

Consumer attitudes & trends for branding in 2007

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There are five noteworthy trends that are set to impact both luxury and mass-market brands during the year ahead, particularly relating to how consumers feel and behave toward brands, according to advice offered to The Wise Marketer by Kenneth Hirst, president of Hirst Pacific Design.

The changing consumer attitudes and branding trends expected to significantly impact marketers during the coming year include:

1. Customization and personalisation: Branding the brand

Consumers appreciate the ability to add their own personal touches to products to really make them their own. Concoct-it-yourself perfumeries, snap-it-on cell phone faceplates, and other do-it-yourself design opportunities are constantly arising from brands that value engaging their consumers.

Personalised and customizable products form an even closer bond between the consumer, the product, the brand, and the company. Yet while Nike offers the chance to design your own sneakers and even Xbox has snap-on faceplates, the challenge remains for brands to maintain, and strengthen, their core brand image.

Personalised product evolution is highlighting the need for brands to sustain a strong identity through solidified positioning, strategic packaging innovation and effective graphic design, which are completely distinct from the customizable characteristics of the products.

2. Hand-in-Hand brands

Focused and well-respected brands that represent coolness and quality are gaining greater exposure by enriching other as more wide-ranging brands. Dual marketing ploys, brand acquisitions and strategic partnerships are bringing targeted consumer groups further into focus. When you stay at a Westin Hotel, expect the beauty products in your bathroom to be by the premium, all-natural Aveda brand. And Le Meridien, along with other luxury hotels, add to their appeal by featuring top-of-the-line Hermes toiletries.

Nike and Apple formed a partnership bringing the worlds of sports and music together with the launch of innovative Nike+iPod products. Lamborghinis are being sold with Versace-finished interiors.

By partnering with each other, brands increase the quality perception, capitalise on existing brand recognition and loyalty and renew and refresh consumer interest.

Nevertheless, it is important that the individual brands' originality and innovation effort continue to progress at the same time. Maintaining a core identity is key, even while interlocking with another brand in a partnership.

3. Seeing green

All natural product lines, especially cosmetics, skin, and hair care, are on the increase, stressing holistic lifestyles and environmental awareness. Spas are increasingly using products with all natural ingredients, many of which are homemade, like masks made with bananas, milk, honey and rosewater. Lush, a UK-based cosmetics company, specialises in handmade products of fresh organic fruit and vegetables, essential oils and safe synthetics without animal ingredients.

Origins, Dr. Hauschka, and Aveda are brands that stress the relationship between Mother Nature and human nature, promoting beauty and wellness by conducting business in a way that does not compromise the sustainability of future generations. Even Wal-mart has launched an aggressive programme to encourage its 60,000 suppliers to produce goods that don't harm the environment and use organic raw materials while urging consumers to buy green.

The packaging of these products also stresses sustainability; protecting the Earth and conserving resources by using materials like bio-plastics, bagasse, TerraSkin, bamboo and recycled paper and plastics. With many brands capitalising on the "green" factor, product packaging has become mundane. Companies will need to look for new ways to differentiate their vision that competitors can't easily match.

Expect to see the introduction of innovative packaging that emphasizes greenness but also complements other unique differentiating brand values.

4. From Urban to Urbane

Ostentatious products, such as over-the-top "bling" (flashy) jewellery and crystal-encrusted phones and PDAs are taking a back seat and giving way to more sophisticated and refined items. Subtle, chic and classic design aesthetics are replacing showy "look at me" designs covered with big logos and flashy embellishments.

Less is definitely becoming more, as restraint and refinement define all that is stylish and super-chic. Today's consumers are beginning to recognise products by their design and quality, not by an emblazoned brand mark.

5. Forever young

There is a huge demand for effective and affordable non-invasive alternatives to cosmetic surgery. Premium skin care marketers like L'Oreal and Estee Lauder have adopted technologies from other fields, such as pharmaceuticals and electronics, to introduce anti-aging actives to the skin more effectively, more efficiently, and for a longer duration.

More recently, mass-market brands such as Olay and Neutrogena have launched similar products, competing with professional skin care brands but at lower price points and with larger distribution. Other innovations include full-scale beauty regimes that recognise beauty is more than skin deep. Ingestible nutritional supplement lines are becoming more visible and are specifically designed to care for skin from the inside out.

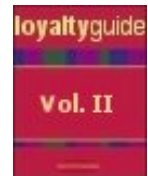
With so many anti-aging potions and lotions on the market, newer inventive products are popping up in the category from smaller niche brands, such as Lip Fusion's lip plumping glosses with a venomous effect that enhances one's pout almost immediately and DuWop's "Reverse Eyeliner" a multi-tasking pencil, that among other things, diminishes the signs of aging by plumping fine lines around the eyes. Skin brighteners, firming agents like Benefit's Wonderbod Jiggle Gel, and cellulite reducers are other products making debut appearances in many cosmetic lines. Expect to see even more advances in skincare products coupled with innovative dispensing systems.

Kenneth Hirst provided the creative vision behind fragrance lines such as "Still" Jennifer Lopez, "Celine" Dion, Havana, and Tommy, as well as the rather exclusive metal box packaging for Movado Vizio watches, the Gillette Series men's grooming products, glass bottles for PepsiCo, various packagings for Procter & Gamble, and limited-edition watch boxes for Audemars Piquet.

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