Managing Brands for the Long Run:

Brand Reinforcement and Revitalization Strategies

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One of the challenges in managing brands is the many changes that occur in the marketing environment. The marketing environment evolves and changes, often in very significant ways. Shifts in consumer behavior, competitive strategies, government regulations, and other aspects of the marketing environment can profoundly affect the fortunes of a brand. Besides these external forces, the firm itself may engage in a variety of activities and changes in strategic focus or direction that may necessitate adjustments in the way that its brands are being marketed. Consequently, effective brand management requires proactive strategies designed to at least maintain—if not actually enhance—brand equity in the face of these different forces.

The customer-based brand equity framework, developed by the author,[1] defines customer-based brand equity as the differential effect that consumer knowledge about a brand has on the customer's response to marketing activity. Positive customer-based brand equity results when consumers respond more favorably to a product, price, or communication when the brand is identified than when it is not. According to this framework, consumer brand knowledge can be characterized in terms of brand awareness and brand image dimensions. Sources of brand equity occur when consumers are aware of the brand and hold strong, favorable, and unique brand associations. There are a number of ways to create those knowledge structures in the minds of consumers. Broadly, they involve choosing brand elements, developing supporting marketing programs, and creating secondary associations.

One direct implication of this view of brand equity is that effective brand management requires taking a long-term view of marketing decisions. Any action that a firm takes as part of its marketing program has the potential to change consumer knowledge about the brand in terms of some aspect of brand awareness or brand image. These changes in consumer brand knowledge will also have an indirect effect on the success of *future* marketing activities. Thus, from the perspective of customer-based brand equity, it is important when making marketing decisions to consider how the changes in brand awareness and image that could result from those decisions may help or hurt *subsequent* marketing decisions. For example, the frequent use of sales promotions involving temporary price decreases may create or strengthen a "discount" association to the brand, with potentially adverse implications on customer loyalty and responses to future price changes or non-price-oriented marketing communication efforts.

Managing brand equity, however, requires more than taking a long-term perspective. Brand equity must be actively managed over time by reinforcing the brand meaning and, if necessary, by revitalizing the brand.

Reinforcing Brands

How should brand equity be reinforced over time? How can marketers make sure that consumers have the desired knowledge structures such that their brands continue to have the necessary sources of brand equity? In a general sense, brand equity is reinforced by marketing actions that consistently convey the meaning of the brand to consumers—in terms of brand awareness and brand image—as follows:

What products does the brand represent; what benefits does it supply; and what needs does it satisfy? For example, Nutri-Grain has expanded from cereals into granola bars and other products, cementing its reputation as "makers of healthy breakfast and snack foods."

How does the brand make those products superior? What strong, favorable, and unique brand associations exist in the minds of consumers? For example, through product development and the successful introductions of brand extensions, Black and Decker is now seen as offering "innovative designs" in its small appliance products.

Both of these issues—brand meaning in terms of products, benefits, and needs as well as brand meaning in terms of product differentiation—depend on the firm's general approach to product development, branding strategies, and other strategic concerns.

Maintaining Brand Consistency

Without question, the most important consideration in reinforcing brands is the consistency of the marketing support that the brand receives—both in terms of the amount and nature of marketing support. Brand consistency is critical to maintaining the strength and favorability of brand associations. Brands that receive inadequate support, in terms of such things as shrinking research and development or marketing communication budgets, run the risk of becoming technologically disadvantaged or even obsolete.

Market Leaders and Failures

From the perspective of maintaining consumer loyalty, inadequate marketing support is especially dangerous when combined with price increases. Once the comfortable leader in its market, Tampax lost market share to brands from Playtex and Johnson & Johnson when its prices were raised while its ad spending was simultaneously cut. To recover lost ground, management was eventually forced to quickly introduce a $20 million ad campaign for the brand that promoted "Trust is Tampax Tampons."[2]

In terms of qualitative aspects of positioning, a cursory examination of the brands that have maintained market leadership for the last 50 or 100 years or so is a testament to the advantages of staying consistent. Brands like Budweiser, Coca-Cola, Hershey, and others have been remarkably consistent in their strategies once they achieved a pre-eminent market leadership position. Philip Morris has single-mindedly focused its marketing communications for their Marlboro cigarette brand on a western cowboy image. Since the mid-1970s, Marlboro has been America's No. 1 cigarette brand. The romantic images of the rugged cowboy have since been taken worldwide and even successfully transferred to billboards and print ads when Marlboro's cigarette commercials were banned from television and radio.[3]

Perhaps an even more compelling demonstration of the benefits of consistency is to consider the fortunes of those brands that have been inconsistent in their marketing program—e.g., by constantly repositioning or changing ad agencies. Since its highly successful mid-1970s "Have It Your Way" campaign that touted the uniqueness and quality of their hamburgers, Burger King suffered through 20 years of false starts and wrong turns in brand support. The disastrous $40 million Herb campaign in 1985—featuring a nerd-like character who was supposed to be the only person in America never to have tasted a Whopper—was pulled after only three months. While watching its market share of the total fast food market drop, Burger King went through a number of company presidents, marketing directors, and ad agencies. Eventually, Burger King advertising returned to perhaps their strongest and most favorable brand association—the popular Whopper hamburger—in a new campaign themed "Get Your Burger's Worth," which brought a corresponding return to good fortunes.

Consistency and Change

Consistency does *not* mean, however, that marketers should avoid making any changes in the marketing program. On the contrary, the opposite can be quite true—being consistent in managing brand equity may require numerous tactical shifts and changes in order to maintain the proper strategic thrust and direction of the brand. There are many ways that brand awareness and brand image can be created, maintained, or improved through carefully designed marketing programs. The tactics that may be most effective for a particular brand at any one time can certainly vary from those that may be most effective for the brand at another time. As a consequence, prices may move up or down, product features may be added or dropped, ad campaigns may employ different creative strategies and slogans, and different brand extensions may be introduced or withdrawn over time in order to create the *same* desired knowledge structures in consumers' minds.

Nevertheless, despite these different types of changes in marketing programs, the strategic positioning of many leading brands has remained remarkably consistent over time. A contributing factor to the success of these brands is that despite these tactical changes, certain key elements of the marketing program are always retained and continuity has been preserved in brand meaning over time.

For example, many brands have kept a key creative element in their marketing communication programs over the years and, as a result, have effectively created some "advertising equity." Recognizing the latent value of their past advertising, new ad campaigns have seen the return of such advertising icons as Colonel Sanders for Kentucky Fried Chicken, Charlie the Tuna for Star-Kist tuna, American Tourister's luggage-thumping gorilla, the percolating Maxwell House coffeepot, and the sing-song Oscar Mayer wiener jingles.

From an awareness standpoint, such efforts obviously make sense. It is important to determine whether these old advertising elements have enduring meaning with older consumers and, at the same time, can be made to seem relevant to younger consumers. More generally, the entire marketing program should be examined to determine which elements are making a strong contribution to brand equity and therefore must be protected.

Protecting Sources of Brand Equity

Consistency should therefore be viewed in terms of strategic direction and not necessarily the particular tactics employed by the supporting marketing program for the brand at any one point in time. Unless there is some change with either consumers, competition, or the company that somehow makes the strategic positioning of the brand less powerful—e.g., changes that somehow make key brand associations for the brand less desirable or deliverable—there is likely to be little need to deviate from a successful positioning. Although brands should always look for potentially powerful new sources of brand equity, a top priority under those circumstances is to preserve and defend those sources of brand equity that already exist.

For example, a few years back, Procter & Gamble made a minor change in the formulation of their Cascade automatic dishwashing detergent, primarily for cost-savings reasons. As a result, the product was not quite as effective as it had previously been under certain, albeit somewhat atypical water conditions. After discovering the fact, one of their chief competitors, Lever Brothers, began running comparative ads for their Sunlight brand featuring side-by-side glasses that claimed "Sunlight Fights Spots Better Than Cascade." Since the consumer benefit of "virtually spotless" is a key brand association and source of brand equity for Cascade, P&G reacted swiftly. They immediately returned Cascade back to its original formula and contacted Lever Brothers to inform them of the change, forcing them to stop running the new Sunlight ads as a result. As this episode clearly demonstrates, Procter & Gamble fiercely defends the equity of their brands, perhaps explaining why so many of P&G's brands have had such longevity.

As another example, consider the public relations problems encountered by Intel Corp. with the "floating decimal" problem in their Pentium microprocessors in December 1994. Although the flaw in the chip resulted in miscalculation problems in only extremely unusual and rare instances, Intel was probably at fault—as company executives now admit—for not identifying the problem and proposing remedies to consumers more quickly. Once the problem became public, Intel endured an agonizing six-week period where the company was the focus of media scrutiny and criticism for their reluctance to publicize the problem and their failure to offer replacement chips. Two key sources of brand equity for Intel microprocessors like the Pentium—emphasized throughout their marketing program—are "power" and "safety." Although consumers primarily think of safety in terms of upgradability, the perceptions of financial risk or other problems that might result from a potentially flawed chip certainly should have created a sense of urgency within Intel to protect one of their prize sources of brand equity. Eventually, Intel capitulated and offered a replacement chip. Perhaps not surprisingly, only a very small percentage of consumers—an estimated 1% to 3%—actually requested a replacement chip, suggesting that it was Intel's stubbornness to act and not the defect per se that rankled so many consumers.

Ideally, key sources of brand equity would be of enduring value. If so, these brand associations should be guarded and nurtured carefully. Unfortunately, their value can easily be overlooked as marketers attempt to expand the meaning of their brand and add new product-related or non-product-related brand associations.

Fortifying vs. Leveraging

There are a number of different ways to raise brand awareness and create strong, favorable, and unique brand associations in consumer memory to build customer-based brand equity. In managing brand equity, it is important to recognize trade-offs between those marketing activities that attempt to fortify and further contribute to brand equity vs. those marketing activities that attempt to leverage or capitalize on existing brand equity to reap some financial benefit.

The advantage of creating a brand with a high level of awareness and a positive brand image is that many benefits may result to the firm in terms of cost savings and revenue opportunities. Marketing programs can be designed that primarily attempt to capitalize on or perhaps even maximize these benefits—

e.g., by reducing advertising expenses, seeking increasingly higher price premiums, or introducing numerous brand extensions. The more there is an attempt to realize or capture brand equity benefits, however, the more likely it is that the brand and its sources of equity may become neglected and perhaps diminished in the process. In other words, marketing actions that attempt to leverage the equity of a brand in different ways may come at the expense of other activities that may help to fortify the brand by maintaining or enhancing its awareness and image.

At some point, failure to fortify the brand will diminish brand awareness and weaken brand image. *Without these sources of brand equity, the brand itself may not continue to yield as valuable benefits*. Just as a failure to properly maintain a car eventually affects its performance, neglecting a brand can catch up with marketers. For example, as Coors Brewing devoted increasing attention in its marketing on growing the equity of less established brands (Coors Light beer) and introducing new products (Zima clear malt beverage), ad support for the flagship Coors beer slipped from a peak of about $43 million in 1985 to a meager $4 million by 1993. Perhaps not surprisingly, sales of Coors beer dropped in half from 1989 to 1993. In launching a new ad campaign to prop up sales, Coors returned to its iconoclastic, independent Western image. Marketers at Coors now admit they did not give the brand the attention it deserves, "We've not marketed Coors as aggressively as we should have in the past 10 to 15 years."[4]

Fine-Tuning the Supporting Marketing Program

Although the specific tactics and supporting marketing program for the brand are more likely to change than the basic positioning and strategic direction for the brand, brand tactics also should only be changed when there is evidence that they are no longer making the desired contributions to maintaining or strengthening brand equity. Dove soap has been advertised in a remarkably consistent fashion over the years, even across geographical boundaries. Dove is positioned as a beauty bar with 1/4 cleansing cream that "creams skin while it washes." Dove advertising has consistently been positioned to consumers on a performance basis with the slogan "Dove Doesn't Dry Your Skin " For years, advertising has always been trial-oriented, using consumer testimonials to vouch for the quality of the product ("Take the 7-Day Dove Test").

Reinforcing brand meaning may depend on the nature of brand associations involved. Several specific considerations play a particularly important role in reinforcing brand meaning in terms of product-related and non-product-related associations.

Product-Related Associations

For brands whose core associations are primarily product-related attributes and/or functional benefits, innovation in product design, manufacturing, and merchandising is especially critical to maintaining or enhancing brand equity. After Timex saw brands like Casio and Swatch gain significant market share by emphasizing digital technology and fashion (respectively) in their watches, they made a number of innovative marketing changes. Within a short period of time, Timex introduced Indiglo glow-in-the dark technology; showcased popular new models such as the Ironman in mass media advertising; and launched new Timex stores to showcase their products. Timex also bought the Guess and Monet watch brands to distribute through upscale department stores and expand their brand portfolio. These innovations in product design and merchandising have significantly revived the brand's fortunes.[5]

Failure to innovate can have dire consequences. Schwinn Bicycle once owned the kids bike market with famous models such as the Phantom (a 1950s workhorse with balloon tires) and the Varsity (a 10-speed stalwart of the 1970s). Unfortunately, its market share, which peaked at 25% in the 1960s, slipped to single digits by the early 1990s. The problem? In part, Schwinn was slow to adjust to changing consumer tastes and take aggressive new rivals seriously. While other companies won over biking enthusiasts with lighter, sleeker models in the early 1980s, Schwinn continued to crank out its durable, but bulky, standbys. As one custom bicycle dealer observed, "Schwinn never spent the money on research and development or planned for the long-term, like so many American companies. Except for their name, they really have nothing to sell."[6]

Thus, product innovations are critical for performance-based brands whose sources of brand equity primarily rest in product-related associations. In some cases, product advances may involve brand extensions based on a new or improved product ingredient or feature, e.g., Sony televisions with special Trinitron color tubes, Oreo Double Stuff cookies with extra filling, and Ziploc Gripper Zipper storage bags .[7] In fact, in many categories, a strong family sub-brand has emerged from product innovations associated with brand extensions, e.g., Wilson Hammer wide-body tennis racquets. In other cases, product innovations may center on existing brands. For example, General Mills "Big G" cereal division strives to improve at least a third of its nearly two dozen brand lines each year, recently reformulating Cheerios and Wheaties.[8]

At the same time, it is important not to change products too much, especially if the brand meaning to consumers is wrapped up in the product design or make-up. In a classic marketing story, Coca-Cola encountered strong consumer resistance when they changed their cola formula to "New Coke" in 1985. Thus, in making product changes to a brand, it is important that loyal consumers feel that a reformulated product is a *better* product not a *different* product. The timing of the announcement and introduction of a product improvement is also important: If the brand improvement is announced too soon, consumers may cease to buy existing products; if the brand improvement is announced too late, competitors may have already taken advantage of the market opportunity with their own introductions.

Non-Product-Related Associations

For brands whose core associations are primarily non-product-related attributes and symbolic or experiential benefits, relevance in user and usage imagery is critical. Because of their intangible nature, non-product-related associations may be potentially easier to change, e.g., through a major new advertising campaign that communicates a different type of user or usage situation. Nevertheless, ill-conceived or too-frequent repositionings can blur the image of a brand and confuse or perhaps even alienate consumers. Pepsi-Cola's fresh, youthful appeal has been a key point-of-difference versus Coca-Cola. Moving away from its "Choice of a New Generation" slogan, Pepsi launched a new campaign with the slogan "Gotta Have It" during the 1992 Super Bowl. The ads, showing young and old Pepsi drinkers, was an attempt to expand the "Pepsi Generation" to include older age groups. With little indication of sales success, Pepsi returned to its more familiar and powerful positioning, introducing new ads with the snappy tag line "Be Young. Have Fun. Drink Pepsi."[9] Subsequently, Pepsi perhaps again ran the risk of straying away from a key source of equity with the introduction of the ad theme "Nothing Else Is a Pepsi." More recently, they have returned to the youth appeal of "Generation Next," and its creative follow-up, "Joy of Cola."

Another example of a too hasty departure from advertising equity occurred with Miller Lite light beer. Miller Lite was advertised for years with the slogan "Tastes Great. Less Filling." in humorous ads featuring famous retired athletes. In part to revive fading brand sales, a new ad campaign was launched in 1992. A dramatic departure from previous advertising, the new campaign, featuring fashionable young people, contained the slogans "C'mon, Let Me Show You Where It's At" and "It's It and That's That." When the slide in brand sales continued, Miller reversed their field to create a new campaign, much more faithful to their original positioning. The "Combinations" campaign showed Miller Lite drinkers disagreeing over which of two completely different events to watch on TV. After banging their TV set with a bottle of Lite beer, the two events became combined into one "wacky" spectator sport such as "Sumo High Dive," "Recliner Chair Ski Jump," "Wiener Dog Winter Nationals." The new ad tagline, echoing the past, became "Great Taste. Less Filling. Can Your Beer Do This?" More recently, Miller Lite adopted yet another slogan, "Life is Good," although retaining some of the stylistic characteristics of the Combinations campaign. The return to advertising form saw a comeback in sales, although Miller chose in 1997 to introduce a quirky, controversial ad campaign featuring a fictitious copywriter, Dick, in explicitly targeting 21- to 25-year-olds that was eventually abandoned at the end of 1998.

Significant repositionings may be dangerous for other reasons. Brand images can be extremely sticky, and once consumers form strong brand associations, they may be difficult to change. Consumers may choose to ignore or just be unable to remember the new positioning when strong, but different brand associations already exist in memory.[10] Club Med has attempted for years to transcend its image as a vacation romp for swingers to attract a broader cross-section of people.

For dramatic repositioning strategies to work, convincing new brand claims must be presented in a compelling fashion. One brand that successfully shifted from a primarily non-product-related image to a primarily product-related image is BMW. Uniformly decreed as the quintessential "yuppie" vehicle of the 1980s, sales of the brand dropped almost in half from 1986 to 1991 as new Japanese competition emerged and a backlash to the "Greed Decade" set in. Convinced that high status was no longer a sufficiently desirable and sustainable position, marketing and advertising efforts switched the focus to BMW's product developments and improvements, such as the responsive performance, distinctive styling, and leading-edge engineering of the cars as the "Ultimate Driving Machine." These efforts, showcased in well-designed ads, helped to diminish the "yuppie" association, and sales by 1995 approached their earlier peak.[11]

Revitalizing Brands

Sometimes even the best-designed and implemented brand reinforcement strategies may fail. As noted above, changes in consumer tastes and preferences, the emergence of new competitors or new technology, or any new development in the marketing environment could potentially have a profound effect on the fortunes of a brand. In virtually every product category, there are examples of once prominent and admired brands that have fallen on hard times or, in some cases, completely disappeared. Nevertheless, a number of these brands—such as Harley-Davidson, Mountain Dew, and Chrysler—have managed to make impressive comebacks in recent years as marketers have breathed new life into their customer franchises.

To revive their fortunes, brands sometimes have had to "return to their roots" to recapture lost sources of equity. Adidas, once the standard of athletic footwear, saw its leading market position overtaken by rivals Nike and Reebok as the company became mired in out-dated business practices and internal squabbles. New management, headed by a former chief executive at Saatchi & Saatchi ad agency, began efforts to turn the brand around in 1993. Adidas decided to concentrate their efforts on the lucrative, but fickle, teenage market with the hope that this group might choose to reject brands adopted by their parents and others to create their own identity. New performance-oriented products, advertising, and athlete sponsors targeted a young, urban audience. Additional promotional efforts capitalized on the World Cup soccer tournament in the United States. Complementing this "pull" effort, Adidas also attempted to increase their share of shelf space in stores. As a result, Adidas increased their share of the $8 billion athletic shoe market to 5% from 2% in just four years, and has become the number four sneaker company in the U.S., challenging number three Fila.[12]

In other cases, the meaning of the brand has had to fundamentally change to regain lost ground and recapture market leadership. Hush Puppies' suede shoes—symbolized by the cuddly, rumpled, droopy-eyed dog—was a kids' favorite in the 1950s and 1960s. Changes in fashion trends and a series of marketing mishaps, however, eventually resulted in an out-of-date image and diminished sales. Wolverine World Wide, makers of Hush Puppies, made a number of marketing changes in the early 1990s to reverse the sales slide. New product designs and numerous off-beat color combinations (bright shades of green, purple, and pink) enhanced the brand's fashion appeal. Increased expenditures backed an ad campaign featuring youthful, attractive people wearing the shoes and the tag-line "We Invented Casuals." Popular designers began to use the shoes in their fashion shows. As a result of all these developments, and a concerted program to engage retailer interest, the brand has now re-appeared in fashionable department stores and sales and profits have sky-rocketed.[13]

General Approach

Reversing a fading brand's fortunes thus requires either that lost sources of brand equity are recaptured or that new sources of brand equity are identified and established. Regardless of which approach is taken, brands on the comeback trail have to make more "revolutionary" changes than the "evolutionary" changes to reinforce brand meaning. Often, the thing to do in turning around the fortunes of a brand is to understand what the sources of brand equity were to begin with. That is, in profiling brand knowledge structures to guide repositioning, it is important to accurately and completely characterize the breadth and depth of brand awareness and the strength, favorability, and uniqueness of brand associations held in consumer memory. Of particular importance is the extent to which key brand associations are still properly positioning the brand. Are positive associations losing their strength or uniqueness? Have negative associations become linked to the brand (e.g., due to some type of changes in the marketing environment)?

To answer these questions, a brand audit is often conducted. A brand audit is a comprehensive examination of the health of a brand in terms of its sources of brand equity from the perspective of the firm and the consumer. Decisions must then be made as to whether or not to retain the same positioning or to create a new positioning. Positioning considerations relate to desirability and deliverability of different possible brand associations—salient attributes and/or benefits—based on company, consumer, and competitor considerations.

With an understanding of the current and desired brand knowledge structures in hand, the customer-based brand equity framework again provides guidance as to how to best refresh old sources of brand equity or create new sources of brand equity to achieve the intended positioning. According to the customer-base brand equity model, two such approaches are possible:

Expand the depth and/or breadth of brand awareness by improving consumer recall and recognition of the brand during purchase or consumption settings.

Improve the strength, favorability and uniqueness of brand associations making up the brand image. This approach may involve programs directed at existing or new brand associations.

Strategically, lost sources of brand equity can be refurbished and new sources of brand equity can be established in the same three main ways that sources of brand equity are created to start with—by changing brand elements changing the supporting marketing program and leveraging new secondary associations.

Expanding Brand Awareness

With a fading brand, often it is not the *depth* of brand awareness that is a problem—consumers can still recognize or recall the brand under certain circumstances. Rather, the *breadth* of brand awareness is the stumbling block—consumers only tend to think of the brand in very narrow ways. Therefore, one useful means of building brand equity is to increase the breadth of brand awareness, making sure that consumers do not overlook the brand and think of purchasing or consuming it in those situations where the brand can satisfy consumers' needs and wants.

Assuming a brand has a reasonable level of awareness and a positive brand image, perhaps the most appropriate starting point to creating new sources of brand equity is by employing tactics that increase usage. In many cases, approaches to increase usage represent the "path of least resistance" because they do not involve potentially difficult and costly changes in brand image or positioning as much as potentially easier-to-implement changes in brand salience and awareness. Usage can be increased by either:

increasing the level or quantity of consumption (i.e., "how much the brand is used") or

increasing the frequency of consumption (i.e., "how often the brand is used").

In general, it is probably easier to increase the number of times a consumer uses the product than it is to actually change the amount used at one time. Consumption amount is more likely to be a function of the particular beliefs that the consumer holds as to how the product is best consumed. A possible exception to that rule is for more "impulse" consumption products whose usage increases when the product is made more available (e.g., soft drinks, snacks).[14]

Increasing frequency of use, on the other hand, involves either identifying additional or new opportunities to use the brand in the same basic way or identifying completely new and different ways to use the brand. Increasing frequency of use is a particularly attractive option for large market share brands that are leaders in their product category.

Identifying Additional or New Usage Opportunities

In some cases, the brand may be seen as useful only in certain places and at certain times, especially if it has strong brand associations to particular usage situations or user types. In general, to identify additional or new opportunities for consumers to use the brand more—albeit in the same basic way—a marketing program should be designed to include both:

communications to consumers as to the appropriateness and advantages of using the brand more frequently in existing situations or in new situations; and

reminders to consumers to actually use the brand as close as possible to those situations.

For many brands, increasing usage may be as simple as improving top-of-mind awareness through reminder advertising (e.g., as with V-8 vegetable juice and its classic "Wow! I Could Have Had a V-8" ad campaign). In other cases, more creative types of retrieval cues may be necessary. These reminders may be critical as consumers often adopt "functional fixedness" with a brand such that it can be easily ignored in non-traditional consumption settings. Increased usage applications may also require more than just new ad campaigns. Often, increased usage can arise from new packaging. Maxwell House Filter Pack Singles and Folgers Coffee Singles were both an attempt to accommodate consumers' desires to drink ground roast coffee without brewing an entire pot.

Another potential opportunity to increase frequency of use is when consumers' *perceptions* of their usage differs from the *reality* of their usage. For many products with relatively short life spans, consumers may fail to replace the product in a timely manner because of a tendency to underestimate the length of productive usage.[15] One strategy to speed up product replacement is to tie the act of replacing the product to a certain holiday, event, or time of year. For example, several brands have run promotions tied in with the spring-time switch to daylight savings time (e.g., Oral-B toothbrushes). Another strategy might be to provide consumers with better information as to either when the product was first used (or would need to be replaced) or the current level of product performance. For example, batteries now offer built-in gauges that show how much power they have left.

Finally, perhaps the simplest way to increase usage is when actual usage of a product is less than the optimal or recommended usage. In this case, consumers must be persuaded of the merits of more regular usage, and any potential hurdles to increased usage must be overcome. In terms of the latter, product designs and packaging can make the product more convenient and easier to use.[16] For example, a shampoo designed to be gentle enough for daily use may alleviate concerns from those consumers who believe that frequent hair-washing is undesirable, thereby eliminating their tendency to conserve the amount of product they use.

Identifying New and Completely Different Ways to Use the Brand

The second approach to increase frequency of use for a brand is to identify completely new and different usage applications. For example, food product companies have long advertised new recipes that use their branded products in entirely different ways. After years of sales declines of 3% to 4% annually, sales of Cheez-Whiz rose 35% when the brand was backed by a new ad campaign promoting the product as a cheese sauce accompaniment to be used in the microwave oven.[17]

Perhaps the classic example of finding creative new usage applications for a product is Arm and Hammer baking soda, whose deodorizing and cleaning properties have led to a number of new product introductions for the brand (such as toothpaste, deodorant, and rug cleaners). Other brands have taken a page from Arm and Hammer's book: Clorox has run ads stressing the many benefits of their bleach (how it eliminates kitchen odors); Wrigley's chewing gum has run ads touting their product as a substitute for smoking; and Tums has run ads for their antacid promoting its benefits as a calcium substitute.

Improving Brand Image

Although changes in brand awareness are probably the easiest means of creating new sources of brand equity, more fundamental changes are often necessary. A new marketing program may be necessary to improve the strength, favorability, and uniqueness of brand associations making up the brand image. As part of this repositioning—or recommitment to the existing positioning—any positive associations that have faded may need to be bolstered, any negative associations that have been created may have to be neutralized, and additional positive associations may have to be created.

In some cases, repositioning the brand requires establishing more compelling points-of-difference to better differentiate the brand. Other times a brand needs to be repositioned to establish a point-of-parity on some key image dimensions to "break even" with respect to other brands. For example, a common problem for established, mature brands is that they must be made more contemporary by creating relevant usage situations, a more contemporary user profile, or a more modern brand personality. Heritage brands that have been around for years may be seen as trustworthy but also as boring, uninteresting, and not that likable. Updating a brand may involve some combination of new products, new advertising, new promotions, and new packaging.

Sometimes negative product-related associations emerge because of changes in consumer tastes. Del Monte (makers of canned fruits and vegetables) found that their sales steadily declined after a peak in 1969. Even worse, their loyal buyers were aging (the typical buyer was a female over the age of 55) and were not being replaced by younger ones. The problem was that younger consumers saw Del Monte products as being old-fashioned, inconvenient, and laden with additives and preservatives. As a result, in the mid-1990s, the company launched their first ad campaign in ten years to dispel the negative associations that had been created. Attempting to make canned foods more relevant and contemporary, the campaign targeted "emerging families"—those consumers beginning a career, starting a household, getting married, and having children—who would presumably be more likely to re-evaluate their eating habits.[18]

Positioning decisions require a specification of the target market and nature of competition to set the competitive frame of reference. The target market for a brand typically does not constitute all possible segments that potentially make up the entire market. In some cases, the firm may have other brands that target these remaining market segments. In other cases, however, these market segments represent potential growth targets for the brand. Effectively targeting these other segments typically requires some changes or variations in the marketing program—especially in advertising and other communications—and the decision as to whether or not to target these segments ultimately depends on a cost-benefit analysis.

Retaining Vulnerable or Recapturing Lost Customers

In some cases, simply retaining existing customers who would eventually move away from the brand or re-capturing lost customers who no longer use the brand can be a means to increase sales. Brands such as Kellogg's Frosted Flakes cereal, Oreo cookies, and Keds tennis shoes have run ad campaigns targeting adults who presumably quit using the product long ago. Some of these ads use themes and appeals to nostalgia or heritage. Others attempt to make the case that the product's enduring appeal is still relevant for users today. The importance of retaining current customers can be recognized by calculating the lifetime value of customers. For example, one research study noted that the cost of selling an automobile to a new customer is five times greating than selling it to a satisfied existing customer. This is significant since a purchaser of automobiles will spend more than $500,000 on cars during his or her lifetime.[19]

Identifying Neglected Segments

Segmenting on the basis of demographic variables and identifying neglected segments is thus one viable brand revitalization option. To grow the brand franchise, many firms have reached out to new customer groups to build brand equity. One classic example of this approach was with Procter & Gamble's Ivory soap that revived their brand franchise by promoting it as a pure and simple product for adults instead of just for babies. Johnson & Johnson baby shampoo achieved success by virtue of a similar strategy, promoting the gentleness and every-day applicability of its shampoo to an adult audience. After a century of fighting tooth-and-nail with arch-rival Arrow, Van Huesen was finally able to take over the top spot in the dress shirt market in 1991. By devoting half of its

$8 million budget to advertising directly to women in women's magazines, Van Huesen was able to influence the key decision makers in the men's dress shirt purchase since women buy an estimated 60% to 70% of men's shirts.

Attracting a new market segment can be unexpectedly difficult. Nike, Gillette, and other marketers have struggled for years to find the right blend of products and advertising to make their brands—which have more masculine-oriented images—appear relevant and appealing to women. Creating marketing programs to appeal to women has become a priority of makers of products from cars to computers. Marketers have also introduced new marketing programs targeted to different racial groups, age groups, and income groups. Attracting emerging new market segments based on more cultural dimensions may require different messages, creative strategies, and media.[20]

Attract New Customers

Of course, one strategic option for revitalizing a fading brand involves simply more or less abandoning the consumer group that supported the brand in the past and targeting a completely new market segment. For example, Gillette decided Dippity-Do hair gel carried too much negative baggage to appeal to those women who used it in the 1960s but who now associated it with out-of-fashion bouffant hairdos and flips. Rather than targeting middle-aged consumers, Gillette chose to start with a clean slate by targeting a new generation of younger consumers and repositioning the brand as a fun, hip product through advertising in teen magazines.[21] Similarly, the hair conditioner Brylcreem, which gave teenagers the slicked-back look in the 1950s, saw its sales go limp in the 1960s when the Beatles popularized a "mop-top" look and bangs. To revive the brand, product packaging has since been modernized and a clear Brylcreem Power Gel introduced to appeal to a younger audience.[22]

Balancing New and Old Target Markets

Firms have multiple market segments they can target to grow their sales. All firms face trade-offs in their marketing efforts to attract new customers versus their efforts to retain existing ones. In mature markets, building loyalty and retaining existing customers is generally more important. Nevertheless, a certain amount of customers inevitably leave the brand franchise, even if only by natural causes. Consequently, it is imperative that the firm proactively develop strategies to attract new customers, especially younger ones.

The marketing challenge in acquiring new customers, however, lies in making a brand seem relevant to customers from sometimes vastly different generations, cohort groups, and lifestyles. This challenge is exacerbated when the brand has strong personality or user image associations that tie the brand to one particular consumer group. Unfortunately, even as younger consumers age, there is no guarantee they will have the same attitudes and behaviors of the older consumers who preceded them.

The response to the challenge of marketing across generations and cohort groups has taken all forms. Some marketers have attempted to cut free from the past. Procter & Gamble's Old Spice has had to wrestle with the problem of being seen as "your father's after shave" to young male consumers. As one P&G marketing executive notes, "We recognize the need to change and bring in a new generation of young users. At the same time, we don't want to alienate the users we already have." To revitalize the brand, a new campaign backed by heavy spending was launched in 1993. The new TV ads eliminated the trademark "whistling sailor" character to show—via rapid-fire editing—active, contemporary men. Old Spice also became a sponsor for several AVP volleyball tournaments. On the product side, P&G put heavy support behind their fast-selling and more youth-positioned Old Spice High Endurance deodorant.[23]

Perhaps the brand that attempted the cleanest break from their past in recent years was Oldsmobile with their lavish, $100 million-plus ad campaign in 1988. With the theme "This is Not Your Father's Oldsmobile," each ad featured an icon from the 1960s (such as Star Trek's William Shatner, TV game-show host Monty Hall, the Beatle's Ringo Starr, astronaut Scott Carpenter, and actress Priscilla Presley) paired with one of their children. The ads showed the celebrity parent being driven away in an Oldsmobile by their child. With the average age of an Oldsmobile buyer at 51 years old, the purpose of the ads was to redefine user and usage imagery and make the brand relevant for a new market. Although the ads were among the best-remembered of the year—especially among the target consumers aged 35 to 44—sales continued to slide even after the campaign was introduced. Ultimately, it was withdrawn from the air. Critics faulted the campaign for drawing attention to the dowdiness of the brand's image. Others defended the campaign by noting that auto sales were generally soft during that period; Oldsmobile's models were relatively high priced for younger buyers and, most importantly, Oldsmobile's models really hadn't changed all that much anyway. Subsequent efforts to revive the brand similarly stuttered, and Oldsmobile sales have shrunk from 1.1 million cars and trucks in 1986 to under 400,000 in 1995. The company announced plans in 1996 to cut the number of dealers selling Oldsmobiles in half.

General Motors has experienced similar problems with their Buick and Cadillac divisions. Cadillac sales, which reached a peak of over 350,000 cars in 1978, dipped to roughly 175,000 in 1995. The average age of Cadillac buyers at that time was 65 years old but the average age of the entry-level luxury car owner was about 44 years old. This younger market segment did not view Cadillac as a symbol of American affluence and success as much as their parents did. To attract younger consumers, Cadillac introduced the entry-level Catera, a clone of the Opel Omega MV6 sold by GM in Europe. Cadillac also targeted younger consumers with their older Seville models. To retain existing older customers, however, Cadillac only did a modest make-over of their Sedan de Ville models (re-designed primarily to satisfy their most loyal customers) and retained the expansive Fleetwood models. Similar demographic problems have plagued the Buick line too, causing one dealer to complain, "Our customer are going out the back door and nobody's coming in the front door."[24]

Multiple Marketing Communication Programs

One approach to attracting a new market segment for a brand while satisfying current segments is to create separate advertising campaigns and communication programs for each segment. For example, Dewars launched the "Authentic" and "Profiles" campaigns, each directed to a different market segment. The "Authentic" campaign focused on the brand heritage in terms of its product quality and Scottish roots and was focused on an older segment, including existing customers. The "Profiles" campaign took a completely different tact, profiling younger users of the brand to make the brand seem relevant and attractive to a younger audience. Different media buys then attempted to ensure that the appropriate campaign was seen by the relevant market segment.

Similarly, Anheuser-Busch's popular Spuds Mackenzie and Budweiser "frogs" campaigns targeted to young adults have been balanced by a more "mature" product quality message featuring company president, August Busch III. The increased effectiveness of targeted media makes multiple targets more and more feasible. The obvious drawback to this approach is the expense involved and the potential blurring of images if there is too much media overlap among target groups and if the respective ad positionings are seen as incompatible.

Brand Extensions and Sub-Brands

Another approach to attract new customers to a brand and keep the brand modern and up-to-date is to introduce a line extension or establish a new sub-brand. Häagen-Dazs successfully introduced its ingredient-laden Exträas sub-brand (with flavors like Cappucino Commotion and Carrot Cake Passion) to give its brand a more youthful appeal and to better compete with Ben & Jerry's, whose products had a stronger draw with younger consumers.[25] Similarly, Aqua Velva introduced their Ice Sport after-shave sub-brand to appeal to a younger audience.

New Distribution Outlets

In some cases attracting a new market segment may be as simple as making the product more available to that group. For example, the sunglasses industry, which grew sales from $100 million in 1972 to $2.5 billion only 15 years later, benefited not only from social and fashion trends, but also from a shift in distribution strategies. Sunglasses used to be sold mostly by opticians, but in the 1970s, Sunglass Hut and other companies moved into malls, sporting-goods stores, and campuses, building strong loyalty with teenagers and college students in the process.

Retiring Brands

Finally, it should be recognized that because of dramatic or adverse changes in the marketing environment, some brands are just not worth saving. Their sources of brand equity may have essentially "dried up" or, even worse, damaging and difficult-to-change new associations may have been created. At some point, the size of the brand franchise—no matter how loyal—fails to justify the support of the brand. In the face of such adversity, decisive management actions are necessary.

Several options are possible to deal with a fading brand. A first step in retrenching a fading brand is to reduce the number of its product types (e.g., package sizes or variations). Such actions reduce the cost of supporting the brand support and allow the brand to put its "best foot forward." Under these reduced levels of support, a brand may more easily hit profit targets. Relatedly, if a sufficiently large and loyal enough customer base exists, marketing support can be virtually eliminated altogether as a means to milk or harvest brand profits from these "cash cows." Unilever's Lux Beauty Bar, despite not having received any advertising support for 15 years, still retains almost 3% market share from sales to consumers who became loyal to the brand in years past. As a result, Lux contributes over $10 million in gross profits to Unilever.[26]

In some cases, on the other hand, the brand is beyond repair and more drastic measures have to be taken. One possible option for fading brands is to consolidate them into a stronger brand. Procter & Gamble merged White Cloud and Charmin toilet paper, eliminating the White Cloud line in 1992. P&G also merged Solo and Bold detergents. With shelf space at a premium, brand consolidation will increasingly be seen as a necessary option to create a stronger brand, cut costs, and focus marketing efforts.[27] Finally, a permanent solution is to discontinue the product all together. The market place is littered with brands that either failed to establish an adequate level of brand equity or found their sources of brand equity disappear because of changes in the marketing environment.

Obsoleting Existing Products

How do you decide which brands to attempt to revitalize, which to milk, and which to obsolete? Beecham chose to abandon such dying brands as 5-Day deodorant pads, Rose Milk skin care lotion, and Serutam laxative but attempted to resurrect Aqua-Velva after-shave, Geritol iron and vitamin supplement, and Brylcreem hair-styling products. The decision to retire a brand depends on a number of factors, related to the strength of the brand, the market, and competitors.

Fundamentally, the issue is the existing and latent equity of the brand. As the head of consumer package goods giant Unilever commented in explaining his company's decision to review about 20% of their brands and lines of businesses for possible sell-offs: "If businesses aren't creating value, we shouldn't be in them. It's like having a nice garden that gets weeds. You have to clean it up, so the light and air get in to the blooms which are likely to grow the best."

Summary

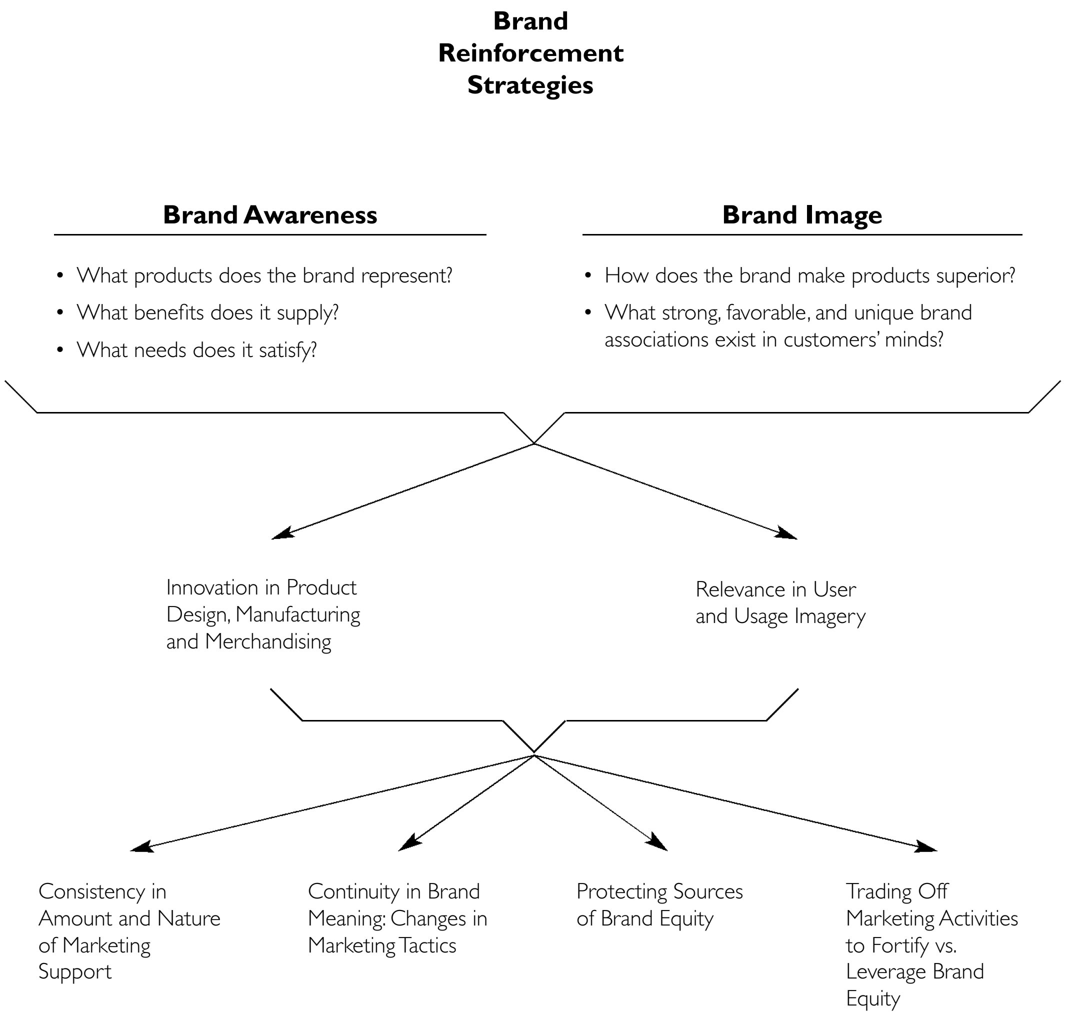
Effective brand management requires taking a long-term view of marketing decisions. A long-term perspective of brand management recognizes that any changes in the supporting marketing program for a brand may, by changing consumer knowledge, affect the success of future marketing programs. Additionally, a long-term view necessitates proactive strategies designed to maintain and enhance customer based brand equity over time in the face of external changes in the marketing environment and internal changes in a firm's marketing goals and programs. Figures 1 and 2 summarize the process for reinforcing and revitalizing brands.

Reinforcing Brands

Brand equity is reinforced by marketing actions that consistently convey the meaning of the brand to consumers in terms of: what products the brand represents, what core benefits it supplies, what needs it satisfies, and how the brand makes those products superior. The goal should be creating strong, favorable, and unique brand associations in the minds of consumers. The most important consideration in reinforcing brands is the consistency of the marketing support that the brand receives, both in terms of the amount and the nature of that support. Consistency does not mean that marketers should avoid making any changes in the marketing program and, in fact, many tactical changes may be necessary to maintain the strategic thrust and direction of the brand. Unless there is some change in the marketing environment, however, there is little need to deviate from a successful positioning. In such cases, the critical points-of-parity and points-of-difference that represent sources of brand equity should be vigorously preserved and defended.

Reinforcing brand meaning depends on the nature of the brand association involved. For brands whose core associations are primarily product-related attributes and/or functional benefits, innovation in product design, manufacturing, and merchandising is critical to maintaining or enhancing brand equity. For brands whose core associations are primarily non-product-related attributes and symbolic or experiential benefits, relevance in user and usage imagery is critical to maintaining or enhancing brand equity. In managing brand equity, it is important to recognize the trade-offs that exist between those marketing activities that fortify the brand and reinforce its meaning and those that attempt to leverage or borrow from its existing brand equity to reap some financial benefit. At some point, failure to fortify the brand will diminish brand awareness and weaken brand image. Without these sources of brand equity, the brand itself may not continue to yield as valuable benefits.

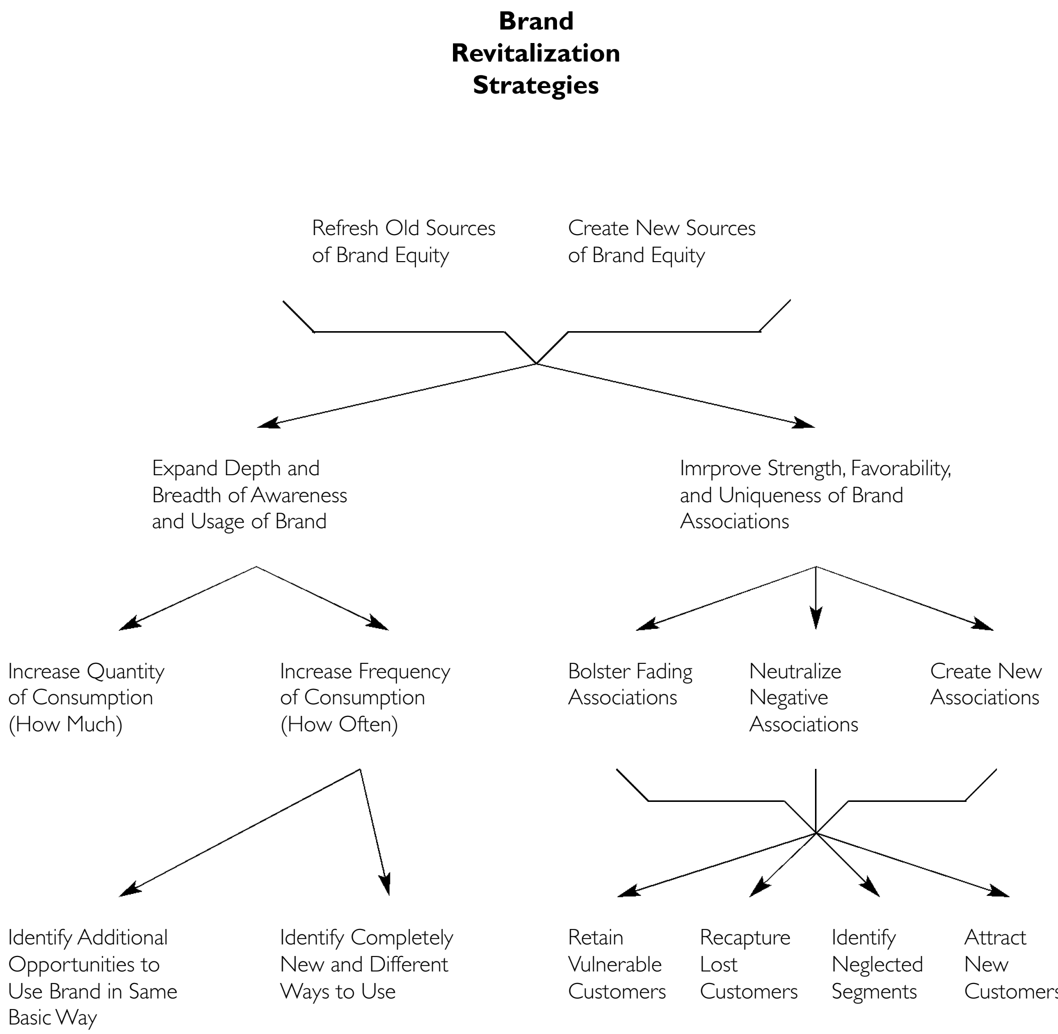
FIGURE 1. Brand Reinforcement Strategies



Revitalizing Brands

Revitalizing a brand requires either that lost sources of brand equity be recaptured or that new sources of brand equity be identified and established. According to the customer-based brand equity framework, two general approaches are possible: expanding the depth and/or breadth of brand awareness by improving brand recall and recognition of consumers during purchase or consumption settings; and improving the strength, favorability, and uniqueness of brand associations making up the brand image. This latter approach may involve programs directed at existing or new brand associations.

FIGURE 2. Brand Revitalization Strategies



With a fading brand, the depth of brand awareness is often not as much of a problem as the breadth—consumers tend to think of the brand in very narrow ways. Although changes in brand awareness are probably the easiest means of creating new sources of brand equity, a new marketing program often may have to be implemented to improve the strength, favorability, and uniqueness of brand associations. As part of this re-positioning, new markets may have to be tapped. The challenge in all of these efforts to modify the brand image is to not destroy the equity that already exists.

Notes

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