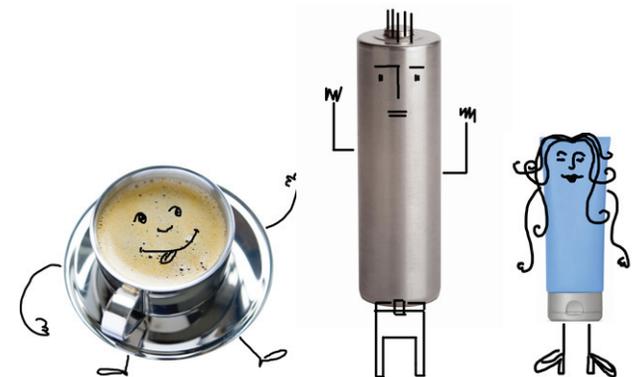




# Brands Are People Too

Joy Panos Stauber



When you talk about “branding,” you are not discussing a superficial activity—or, at least, you shouldn’t be. More and more business people are finally starting to understand that.

A brand is not a veneer you apply to make a business (or product or service or idea) appealing to its intended audience. Instead, a brand begins to exist when a business has something to offer to the world—values, services, or products. From there, the brand’s work is to articulate those unique attributes and strive to communicate them in the right way, and to the right people. Even so, a brand is not what a business says it is. It’s what the consumer ends up perceiving it to be.

## Brands are people?

Well, brands are made by people. Sometimes brands literally are people (Martha, The Donald). Sometimes, a brand is a start-up launched by friends (people) with a shared philosophy. And at other times, brands are specific products launched by corporate divisions (headed by people who conduct research on customers, also people). So, in all cases, on some level, brands are people too. And, however a brand is born, it has to have a personality that people want to connect to.

A brand's personality is shaped by the team of people—the brand's "handlers"—who get to choose its clothes, behavior, style, etc. Once the decision is made to develop a brand, more and more people become involved. Marketing VPs, product managers, and communications consultants talk about the brand's potential—what it is, how it's different, and what they need to do to tell people what it is and how it's different.

The communications team begins to collect, prioritize and edit the essentials of the brand. They articulate its distinct attributes and how it can make a connection with the customer. Then they (hopefully) give it tangible form by way of an identity system—a comprehensive visual and verbal language that defines specific elements such as logo standards, color palettes, imagery, typography guidelines and language.

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With its identity system (as described above) in place, a brand has what it needs to connect with people and the world. It has a personality and vocabulary that reflect its values and provide ways for it to communicate understandably and relevantly.

This also allows the brand to adapt and evolve. Elements of the identity system can be applied in different ways to create basically anything—print advertising, a corporate website, a retail environment, a press release, and new materials that come up as communication needs grow. Each of these applications has unique requirements and takes different forms, but they are all clearly coming from the same place and infused with the same values. Brand experiences are consistent whether a customer is on the phone with a service representative or using a website. The brand has the ability to evolve or surprise, but it still feels “right” and familiar to its constituents—very much like a person they have come to know in different situations over time.

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## Case Study: Anthropologie

Anthropologie is a brand with a distinct point of view and, according to their website, “a love for making things that inspire the imagination.” The products they carry (clothes, accessories, home items, even some books) and their retail environments reflect a warm, personal, hand-crafted sensibility.

At a time when many retailers seem to sell virtually the same merchandise and have design guidelines that produce cookie-cutter stores, Anthropologie seems to understand that a more personal and fluid approach—that involves their people too—can help them stand out and connect with consumers looking for something more interesting.

Individual stores are given freedom to come up with ideas for decor. The people working there get to manifest the brand in their own way, for their own community.

For example, for the 2008 holiday season, all stores were required to have the same large rough-hewn wooden element in store (a vaguely dress- or tree-shaped structure). But exactly

what they did with it, and in addition to it, for seasonal decor was up to them. The Wrigleyville store in Chicago had a local stylist/artist make hundreds of yards of white paper chains that hung from the ceiling. It totally demonstrated the brand’s love for inspiring and making things—the creative energy of the people involved resulted in an absolutely beautiful environment created using something as banal as copier paper.

Why is this smart? Because it’s engaging and it’s about making an authentic connection with people. Employees, people, who come up with great ideas when given ownership, and who tell consumers, other people (like me and my shopping friend), the back-story about the paper chains, making us want to tell other people about it—plus go back to see what’s in store next.

On some level, all these people live and breathe the attributes of the brand (imaginative, personal, hand-crafted, etc). The brand truly comes to life this way—not through a set of guidelines in a binder. ✿

## Everyone is the brand.

Brands need friends, or a support system and, again, it comes back to people. Everyone who plans, writes, designs, or thinks about the brand is responsible for making sure that its values remain intact and understandable to its constituents. All communications (printed, online, PR) and experiences (retail, tradeshow, customer support, even email and phone conversations) must manifest brand values.

A group of people with a clear understanding of the brand can create great work—easily. Decisions are made and materials come together readily when everyone on the team internalizes the brand (drinks the Kool-aid) and collaborates to give it form. The process itself energizes and inspires people and, in doing so, insures excellent results.

**So, power to the people (sorry, I couldn't resist)... and thus to the brand! 🇺🇸**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joy Panos Stauber is a Chicago-based designer who develops comprehensive brand communications for a diverse clientele. Her work has been recognized by various awards shows and publications. Her job is to sift through context, goals, business needs, audience research, etc. to help determine the best communications strategy. And then figure out what that ought to look like, making sure that of all the details are well executed along the way to fruition. She posts observations and essays about design and communication on her website, [Stauber Design Studio](#).

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