All have a common purpose: to not only move people to buy their brand over a competitor’s brand, but to perpetuate an everlasting brand that holds a cherished or respected place in the market’s mind.
We explore **10 BRANDS** and the **BIG IDEA** that has been the **BREAK-THROUGH** in building their business.

**WHAT IS YOUR BIG IDEA?**
Based in Vista, California, prAna has perpetuated an authentic brand for nearly two decades. It’s simply in their corporate fabric.

In 1992, Beaver and Pam Theodosakis started prAna, a company that makes authentic clothing that works well for their passions: climbing and yoga. Their slogan remains, “Born from the experience.”

Over the years, prAna (a Sanskrit work for “breath, life and vitality of spirit,” by the way) has continued to hire and participate in business with like-minded people who want to embrace the experience, promote conservation and create positive change. And as it turns out, products born from the experiences of climbing and yoga work well for other passions, too.

That makes the prAna brand both authentic and aspiring.

Based in Vista, California, prAna has perpetuated an authentic brand for nearly two decades. It’s simply in their corporate fabric.

Do your products and people exude your values? Does your company stand for something other than making a buck? If so, humbly share your story over and over to like-minded cultures and markets.

Your brand will become an aspiration to these cultures. And your logo will symbolize this aspiration.

Authenticity enables brands to
  • Hire people with like-minded values
  • Foster a company culture centered on these values
  • Use these values as the foundation for EVERY company decision
  • Develop products that become an extension of these values

There are many brands in the outdoor industry that claim to be authentic. And some are. There are, however, no arguments about who does “authenticity” better. A brand is simply authentic or it isn’t.

Moreover, authenticity is unlike any other brand position. For example, prAna’s brand promise is not compared to others in terms of being faster, better or cheaper. It’s not compared in terms of features, functions, technologies, innovations or superior benefits. It’s not a position that is compared in marketing speak stuffed with gobbledygook.

Its authenticity is simply valued by prAna customers who share like-minded values—people who value organic cotton, fair trade, alternative power and a desire to always reach for the next highest ideal.

Or the next bomber hold.
Sometimes the big idea is to know when to hang it up...

As a brand, sometimes it’s not only what you are, it’s where you are in the store. Such was the case for Sanuk shoes.

At first glance, Sanuk’s “These are Not Shoes” brand position seems to be a ground-breaking idea—a unique approach that attracts attention to the product while differentiating it from the competition. But what really changed the game was combining this big idea concept with a new kind of point-of-purchase display.

Sanuk invented the “Hanging Shoe Category” turning the consumer purchase experience from an aged purchase into a self-service system. Think about the way shoes are normally sold: you pick out a shoe the kid in the shop goes into the back and brings out above it doesn’t fit so he goes back and gets another box. Maybe another.

Then Sanuk comes along. No more guess and what just buy them.

They put all their shoes out in the store, and in doing so they invented the $199 instant buy in the footwear industry and have enjoyed 20x growth in five years (predicting 4x growth in year).

So how did they convince retailers to change the way they sell footwear? The only way you can with retailers, they痛点：

Put yourself in your customer's shoes, how can you make the act of purchase easier? You may have to call in a few favors to implement change, but if it works, your competition will always be a few steps behind.

THESE ARE NOT SHOES
NEW DELIVERY MECHANISMS ARE BIG IDEAS.

We have been in an escalating boom of new products entering the market—brands that take old products and innovate new delivery mechanisms that support the way we actually live our lives.

In many cases, a new brand solves a problem the consumer doesn’t realize they have.

Yogurt was for the longest time sold in more or less the same package, a cup. If you tossed one in your school backpack to take studying and it got squished, it is just what happened if you weren’t careful. Then along came Go-GURT®, yogurt in a drinkable, squeezable packaging, to solve a problem you may not have recognized.

UNTIL 1989, MOUNTAIN BIKERS HAD TO STOP ON LONG TECHNICAL HILL CLIMBS OR RISK TAKING THEIR HANDS OFF THE HANDLEBARS TO DRINK WATER FROM A BOTTLE. IT WASN’T VIEWED AS A PROBLEM SIMPLY BECAUSE IT WAS THE ONLY OPTION THERE WAS AVAILABLE.

BUT THEN MICHAEL EIDSON INVENTED HANDS-FREE HYDRATION. MICHAEL ENTERED THE HUNDRED-MILE MOUNTAIN BIKE RACE THROUGH THE TEXAS DESERT CALLED, HOTTER’N HELL 100. THE AVID MOUNTAIN BIKE RACER HAD A DAY JOB AS AN EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIAN, SO HE THOUGHT TO USE AN INTRAVENOUS BAG DROPPED INTO A TUBE SOCK SEWN TO HIS RIDING SHIRT, WITH AN IV HOSE AND HOSE CLAMP DELIVERING THE H2O.

It literally became an idea that held water. And in an instant, the hands-free hydration product category was invented, solving a major problem many athletes didn’t realize they had.

CamelBak the company was born. Twenty years later, you’d be hard pressed to see a mountain biker without a CamelBak product.

Today, there is still incredible opportunity for entrepreneurs to brainstorm and leverage new delivery mechanisms for existing products. So get those creative juices flowing.
For some, mass customization is a nightmare. For Timbuk2, it’s a brand strategy.

Timbuk2 Designs, Inc. arguably reinvented the Pony Express messenger bag—a tough-as-hell bag that is as functional as your day demands and as funky as your style desires.

However, that wasn’t the big idea that stitched Timbuk2’s iconic place in the market’s mind.

To be sure, that philosophy may have been easier when founder Rob Honeycutt sewed each bag himself. But today, San Francisco-based Timbuk2 still practices “just-in-time” manufacturing to customize messenger bags — quickly and tens of thousands of times a year.

If you can do it, it makes perfect branding sense.

People naturally embrace brands whenever they are made to feel special—a simple idea, really. And you can’t get any more special than customized, which is why we’re seeing big brands jumping on the mass customization bandwagon (e.g., NIKEiD, Vans and Timberland).

Timbuk2 still manufacturers custom bags in the heart of San Francisco’s Mission District—their mission fulfilled: creating brand loyalty by delivering high-quality products their customers can truly make their own.
Some brands are products. Some are pure attitude. **NEMO is a spirit.**

It is not a rah-rah spirit. Nor is it a candy-coated line in a marketing campaign. NEMO Equipment, Inc. exudes an authentic, sincere and honest spirit—one infused throughout the company, which makes state-of-the-art mountaineering tents. It is a living breathing culture. And you’ll feel it every time you interact with the brand, at every touch point and with every employee.

For NEMO, design and speed of innovation are built into its DNA. The brand is about taking customer feedback, needs and ideas and turning them into implemented innovations ... now! This spirit urges its employees to constantly advance and execute improvements within one season. It’s a nimble process that is not laden with interoffice memos, meetings, multiple formal presentations and multi-level approvals. Rather, it’s a can-do attitude facilitated by impromptu conversations, stand up huddles, over-the-weekend engineering and “let’s go” approvals. As a result, NEMO tents were named among the 100 best inventions of the year by TIME and Popular Science magazines. (Their air-supported tents require no poles. How cool is that?)

Accolades are great. Customers are even better. Most brands don’t even recognize customer feedback with a reply. But for NEMO, proactive responsiveness becomes contagious. It’s only human nature. When customers realize their feedback has been considered and actually implemented, their affinity for the brand grows instantly. And they’ll tell everyone they know about it. Being ultra-responsive yields brand evangelism. Given the brand’s responsive spirit, it’s no wonder even U.S. Special Forces rely on NEMO innovations.

**NEMO is built to innovate on the fly. (And sometimes, it’s literally a fly.)** Some brands are products. Some are pure attitude.
You can’t always be the brand that invented the market category. But here’s what you can do: when you follow in someone else’s footsteps, improve the footsteps. Fast.

Take the case of Chaco shoes. They didn’t invent the world’s first sports sandal. (Teva owned that position.) But they improved them. They made them fit better.

Chaco, then called Gecko, improved the sports sandal by focusing on function and creating a brand truly fit for adventure™. “We never tried to fake you out,” says Brandan Hill, “with design elements that suggests performance but don’t actually perform, suggests comfort but aren’t comfortable, suggests eco but aren’t eco.”

Chaco shoes featured sticky rubber outsoles, a strap that pulled through the midsole to allow for a customized fit, and ladder lock buckles that wouldn’t get ripped off in white water—a problem prevalent with Velcro straps.

Think of what they were up against. They were second to the market. They changed their name. Yet, the Chaco brand still trail blazes and dances in the minds of its consumers because it was a successful “fast follower”—the very next to leverage, build upon and improve the original product or service.

There’s always room for a brand to own second place—and create a distinguishing niche there. Third place, however, is typically way back in the dust. For example, there is Coke and Pepsi. … There is Hertz and Avis.

Not the first in your market? That’s OK. … But step lively.

www.chacousa.com
Products that speak volumes for themselves

Sometime the big idea that seeds brand ubiquity is a campaign theme. Sometimes it’s a go-to-market strategy. And sometimes the big idea is the product itself.

This is the case with the Bamboo Bottle Company brand.

The hip little brand was founded around the idea of creating the most environmentally friendly water bottles—clean, reusable and safe water bottles that don’t leach chemicals into your drink. And it is quite possibly the best-looking insulated water bottle you’ve ever seen.

Simply put, Bamboo Bottle Company makes a better water bottle—the best reusable water bottle, in fact. And as the first of its kind, that’s the only big idea this brand needs right now.

No spin, no magic and no shenanigans required. The product itself speaks volumes. We just have to tell the story.
How do you recognize where a brand starts and stops ... and when it would be smarter to launch a new brand instead of extending an old one?

Since 1995, French-based Baladéo has created, marketed and distributed a range of outdoors accessories (travel lights, binoculars, compasses and bags), as well as high-end cutlery items (knives, corkscrews and multipurpose tools).

This, of course, seems rather diverse. But according to Baladéo.com, the brand sells a knife every 12 seconds.

And now, they have something new: two of the most-lightweight knives in the world, designed especially for the outdoors enthusiasts who weigh every ounce and gram before hitting the trail.

At only 22 and 34 grams, these knives are sharp, strong, elegant, incredibly balanced and entirely useful.

Could this be the product that cuts through the clutter enough to deserve its own brand?

Prior to this innovation, the company has sold a multitude of different shapes and sizes of knives into dozens of markets—all sold under the Baladéo brand name. To continue to do so with these new knives could be a risk; the design itself may be protected, but the idea is going to get copied, branded and commoditized. Fast.

But if Baladéo launches a new brand and becomes known as the brand that invented the category, they will always own that brand position.

Perhaps they could brand it as “GRAMSTM, forged by Baladéo.” Perhaps they could push the brand to retailers in its own point-of-purchase cases that emphasize the value of being lightweight.

Then, these new knives would be more than a great product idea; they would be a big brand idea—and a pretty sharp one at that.
TODI™ USA, Inc. (www.TODIUSA.com) manufactures après athletic shoes, a new market category and certainly a big idea of its own merit. Made exclusively for aggressive souls, TODI™ symbolizes the spirit found deep inside an athlete’s core.

Working with TODI™ leadership, our brand ubiquity big idea was to seed the TODI™ brand via athlete scouts who find the hardest charging undiscovered athletes in the USA. These aggressive souls will serve as our brand ambassadors. They are not necessarily the best players on the field, pitch, court, ice, or slope. But they are the gutsiest. And they make up Team TODI™.

To highlight these ambassadors, the TODI™ scout interviews athletes and creates comprehensive athletic résumés.

To encourage public participation, TODI™ announces each athlete’s naming to Team TODI™ via press releases, posted on Twitter, Facebook and www.TODIUSA.com and submitted to hometown newspapers, radio and TV stations eager for good news about local heroes.

Also, friends and fans of each athlete can leverage their social networks on Facebook and Twitter to drive participation. The goal? To create the viral spread of Team TODI™ watching through www.TODIUSA.com. It could prove invaluable to TODI™ brand awareness.

In the meantime, buzz for this new athletic lifestyle shoe is deafening. Month over month revenues are doubling.

TODI. It Takes A Pair™.

CREATING COMMUNITY TO KICK START A BRAND.
Should a brand target a narrow market and build momentum from there? Or should it try to appeal to everybody?

I would have bet on the former. So while in conversation with Kevin Williams and Jenie Fu at OgoSport, we tossed this subject around.

Designers of “active play” toys, OgoSport bounced its brand into the $20 billion toy market with the idea that the true value of a toy is the gazillion things your imagination can do with it. “Look at the toy industry today,” says Fu. “They’ve taken imagination out of play.”

Video games dictate rules. Toy manufacturers dictate ages and genders. And no longer can a plastic stick transform into a sword with which to slay a dragon, or a bat to hit the game-winning homer, or a magic wand; it’s a highly mechanized light saber to fight Sith Lords. And that’s it.

But look at what a red rubber ball can be. It’s a kick ball, dodge ball, bat ball, wall ball, roof ball, peg-the-kid-in-the-head ball and myriad other kinds of ball—dependent only on the rules and imagination of the user.

OgoSport’s toys are the modern-day version of the classic playground ball. Except way cooler. The company’s brand is based on the very wide appeal of “open play,” meaning there is no wrong way to play. The founders position the brand as a leader of open play inventions.

And I was sure they were missing the point. For me, the sweet spot of this brand was its ability to bridge generations.

I was the youngest in my family. My next older brother was 13 years older—practically a generation. My happiest moments of catch were between me and my much-older brother or my dad. I could imagine an OgoSport tagline of “Play between generations.”

Then I realized I did exactly what they wanted me to do: I placed my own values onto OgoSport toys. On the other hand, show OgoSport toys to people with closer siblings, and they’ll think otherwise. They won’t imagine tossing a disc with grandma, but making up all sorts of games—and changing the rules to ensure whipping the snot out of their siblings.

OgoSport is changing the rules of branding. ... And, as they grow, they’ll probably change them again—just like their market.
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