor the brand's past, without getting stuck in it.

Think about the Mini Cooper cars. "The Mini Cooper played the nostalgia card gracefully," one Ford exec tells me. "It was a forty-year-old brand brought back in 2000, with a design that echoed the racy 1961 original: the scooped headlights, recessed door handles, chunky wheels, and box aesthetic paying authentic homage without trying to be old in a new setting. Inspired by, rather than a direct replica."¹

Car aficionados can articulate the five critical components of the Mini Cooper's success: the car's parentage brings quality assurance; the racy performance and road handling adds experiential sizzle; its interior appointments suggest compelling

thoughtfulness; its distinctive design screams *Pay Attention To Me!*; and its buzzworthy marketing (more about this in a moment) says you're not dealing with just another vehicle, but an attitude, a worldview that includes large dashes of wit.

Even the experts didn't realize what a phenomenon it would become. At the 2000 Auto Show in Detroit it was derided. In 2002, it was the car of the year, with sales of 125,000, up 25 percent over its target.

Even more impressive, really, is its success in Japan, arguably the birthplace of the compact car. The Japanese buy nearly one-quarter of all the Minis produced. When it came time to launch the Mini Cooper, Rover took back management of the brand in Japan and made two essential decisions: first, a commitment to supporting the Mini in Japan, buying back the import franchise and making unique modifications to the Mini Cooper required by Japanese regulations; second, straightforwardly linking it to its Rover heritage, a step not taken elsewhere in the global markets. Because of the perceived appeal for the Japanese of this storied birthright, the car created what the designers called a balanced reciprocity between the Rover and Mini Cooper mark.

"The Mini Cooper's attraction is not primarily at the functionally-tangible level but at an iconically intangible level," write Stuart Laverick and Kevin Johnston in the industry journal *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*. "The Mini Cooper, like all icons, is the manifestation of a sentiment—culture made flesh—and a rich representation of a vastly image-rich period in British culture."²

The Mini Cooper then offered Japanese drivers "genuine Britishness, traditional design, traditional materials and, perhaps most importantly, the opportunity to personalize their purchase and stand out from the crowd," according to Nicki Darzinkas, a small car brand manager at Rover.³ Notice that

in the United States the appeal was one of a basic, small economy car with an idiosyncratic attitude. The Rover name would have limited, not advanced, the story here.

This entire notion of the iconic tug of brands is worth dwelling on for a bit. The writer defines an icon as “an artifact that crystallizes and embodies a set of mental associations far beyond its functionality and immediate environment.” Levi’s 501 jeans, of course, are one of the most iconic brands in history, a “particular vigorous set of associations of time, place and culture.” I believe passion brands typically have that iconic attribute as part of their appeal.

Grasp the magic of IKEA. It’s in the vision statement: from a farming village in southern Sweden to scores of countries around the world, IKEA has maintained its core values: design, function, and value. From that farming village, it has also pioneered an entire category of “first home” furniture, establishing a category that has grown to attract new entrants such as CB2, West Elm, and Pottery Barn.

Peter Connolly, retail maven and architect of the successful introduction of IKEA into this country (after a less-than-stellar beginning in the mid-1980s), says the course was chartered in the early 1990s when he and Linda Sawyer, now CEO of Deutsch Advertising, realized that the brand had come to mean cheap.

“The marketing at first was solely focused on price,” he recalls. “Every store started off with a bang and then sales steadily trended down. Linda and I listened to consumers in groups tell us they didn’t buy anything from IKEA, but when they showed us pictures of their homes, we saw lamps and chairs and tables we knew had come from IKEA. When we asked about it, they’d tell us it was just temporary. They were ashamed to have it in their homes. The brand had done that to itself.”

Connolly and Sawyer decided to reposition the brand away

from cheap and onward to lifestyle choice. The ads moved from being about five-cent forks and nine-dollar lamps to a young couple buying a well-designed living room suite for less than fifteen hundred dollars. They showed more-mature couples relying on IKEA for weekend house furnishings.

To make the IKEA point in an exciting way, Connolly used the Elizabeth, New Jersey, store—where he started out as manager before being promoted to chief marketing officer for the entire US division—as the source of over-the-top promotions. These ranged from bringing in tons of sand and borrowing life-guard stands from up and down the New Jersey shore—making customers crawl over the sand to get in the door and rewarding them with free sunglasses for their effort—to having couples sleep overnight in the bedding section to win a free mattress and box spring. New York City mayor Rudy Guiliani even married one couple who won a Connolly-inspired contest.

One of his seminal initiatives predated the rise of pop-up stores: he launched a ministore, termed an “outpost,” on 57th and Lexington Avenue in New York City. Every three months he changed the focus. It started as a kitchenware store, then became a lighting store, then a carpet store. Everything about it changed, not just the inventory: different uniforms for the staff, different layout, different color schemes.

Through all of it, Connolly stayed focused on the core “root stock” of IKEA, while leavening its Swedish heritage with some American wit. IKEA doesn’t bring us the same furniture and accessories it did a generation ago. The idea of IKEA is and has been flexible, adaptable furniture and accessories, scalable to small and large dwellings. What it has preserved is a utilitarian approach to modern home furnishings and an emphasis on cost containment that ensures IKEA’s relevance on our to-do lists: from dorm room to apartment to family room to weekend getaway.

IKEA'S ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM

IKEA's commitment to sustainability predates the current world emphasis: IKEA began taking serious environmental measures in 1992.

1. Replace polyvinyl chloride (PVC) in wallpapers, home textiles, shower curtains, lampshades and furniture
2. Minimize the use of formaldehyde in its products, including textiles
3. eliminate acid-curing lacquers
4. Produce a model of chair (OGLA) made from 100 percent pre-consumer waste
5. Introduce a series of air-inflatable furniture
6. Reduce the use of chromium for metal surface treatment
7. Limit the use of substances such as cadmium, lead, PCB PCP and AZO pigments
8. Use wood from responsibly-managed forests that replant and maintain biological diversity
9. Use only recyclable materials for flat packaging and "pure" (non-mixed) materials for packaging to assist in recycling

The company's reliance on the flat pack, that amazing shipping container first designed to be used by customers taking their wares home on public transportation, is going through an expanded redefinition: the flat pack house, working to reduce the cost of home ownership for first-time buyers. Today, IKEA is definitely a long way from the founding vision of Ingvar Kamprad in 1943, who began by selling pens, wallets, picture frames, and anything else he could get on the cheap. But it is a living, breathing organism breeding tremen-

dous brand enthusiasm among the value conscious in thirty-five countries around the world.

If a brand doesn't have roots, it can create personality with a series of successful small gestures of its own, as long as they ratchet up authentic affection. Remember GEICO. Imagine what another company might have done to create a relaunch for the moribund Government Employees Insurance Company?

There is another type of mythos, as well, to consider. The personal mythos, as in "How I Came to Love This Brand" stories. These are part and parcel of passion brand legend and lore. They are often kicked off in what researchers Harper and Michelle Roehm term flashbulb memories—a term more typically used to describe negative public events, such as the death of a public official or an extremely horrible news event. Think of the assassination of John or Robert Kennedy or the 9-11 tragedy and our ability to preserve in memory's narration every detail of our personal experience of these horrible events. Crucial elements of the flashbulb phenomenon are how "vividly detailed and resistant to forgetting and therefore enduring over time."⁴ The event is so powerful that many of the details are caught up in a profoundly personal context, rather than solely in the event that caused the bulb to flash.

The Roehms, both academics albeit at different universities in North Carolina, decided to look at the same phenomenon from a marketer's perspective. They quote at the outset a twenty-five-year-old memory as told to them of a first experience with Krispy Kreme doughnuts. "I remember it like it was yesterday. I was eleven and we were visiting my cousins, who lived in the South at that time. As a special treat, my aunt and my cousin and I went to the Krispy Kreme one morning. There were some hot doughnuts that had just been made and we had them right after they were done. I remember the smell, the

taste of the doughnuts. I remember my cousin making fun of me, because I ate mine so fast and I got glaze all over myself, on my face, my hands, everything.” This powerful product memory includes—as do those associated with shocking news events—tremendous layers of detail, sensory information, time of day, context, and people who participated with her.

The conclusion is clear: novelty is crucial, a sense of surprise can produce the requisite flash. Naturally, first movers in categories can be said to offer such novelty cues. Build-a-Bear Workshop is another brand the Roehms found that met the criteria. But novelty is more than innovation. Novelty is personal. It may not be new to the marketplace, but if it’s new to me there’s the opportunity for a flashbulb moment.

I remember such a moment for me with Elizabeth Arden cosmetics. I had gone through all of four years at Indiana University wearing blue jeans and white oxford cloth shirts, long hair pulled into a pony tail, no makeup, and Adidas sneakers (I think). Pretty much it was the uniform of the serious student of the day. Then, all of a sudden I was going to graduate and go on job interviews. Things seemed ready to spool out of control pretty quickly.

For college graduation, my second cousins from Memphis sent me an Elizabeth Arden makeup kit, undoubtedly a gift-with-purchase promotion. I’d never really seen such a thing or confronted such a series of choices—foundation, lipstick, eye shadow, blush—it was, to say the least, overwhelming. And yet there was a pamphlet inside the kit that spoke directly to me with very basic and friendly “how-to” information. I remember sitting down on the bed and just reading, trying, looking in the mirror, and making the effort. I was extremely grateful, both to my Memphis cousins and to Elizabeth Arden Cosmetics, which I still rely upon. I’ve never seriously considered using anything else.

I believe that some brands are poised to enter our lives at key moments, those when a flashbulb really does go off. In my own work, when I team up with Hal Goldberg to hypnotize consumers, I always have him follow that same syntax of questions I outlined earlier: first, what is the most powerful and most recent memory of the category? Second, what is the most powerful and most recent memory of the specific brand for which I'm consulting?

We find that the first and most powerful memories meet the criteria of the flashbulb going off. These memories, which are more easily accessed through hypnosis, are wonderfully rich, detailed, sensory, and contextual. The most recent memories, however, are typically dull, flat, and disappointing. It's the dissonance between the promise of the brand experience—as felt in those early memories—and the letdown in the reality of today's more mundane usage that points the way to reinvigorating a brand. What we're attempting to do is get the current personal brand story back in line with the original and very compelling personal narration the consumer tells herself.

One consumer's first experience with Trix cereal was in opposition to her mother's refusal to ever purchase it, because it was "sugary fluff." The now forty-something mother was transported back to the world in which she wanted oh so very much to eat the Trix with the funny bunny rabbit she watched in the commercials: "Silly rabbit, Trix are for kids," she remembered with a laugh. And yet her mother wouldn't let her have it. It was a memory of deprivation, alleviated by a sleep-over at a friend's house and the treat of Trix before heading home. Her most powerful memory? Serving Trix to her own daughter and laughing with her about how colorful and delicious it was. Her most recent? Being irritated when the box she bought seemed filled mostly with air and not very much cereal. Deprivation again.

These personal narrations are the harbingers of any brand's real equity, their profound connection woven in and through our private memories. Every brand has this to rely upon, whether or not there's a fabulous backstory to the brand itself.

Two strangely similar brands became true north on the compass for me as I started investigating the company mythos-as-marketing aspect of the passion brand phenomenon: Jack Daniel's and Camel. Both had held firmly onto their roots, albeit in distinctly different fashions. Let's start with Jack.

"We're Tennessee whiskey," Frank Bobo tells me. He's the retired head distiller who spends most of his spare time talking to people about Jack Daniel's. "We're not bourbon. We're just about the only folks that can lay a claim to that. Couple of others have come along, but we've been at it a good long time. Aged over maple charcoal we make ourselves. American oak barrels. Been that way since we started."⁵

That tone of voice is amazing, and not just because it's so spectacularly authentic coming from the retired head distiller as we walk around the Jack Daniel's distillery in Lynchburg, Tennessee. It's amazing because nearly everyone I talk to adopts the same kind of gnarled, folksy, "gosh I don't know nothing 'bout marketing ma'am, but I sure do love to talk about Jack" tone. And, of course, it's also the precise tone of Jack Daniel's advertising and its Web site. It's like talking to the brand itself.

The "marketing fellow" isn't around, but I'm given a note that he left for me. "Kate, I'm sorry I missed you this afternoon. The contractor who built this building for us called me this afternoon and asked me to go fishing with him. We've been trying to do this forever, so I'm going. I hope you got the information you're seeking. It was good meeting you. Warm regards . . ."

Is the “gone fishing” sign genuine or a ruse? Does this marketing guy really embody the brand personality that perfectly or is his note an intricate screen through which Jack Daniel’s filters every communication? Another brand might well blow off a writer, but I can’t think of many that would opt for this particular gambit. Whatever it is, it is charming. I’m delighted, really, to wander around on my own and to think of a corporate executive who goes fishing instead of making sure I get the story straight.

I don’t think it’s something they’ve been trained to do, but encouraged to do. The company culture planted years ago is one that Jack Daniel’s and its ad agency decided not to get in the way of. One of my favorite quotes is attributed to Michelangelo when he was asked how he came to sculpt David. He is reported to have said, “I went to the quarry. I chose the marble. I took away everything that *wasn’t* David.” That’s what a great and rooted brand like Jack Daniel’s can do: Just let the brand speak for itself.

Frank Bobo, the stand-in for the marketing fellow, tells me “I figured we’d just go out and take a walk around and I’d introduce you to folks. I asked to be able to take you around, but pretty much anybody who works here knows how to do the job. We all qualify by taking the tour twelve times and then taking Joe on a tour to prove we can do it right.”

How many other companies have each employee take the tour twelve times and then give it to the head of marketing? I wonder. My guess: None that boast a billion-dollar international brand.

So Frank starts me off with a bit of history: “The Old No. 7 on the label comes from a story that old Mr. Lem told me. I’m pretty sure it’s the real one. Seems like Jack Daniel sent out a barrel to a distributor in Kansas and it was marked with a seven. Come to find out, it didn’t get there. So, Jack sends him

another one. Just by coincidence that one was marked seven also. Then, the railroad found the first barrel, so they delivered it—but marked it ‘*Old Number 7.*’ The guy wrote back asking for more of the ‘*Old Number 7,*’ cause he thought it was better. Jack just started labeling everything *Old Number 7.*”

That ability to deal with happenstance in a totally unflappable if eccentric way appears to become part of the DNA of the brand over time. As one of the fellows I met down there told me, “We figured out that the barrels up top in the warehouse got colder in the winter and warmer in the summer. That makes the whiskey age differently, so we let it set in those barrels and didn’t blend it in: That got us to single-barrel aged Jack Daniel’s.”

What did single-barrel aged Jack Daniel’s do for them? The bartender of the Admirals Club in the Nashville airport tells me soon enough. “That single-barrel stuff is amazing. Sometimes it’s great; sometimes it’s pretty rough. You pay more for it, but when it’s great there’s nothing better.”

Imagine that. Spotty performance becomes part of the legend, not a detractor from it. This is one of the reasons why I believe that passion brands have extremely forgiving consumers, just as we’re more forgiving of someone we care about than we are of the stranger who owns that all-night car alarm. This story also illustrates the power of passion brands to deliver margin, of course.

One of the amazing things about Jack Daniel’s is that it has grown tremendously over the years, not just the number of cases shipped, dollar volumes, and contribution to Browne-Foreman’s bottom line, but its styles of distillation. One of the guys tells me, “There’s green label and black label. For years, that was about it. We couldn’t make it fast enough. Everyone—every state, every restaurant, every bar, every liquor store—everyone was on allocation. We’d get them what we could, but we couldn’t come close to getting everyone what they wanted.

“Pretty soon we noticed that some folks might like something a bit different than just green and black label. Maybe we could trade them up a bit and reduce the allocation backlog. Charge ’em more for better. We thought, if one time over the charcoal was good, what would two times do? That’s where Gentleman Jack came from. Country cocktails, like Down-home Punch, Black Jack Cola, and Lynchburg Lemonade came out when folks seemed to like coolers and all. We just thought they’d like ’em with Jack Daniel’s, too. Then, we noticed that visitors to Lynchburg, which is a dry county, seemed to get frustrated that they couldn’t buy Jack Daniel’s, so we got a bill through the legislature saying we could sell special commemorative editions in our gift shop, so we started doing that. I think I’ve got some of our new steak grilling sauce here, someplace, too.” And on and on it goes. Absolutely on the same page, singing from the same hymnal, in perfect harmony.

Beyond the distillery, the lifeblood of the brand runs through several important arteries: There’s the Lynchburg Hardware and General Store, in real space and in the virtual world. “Walk on down,” they tell me, and so off I go on a dusty road, there’s no better word for it than “ambling,” across a creek bed, through a residential area of town where I think I may see Barney Fife strolling along on his way to have lunch with Sheriff Andy and Aunt Bee. But no, I’m just hoping to find a worn path to Main Street.

I’m going through a time warp to inspect a glittery array of merchandise, ranging from chrome bar stools with the Jack Daniel’s logo embossed on the leather seats (\$109) to a three-piece shot glass set with pewter emblems (\$33.50), a bristle dart board (\$65.50), a barrel wood bar stool (\$230), and a pool table (don’t ask). The passion Jack drinkers (and they do call it by its first name) feel for the brand goes well beyond the drink. They want to bond themselves to the

brand and the brand to themselves, their homes, and their leisure pursuits.

There's also the fabled Tennessee Squire Association. "Here in the Hollow, we move a bit slower than the rest of the world, but we want to keep in touch with our friends. We know that some of you use electronic mail, so if you'd like for us to have your e-mail address, please fill out the card below and send it back to us. We don't want you to miss out on any news from Lynchburg." So I ask to become a squire and am "accepted." Thus begins a really remarkable aspect of the Jack Daniel's relationship. Every so often, but never in a way that I can predict, I receive various things from "the Hollow." Notices of taxes, a calendar, an update that someone's cow has started walking across my property. All messages in the distinct voice of the brand, nothing trying to sell me anything more than the very real uniqueness of Jack Daniel's. Some arrive in the mailbox in a large white envelope with a Lynchburg return address; some slip into my e-mail. In either case, they are welcomed and enjoyed. It's particularly striking when I think about how many other mailings from brands, companies, and retailers I smile to receive. That would be none.

"Lynchburg, Tennessee," one calendar explains, "is a quiet little town of white frame houses and perfect green sod . . . a place where kids go fishing, doctors make house calls, and local stores are owned by local folks. I should know. I was born and raised here in Lynchburg. And work here still as the proprietress of Miss Mary Bobo's Boarding House over at the south end of town."

Full disclosure: I can't drink Jack Daniel's. Surely I want to, but it's just not for me. That said, I have friends who will drink nothing but Jack Daniel's. Nothing else. It's reported to be the mainstay of bars throughout the world. I settle with badging my affection for the brand, if not the product, but I am in awe of how the profound specificity of the brand, with its laserlike

focus on its roots, voice, and ever-expanding series of products appeals to a global audience. At first blush, it seems like it might be daunting to those without an appreciation of the shall we say, uniqueness of the South, of Tennessee, of “the Hollow.” But international sales of the brand, coupled with the superpremium Gentleman Jack and Jack Daniel’s & Cola, continue to drive Jack Daniel’s into strong double-digit growth, boosting volume, margin, earnings, and profits, month after month, quarter after quarter.

The profound specificity of the charms of Jack somehow don’t alienate. They fascinate. Even those of us who don’t relish the flavor or the kick of it can appreciate the world the brand inhabits, and even want to visit its rustic birthplace on occasion.

Using a different approach, Camel cigarettes nonetheless quietly pulls forward the vital roots of the brand from its 1913 origins into twenty-first-century relevance. Camel’s story is genuinely remarkable when we consider that cigarettes are viewed as a controlled substance, not allowed many of the communication tools available to virtually every other legal product: no television or no radio ads since 1971 in the United States, plus extremely limited print, age-restricted Web space, no outdoor billboard space, limited direct mail—the list goes on and on.

Still, when we conducted the passion brand survey, Camel—with its brand share that hovers in the single digits—is in a virtual tie with Marlboro, the six-hundred-pound gorilla of the American tobacco market.

“The bottom line when you look at the Camel brand, its identity is less mainstream than the other brands,” explains Cressida Lozano, vice president in charge of the Camel Brand at RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company, based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. We’re having a discussion about the remarkable affection that smokers feel for Camel.⁶

“We have a ‘lust for living’ attitude that is more irreverent, more original. From the very beginning, that’s how the brand has behaved. We’re the original so our core consumers are passionate about us, because they embrace that value. It’s an element of their personality. Camel does not try to be something for everyone. Everyone seems to be smoking Marlboro—we’re outside that.”

One of her colleagues, Richard Wise from Agent 16, Camel’s longtime agency, tells me, “Camel has a much more powerful social currency. But it does not enjoy the benefit of popularity. It’s a distinctive statement, which I quite understand. I find the experience of living in a mass society very unsettling, because everything blurs together. Whether it’s an Albertson’s in Omaha or Whole Foods in Union Square, everyone has followed the same convention: packaging, layout, aisles, carts, everything. Camel has refused to yield to the spirit of the age.”⁷

“The thing specifically about Camel,” Mark Morrissey, also a tenured Camel agency executive and chief executive officer of Agent 16, explained, “is that its values have been stable for a very long time: irreverence, authenticity. The longer the values are stable, the more of a ‘lighthouse’ it becomes: Our smokers are into self-definition and they want to show that to others.”⁸

Indeed, Camel was the first mass-marketed cigarette, arriving on the scene in 1913. That arrival was a sensation, orchestrated by none other than R. J. Reynolds himself. Ads announced, “Camel is coming.” But no one quite knew what to expect. Then actual camels arrived, walking down the main streets of various cities and towns around America. Then came the cigarettes, twenty to a pack, bundled and packaged for remarkable convenience versus the then-ubiquitous custom of rolling your own.

From the beginning what Camel wants to tell you about itself is there on the label: a blend of Turkish and domestic tobaccos. It seemed exotic then and it seems exotic now. “A pack of Camels is the most exotic thing you can still purchase at the corner store,” Wise says, recalling what a smoker had told him in a research session.

Just as in the case of Jack Daniel’s “one size doesn’t fit all” aura, Camel, too, gives multiple entry points into the brand. Does the world need a new version of Camel? The Camel marketing folks view the launch of a new varietal as sitting on the pivot point between what the brand *says* about the smoker and what it *does* for the smoker. As Morrissey puts it, “A line extension reinforces an identity; it becomes a way to communicate that identity. It opens a new door to the smoker who may like the Camel heritage and image, but hasn’t liked the taste up until now. With a new version, a new taste, we give them a reason to give us another try.”

He contrasts this with the efforts of other megabrands like Coke, Pepsi, and Oreo to use one über-mark to bundle a series of emerging benefits, in response to smaller competitors in the market. This technique, which we see over and over again, has the impact of eroding the brand’s iconic meaning as an identity badge for consumers. It gains the brand breadth but loses the depth that marks a passionate attachment.

“It feels desperate,” Wise continues the thought. “We all know people pleasers who are wild for approval: Do you like me now? How about now? as they shape-shift to meet what they believe people want from them. A brand like Camel just cannot do that. A brand becomes sad, in some cases dizzying to the consumer, when it loses its way. I feel that way about Coke right now. What does it stand for?”

The economics at issue are tough for big brands, by definition. How they are to grow in response to changes in the mar-

ketplace without losing their way becomes the question for the stewards of the brand. “Megabrands like Budweiser that are trying to aggregate large share and contribute growth run-up against this all the time,” says Morrissey. “They need to get more people under the umbrella. And then they need to get more people. And then more people. The larger the brand, the more desperate it is to grow, the more powerful the inertia is to shrink. It becomes extremely tricky to keep developing these huge brands that are made up of lots of little sub-brands—I actually think of it as trying to keep lots of plates spinning, like a circus act. Here’s Coke! No wait, here’s Diet Coke! No wait, here’s Coke Zero! All the while, upstart and challenger brands seek to shift the balance.”

One of the reasons über-brands use this umbrella strategy, of course, is simply the high cost of launching a new brand. When a mark, such as Coke or Budweiser, is so well known and loved, it is undeniably cheaper for marketers to extend rather than invent an entirely new mark, which then has to earn bottler enthusiasm, retail shelf space, and consumer awareness. So into our world arrives New Coke, Diet Coke, Diet Coke Plus, Coca-Cola C2, Coca-Cola Zero, Coca-Cola Cherry Zero, Coca-Cola Cherry, Diet Coke Cherry, Coca-Cola with Lemon, Diet Coke with Lemon, Coca-Cola Vanilla Zero, Coca-Cola Vanilla, Diet Coca-Cola Vanilla, Coca-Cola with Lime, Diet Coke with Lime, Coca-Cola Raspberry, Diet Coke Raspberry, Coca-Cola Black Cherry Vanilla, Diet Coke Cherry Vanilla, Coca-Cola BlāK, Diet Coca-Cola with Citrus, Coca-Cola with Orange, and Passover Coca-Cola, with pure cane sugar instead of corn syrup.

Obviously, many of these versions simply offer an added ingredient to spice things up a bit: cherry, lemon, vanilla, lime, raspberry, black cherry, or orange. Sure, it’s easy enough to understand. More problematic is the competing claims among

Diet Coke, Coke Zero, and Diet Coke Plus. Does the brand have the latitude, the brand width, the consumer permission to go in so many directions? Diet Coke Plus is fortified with vitamins and minerals! It's an open question, but one rightly asked. Is Coke still the "real thing," or is it morphing into "anything"?

Then there's Bud, Bud Light, Budweiser Select, Bud Ice, Bud Ice Light, Budweiser Brew Masters Private Reserve, Bud Dry, Bud Silver, Bud Extra, Budweiser/Bud Light Chelada (with Clamato Juice!), and now Bud Light Lime, looking a lot like a response to Mexican brand Corona. The big guys seemingly have to compete head to head with smaller, more facile brands, while not estranging their core audiences or losing their identity. It's a hard line to walk for megabrands, but they are assisted, of course, by the raw muscle of brand share (how much of the market they command), category captaincy in retail venues (how many stores, taverns, and eateries they are in), marketing clout, and efficiencies of scale.

A study of brand extensions in the *Journal of Marketing Research* in 1999 does provide solace to the Oreos of the world, a brand extended with Cakesters, Double Stuff, Golden Originals, Pure White Fudge Covered, and Winter with Red Crème—and its Mini-Bite Size Snak Saks, Mini-Bite Size Go-Pak, and Mini-Bite Size nine-ounce bags.

According to the researchers, "Fortunately for brand managers, the research reported here suggests that retrieval (memory) processes such as categorization, recognition, and recall are also fairly immune to the potentially diluting effects of extensions. . . . Established brands are shown here to benefit from the introduction of extension, but there are costs involved in shifting promotional funds from a parent brand to an extension. Although exposure to brand extension advertising facilitated recall of parent brands, the facilitative effect

was not as great as that resulting from exposure to parent brand advertising.”⁹

Minor, newsworthy trademarks (Oreo Double Stuff) within the larger franchise (Oreo) may help a big brand look smaller and more select, off-setting the peril of “same old, same old, different day” ubiquity, while gaining stature from the big brand imprimatur. It may well be important to create newsworthy extensions and it certainly is more cost effective than trying to create a new brand from the ground up. But marketers should not walk away from reminding consumers of the power and joy of the original Oreo, Crest, or Coke. The temptation is to advertise only the newsworthy new entrants rather than continue to invest in plain old Coke, but it’s a temptation to be avoided since it’s the original version that provides the permission to believe in the small newcomer.

But what of smaller brands? What of Camel, which currently has twenty-seven versions available. Too much? Too confusing? The research study, in fact, says that “nondominant brands” actually benefit more from product extensions than big brands. As Wise pointed out, a Camel is a distinct experience, but not a universally popular one. Thus, twenty-seven varieties of Camels provide multiple doorways into the brand, making it more accessible while ensuring that it stays relevant and on the smoker’s radar. The popularity competition may be won by Marlboro, but not the *personality* competition. Ditto Coke versus Red Bull. Ditto for any spirit versus Jack Daniel’s. Ditto Starbucks versus Peet’s.

Wise poses a question: What other brand has ever inspired a piece of modern literary fiction that takes place entirely inside its package? Sure enough, the book *Still Life with Woodpecker* by Tom Robbins (1981) has a pack of Camels on its cover, actually *as* its cover, if you don’t mind that the camel in question is a woodpecker. The dialogue includes such “postmodern-

day fairy tale” insights as “There are two kinds of people in this world: those who believe there are two kinds of people in this world and those who are smart enough to know better.” The ability of the Camel-esque pack to telegraph meaning is underscored by the use of the book by the Lucy Whitmore (Drew Barrymore) character in the film *50 First Dates*.

The point Wise is making is one that illustrates how passion brands operate in our consumer culture: they do help us tell ourselves and others a bit about ourselves. Passion brands are used in television, film, and art to help the audience understand something about a character. A character smokes a Camel, asks for a Tanqueray gin martini “shaken not stirred,” or orders a Cosmopolitan with her girlfriends, and we know something more about these characters.

If further proof were required, Wise has a second question: You’re sitting in a café. There’s an artist sitting next to you and he’s doodling on a napkin with a pack of cigarettes at the ready. What brand is it? “Camel, of course,” he says. “There’s something in the brand that cries out, ‘Step into this. Make it your own.’” That invitation to participate, to tell yourself and others about you through the brand, is the call to passionate attachment. It can’t come from “outer space,” just as a stranger calling to us to come “join the fun” isn’t anywhere nearly as compelling as a long-term friend, someone whose roots we know and to a degree share, or want to.

Passion branding is great, of course, when it works, but what happens to a one-time passion brand when it doesn’t stick to its roots? This is a cautionary tale. I turned to Daryl Brewster, again, this time not as the former head of Nabisco but in his next role as president and CEO of Krispy Kreme, a spot he held from 2006 to 2008, taking the fabled brand from an on-the-ropes, punchdrunk has-been to being a contender.

The essential “secret” of a Krispy Kreme doughnut is to eat

it hot. It's formed from dough extruded by air pressure to form a perfect doughnut shape. Technically, there isn't such a thing as a doughnut "hole" at Krispy Kreme. It's light and airy—and the joy of eating one hot is hard to overestimate. Scores of people tell me that it's possible to get the next best thing by microwaving a Krispy Kreme for one second, perhaps two. Opinions vary.

How could something so simple and delicious go wrong? Brewster's understanding of the past economic foibles of the brand is anchored to the old real estate edict: location, location, location.

"The roots of Krispy Kreme were Southern roots," Brewster explained to me in an interview over lunch. "We started in Winston-Salem and the model was fabulous: a manufacturing facility, a bakery, on the periphery of a town in cheap, industrial space, making terrific doughnuts that they'd load up on trucks and take to local grocery and convenience stores. At its heart, it wasn't a walk-up business: The basic proposition was bake it and take it. They just stumbled on the walk-up business, people driving miles out of their way if they thought that they could get them fresh—so they started using a 'hot light' to signal that a batch was coming out."¹⁰

Then came the franchises. What happened in the '70s, '80s and '90s to Krispy Kreme was an overabundance of optimism in the franchise model, and a misunderstanding of the brand's "bake it and take it" real estate roots. This was not a fast-food business; it was a bakery that delivered to local stores. That got lost in the heat of the moment.

First, in 1976 it was acquired by Beatrice Foods, which had little insight as to what to do with a doughnut company but thought it would be fun to have one. When that paled by 1982, a group of franchisees purchased it back from Beatrice. Unfortunately, in that go-go franchise era, Krispy Kreme was

modeled after Dunkin' Donuts. Having one on every street corner might have been a good idea for Dunkin', but not for Krispy Kreme, whose success had been as a bakery, not a quick-serve restaurant.

According to Brewster's explanation to me during our interview, "You need a lot of pretty expensive retail real estate to execute that approach and for much of the '80s and '90s the company tried to be a manufacturing site in a retail setting. So you needed five- thousand-square-foot spaces to make the doughnuts in a location where people can wander in for breakfast. The Krispy Kreme business had always been a dozens business. People buy them and take them to work. It wasn't a place to hang out and have a doughnut and a cup of coffee. You don't mind driving out of your way to buy a couple of dozen doughnuts, so in the brand's heyday, we would get stories of drivers crossing two lanes of heavy traffic on the highway if they saw the hot light was on."

The economics of the successful Krispy Kreme model got buried under neophytes who swarmed to it, hoping to make a "killing" in a fast-food franchise. Stores opened with huge hoopla. There were news articles, television coverage, people standing in line around the block. You have to sell a lot of doughnuts to pay for retail space with the square footage to run the all-important bakery lines. If you don't make it in the morning rush, you're not going to make it.

Nonetheless, expansion outside of the Southern heritage of the brand continued at a breakneck pace, eventually reaching forty-five states, as well as the District of Columbia and moving into Mexico, Australia, Canada, and England. According to Brewster, the move into new areas was complicated by the lack of roots for the brand.

"People in the South grew up with Krispy Kreme and for them, it really is a 'no substitute will do' brand," he explains.

“The move outside that natural and passionate constituency was at once newsworthy and exciting, but also debatable. In the Northeast, you’d get real debates about the relative merits of Krispy Kreme versus Dunkin’ Donuts. That is unthinkable in the South. In the South, there may be alternatives, but there is no substitute.”

There’s a great deal of life in the Krispy Kreme brand, of course. Every day the chain makes 7.5 million doughnuts—that’s 2.7 billion doughnuts a year roughly—so they are doing many things right. They’ve figured out how to reduce the retail “footprint” so that rent can be better managed as a cost of doing business. They’ve retrenched from areas where the franchise system hasn’t worked. They’ve created some new versions, including whole-grain doughnuts. Their entire product line has gone trans-fat free.

From Brewster’s perspective, Krispy Kreme is poised to begin an ascent again: “The reception of the brand internationally is actually much more the way Krispy Kreme is viewed in the South, which is tremendous for it. Once more, it’s in the space where people say, ‘There may be alternatives, but no substitute,’ and that’s where it competes to win.”

The potential for Krispy Kreme to recapture its glory days, albeit in new ways and new markets, shows the resilience of a once and future passion brand. An article in the *New York Times Magazine* by Rob Walker poses this question: “Can a dead brand live again?” He writes of many of the great brands that have disappeared, not because consumers didn’t love them, but because the multinational corporations that acquired them didn’t view them as having the legs to straddle the globe.¹¹

“If commerce is part of the American fabric, then brands are part of the American fabric,” Paul Earle, president of RiverWest, told Walker. “When a brand goes away, a piece of

Americana goes away.” RiverWest is a firm that focuses on buying brands on the decline. Among those already in its portfolio are Nuprin, Brim (remember “fill it to the rim?”), Salon Selectives, and Eagle Snacks.

Can it be done? Think of Converse. “Ours is retro fashion,” says Mike Shine, the creative director at Converse’s ad agency. “Jackson Pollack, Kurt Cobain, Joey Ramone: these are the last people in the world who would ever want to see a commercial for Chuck Taylors. We’re a ninety-seven-year-old brand with a deep allegiance to the Chuck Taylor culture.”¹²

“Deep allegiance” is an excellent turn of phrase to explain the authenticity that Converse enthusiasts attribute to the brand. It stands for some things like creativity, nonconformity, and iconoclasm, values that don’t lend themselves to commercial mass marketing. The Gap may try to bring back khakis by reminding us that “Gene Kelly wore Khakis,” but somehow it doesn’t work. It diminishes both the Gap and Gene Kelly as we find ourselves wondering, Who said it was okay to use his image to sell pants?

This deep allegiance is not a nostalgia play. You don’t bring it back to have it the way it was or to hearken back to simpler times. According to Stephen Brown, “Retromarketing is not merely a matter of reviving dormant brands and foisting them on softhearted, dewy-eyed, nostalgia-stricken consumers. It involves working with consumers to co-create an oasis of authenticity for tired and thirsty travelers through the desert of mass-produced marketing dreck.”¹³

One of the ways to gain a deep allegiance is suggested by the way many brands naturally gravitate to an iconic person to embody its personality and benefits. Thus, Kurt Cobain, Joey Ramone, Jackson Pollack. In other cases, the brand’s genesis story creates a cult of personality: Steve Jobs, Robert Mondavi, Jack Daniel.

Indeed, a fabulous article from *Networking Knowledge* suggests that Steve Jobs has become a “human logo,” so inextricably entwined is his name with the technology and technological design enhancements of our time. Writer Chloe Peacock of the University of Brighton in Britain looks at Jobs as the exemplar of what she terms this time of “late modernity,” when people have been able to brand themselves.¹⁴

The process is one of “metonym,” through which a part is meant to suggest much more than the whole. She uses as an example Margaret Thatcher, the former prime minister of England whose name has come to mean a time of privatization, monetarism, and nationalism. Princess Diana similarly suggests a time of intense national grieving or even hysterics. Steve Jobs in this sense stands for all that is real about the oftentimes depersonalizing world of technology.

Few genesis stories are as literally appropriated as the one she quotes from *The Cult of Mac*: “In the beginning (of the Information Age) was the void. And the void was digital. But lo there came upon the land, the shadow of Steve Jobs (and Stephen Wozniak) and Steven (Stephen) said, ‘Let there be Apple,’ and there was Apple. And Steven (Stephen) beheld Apple. And it was good.”¹⁵

Jobs’s backstory is a classic ennobling quest: a small-college dropout becomes a high-tech “phreak,” in the parlance of the 1970s, lives hand to mouth as an entrepreneur working from his parent’s garage, but later emerges as founder and chief stockholder of a \$2 billion company, only to be displaced and disgraced as its chief executive officer in exile, then becomes a resurrected titan of technology and a prostate cancer survivor. Jobs’s story in many ways encapsulates not just Apple’s story but a human struggle as well.

His black turtleneck and jeans attire is comfortably familiar and approachable yet striking in its departure from

classic CEO garb. Yet he is CEO of one of the most successful companies in the history of capitalism. By making Apple accessible—through his sheer humanity—we find the brand more appealing.

“Jobs mediates attitudes and beliefs on fate, spirituality, love and counterculture which, one could argue, contradict the values of a corporation such as Apple within a capitalist system,” Peacock writes. “But since he is able to resolve the conflict between competing philosophies on a level of personal experience, it transforms into a resolution for the brand identity as well.” It’s in the resolution of this tension between Apple’s counterculture roots and its current size and scale that makes the narrative of Jobs’s life and the force of his personality such a powerful interface between product and consumer.

The consumer then becomes a willing participant in the mythlike creation of the Apple brand, as we take in news, information, and images about Jobs and apply them to what is, after all, a corporate entity. The marketing machinery of advertising, public relations, and promotion moves away from product news and information, away from the mercantile benefits of the marketplace—growing and expanding a business—and onto a very different plain of consumer/brand conspiracy, if you will: a collusion to embrace a sincere, authentic philosophy via a brand.

Emblematic of the approachability of the brand is the tremendous variety in the ways enthusiasts can stake out a piece of Apple for their own: Macintosh User Groups (MUGs) abound. There’s IMUG, for international users group, multilingual users, and designers; CMUG, for Christian Macintosh computing, providing theological connections as well as the typical tech support; I/O MUG, an Internet-only users group that wants to improve the system by sharing information, support, and ideas for Mac users throughout the cybersphere; and

NHMUG, for NASA employees, helping them stay current with Mac technology developments and how best to apply them.

That notion of cocreation is how these passion brands achieve their remarkable vitality and stay buzzworthy, the topic to which we will next turn.

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT BRANDS

Mine the Mythos

Verbatim Consumer Quotes

“Man, I know all about Jobs. He was just a dork and then got Apple started and then got booted out and started Pixar and Next and a whole bunch of other stuff. Then they brought him back to Apple 'cause they couldn't really do it without him. He's the real deal. You can tell it just by looking at him. I mean he hasn't sold out, he's not some corporate tycoon kind of guy, he's in it for the money, sure, but also because he's really still a dork at heart.”

“Belvedere was started by Ann Lander's nephew or Dear Abby's son, or some such. I think he just went over to Poland after the fall of the Iron Curtain and convinced people to make vodka for him. Then he got a great bottle and started advertising in the *Wall Street Journal*. That's where I saw it first. Same upper corner of the paper every day. Really expensive. Something like made out of Polish rye or something? It just seemed so clean and then too it was more expensive, so it must be better. So I started drinking it. My guy at the liquor store told me about it, I think. I just liked the clean taste, better distilled or more often or something like that? I heard Skye vodka keeps you from having hangovers, but I've stuck with Belvedere all the same.”

“There’s this guy down the street and he hand rolls cigars right there in the window. Same stuff as Cohiba’s from Cuba, but not illegal. He makes them right there. His family came from Cuba and they took the seeds from the tobacco plants with them when they left in the ’60s and planted them somewhere else in South America, but it’s the same plants as Cuba. That’s how he gets the tobacco and he rolls the cigars right there while you watch. It’s really something to see, like he’s not even looking at them as he makes them. But they come out perfectly.”

“I went on a winery tour on Long Island, Hargrave and then Bidwell. You know they have a great climate out there for growing a certain kind of grape. Just the right kind of soil and growing season. Kind of amazing really. They used to use the land only for growing potatoes! But now, it’s really gorgeous and we drank some really terrific wines. Sat on this deck overlooking the vineyard at dusk and just enjoyed ourselves. I think they charged a couple of bucks, but it was a good deal. Hard to get, but every once in a while you see them on a good restaurant’s list. I bought a couple of cases and everybody likes them. We even did a tasting for friends when we came back; I got those kind of wafers to ‘clear our palate,’ ahem! but it was fun. Our friends really liked it. We like to go see local things when we travel like that. We’ve seen wineries and cheese makers in North Carolina and had some pretty terrific local wines in Wisconsin. It’s fun. You get to really meet local people and understand why they do what they do. We love doing it.”