THE 3 THINGS YOUR BRAND NEEDS TO SUCCEED
AND 3 BRANDS THAT USE THEM

CREATE YOUR BRAND REVOLUTION

MICROARTS
CREATIVE AGENCY
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As a brand strategy agency, the number one thing that we hear is “we want to be like Apple.” Everyone, whether they sell to consumers or sell to businesses, is familiar with the simplicity of Apple – its clean design, its unboxing experience, what the brand means to them, what the brand signifies about you. Yet very few are able to fully understand what great brands consistently do and the discipline and courage it takes to truly think different. When push comes to shove, most businesses and its leaders default back to their comfort zone of:

1. Mimicking the competition
2. Relying on features and functions instead of benefits
3. Trying to be everything to everyone

Brands that aspire to be like Apple must own a unique vision. Apple didn’t want to be like ANYONE else and set goals that went far beyond making great technology products.

 Communicated to his management team just days before the Think Different campaign launched in 1997, the following is a glimpse into Steve Jobs’ thought process and the thinking that made Apple’s marketing so revolutionary:

“Marketing is about values. This is a very complicated and noisy world. And we’re not going to get a chance for people to remember much about us. No company is. So we have to be really clear on what we want them to know about us. The way to do that is not to talk about speeds and feeds. It’s not to talk about MIPS and megahertz. It’s not to talk about why we’re better than Windows.

Our customers want to know, ‘Who Is Apple? What is it that Apple stands for?’ What Apple is about isn’t making boxes for people to get their jobs done, although we do that well. We do that better than almost everybody in some cases. But Apple is about something more than that. Apple at the core, its core value...is that, we believe that people with passion can change the world for the better. That’s what we believe. And we believe that in this world people can change it for the better. And that those people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones that do.”

The Thinking Required

During the course of our 25+ year history, MicroArts has built a framework of branding principles for our team to leverage in their strategic and creative thinking. These principles allow us to deliver:

- Strategy that Defines Difference
- Creative that Disrupts Category
- Campaigns that Defy Expectations

When we look back at what our most successful clients have done and what makes brands like Apple so great, it comes down to 3 very basic concepts. If you truly want to create a brand revolution, you must possess the following.
Confidence

All great brands have confidence. Confidence in knowing who they are and who they are not. Confidence in one simple message with one key differentiator. The confidence to stand alone, no matter the number of naysayers. And most importantly, great brands have confidence in their own product.

And simplicity screams confidence. A recent report conducted by the CEB found the most effective way to reach consumers is not through complex messaging and marketing tactics, but by simplifying the decision making process - presenting exactly what the consumer needs to know and having the courage to remove the rest of the non-essential information. The research found that brands who simplified the message and decision making process were 86% more likely to make a sale. If the consumer is confused or unsure, they will default back to what they know. It’s your job to have the confidence to make the decision making process simple.

Take the iPod, for example. Sure, Apple invested heavily in the product, from the technology to make it so small to the wheel navigation and sleek design. But they didn’t talk about any of that. They simply said:

1,000 Songs in Your Pocket.

The consumer instantly gets it. Most brands would lead with the features and functionality because of all the time and money spent perfecting them. But not Apple - Not a confident brand that celebrates the simplicity of the final product.

“It’s really hard to design products by focus groups. A lot of times, people don’t know what they want until you show it to them.”
– Steve Jobs
Simon Sinek, the author of “Start with Why,” has become famous for this quote. The reality is, consumers don’t want to be sold, but they love to buy. Brands need to move the decision making process from the brain to the heart by leveraging emotional connections. According to Sinek, consumers will make an emotional justification even if the rational brain says ‘no.’ The easiest way to create this connection is by being authentic to your overall vision.

GoPro is a great example. Started in 2001, it was a 10 year overnight success according to founder Nick Woodman. The product wasn’t mainstream, but in those 10 years he built a loyal following of surfers and extreme athletes that believed in his vision and wanted to be a part of it. It was an easy story to believe in – someone just like me solved the same problem that I face (or maybe I didn’t even know it was a problem, but thank god there is a solution). Ten years later, GoPro is a verb.

Look at GoPro’s mission statement:

GoPro helps people capture and share their lives’ most meaningful experiences with others—to celebrate them together. Like how a day on the mountain with friends is more meaningful than one spent alone, the sharing of our collective experiences makes our lives more fun.

Now compare this to the vision statement of the latest CEO of Contour—the first-to-market POV camera in the space.

The aim is clear: to create a world-class company to support this world-class product; to recover Contour’s position in the market and to continue our long tradition of being at the forefront of product innovation; to bring to market this beautifully simple yet ultimately professional product – the world’s best action camera.

By all accounts, Contour had a better product in the early days. It should have been better positioned to maintain its market leadership, but it didn’t create the emotional connection that GoPro did and ultimately became a commodity brand. While there is an audience for selling on features and functionality, to cross the chasm from the early majority into the early majority with high margins requires more than a limited audience. It isn’t long before the fast followers come and to succeed you need to have an emotional connection cemented into the minds of your consumers. The brands that are able to do so are the ones that have built a loyal following based on their vision.

Which ad inspires you more?

Vision

“People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it.”
— Simon Sinek
Effective brands all have a “thing” (it’s a technical term, trust us). Sometimes called a “hook” or an “angle, it’s the one thing that the brand stands for and communicates as its primary differentiator. The “thing” differentiates a brand from anyone else in its space and is rarely feature or performance based. The “thing” is often the only attribute people think of when they simplify your brand down to its core. All successful brands have a “thing” that is ownable for a long period of time.

*ZZ Top* isn’t known for making better rock music. They are the guys with the long beards and a drummer named Frank Beard who had no beard. They were once offered $1 million to cut off their beards. They didn’t do it. *The ZZ Top brand is about beards. It’s their “thing”.*

*Red Bull* isn’t known for what’s in their energy drinks. They are the brand that supports the superhuman endeavors in action sports. They don’t message their ingredients or caffeine amounts. They are known for having a guy skydive out of space. *Red Bull is about being superhuman. It’s their “thing”.*

*Zappos* isn’t known for their selection or what they sell. The brand treated its customers better and redirected advertising dollars to building the best “Customer Loyalty Team”. They refused to outsource it and moved their headquarters from San Francisco to Las Vegas to ensure they could staff enough people in a place with more available housing. *Zappos isn’t about shoes or apparel … it’s about the smiles on the people who buy them. Service is their “thing”.*

The “thing” helps consumers distinguish brands in the market and decide whether it is for them. This is not a feature or functionality or service – it’s a fundamental principle or cue that guides and differentiates the brand.

Most brands have a problem determining and articulating its “thing”. The reasons vary – some are scared that it will turn off a segment of the market, others are so focused and enamored with their product that they think the product will sell itself. And still others are convinced that they have defined it, but it’s so vague and filled with industry jargon it means nothing to anyone.

To be a great brand with long-term staying power, a differentiating “thing” is needed. Salesforce.com, for instance, created a new market category: Software-as-a-Service (SaaS), which no longer required complex installations or expensive capital investment. Marc Benioff, founder of Salesforce, saw the future and set out to build a company that changed the way software was sold and consumed. He created a business model of shared risk and low commitment centered around a campaign and internal mantra of “No Software.” At the time, this flew in the face of the software industry, but the results speak for themselves. As Benioff says, “It’s better to be different than it is to be right.” Salesforce’s “thing” was that it forever changed the perception of software.

“The primary objective of a branding program is never the market for the product or service. The primary objective of a branding program is always the mind of the prospect. The mind comes first; the market follows where the mind leads.”

– Al Reis

**The “Thing”**
Think Different

It takes real courage to live by these 3 principles, but the brands that can will have the most success (plus, it allows us to do our best work). We have a saying here at MicroArts - If your brand is acquired but you don’t keep the brand, you’ve left money on the table. But if your brand is acquired and the brand is kept, you’ve maximized your brand value. And that should be the goal of every brand - maximizing its value.

Create Your Brand Revolution!

MICROARTS CREATIVE AGENCY, SINCE 1988.

MicroArts is a brand strategy agency that delivers brand ubiquity through marketing communications across all media. As an elite team of multidisciplinary specialists, our experience runs deep in brand development and positioning; website design and development; lead generation programs, social media marketing and advanced search engine marketing.

We choose our clients as carefully as they choose us and immerse ourselves in their business, resulting in an exceptional brand launch track record. Ultimately, our success is determined by our clients’ successes, nothing else.