

brand strategy

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NEXT MONTH IN BRAND STRATEGY:**Fizzing with energy**

Charlotte Oades, president of Coca-Cola UK and Ireland, explains how the fizzy drinks giant is fattening up its healthy drinks range.

All that glitters

The World Gold Council says that the precious metal sees all luxury brands as its competitors – from spa breaks to handbags.

First shout

Exclusive new research from the London Business School claims that word-of-mouth can predict brands' sales growth.

Last orders



This is what I know: four observations on brands from four years of close examination.

1. How your employees behave will say more about your brand than the font on its packaging, the jingle in its advertising or the latest price promotion. There is a widening chasm for most brands between the image that marketing presents, and the reality faced by consumers when dealing with your frontline staff. It's very easy to talk about, very difficult to implement. Business needs to work to bridge that gap. (*Differences between the customer and business perspective are described on page 32*).

2. A transparent brand is a trusted brand. Consumers like to know where things come from. It adds value and it reassures them. In a cluttered market, transparency can make you stand out; it will differentiate you from the competition. If you or your suppliers make a mistake, hold your hands up and apologise, swiftly. Don't pretend it never happened. Know your supply chain intimately – your reputation rests on it. (*Read about the Russian McComplex and Romp, starting page 24*).

3. No brand is an island. Look outside for inspiration – learn from other markets, other sectors. Some of the best ideas are not coming from the Western world, but from Brazil, Russia, India, China and beyond. The innovation cycle is becoming shorter and shorter, and more demanding and competitive. Innovation does not have to be a brand-new shiny idea, it can also be something borrowed and improved. (*Steal the idea on page 12*).

4. Consumers don't just want the visual spectacle of a show, they want to be taken backstage. Savvy brands know it's no longer about telling people what to do and what to think, but about involving and interacting with customers. It's also about providing them with valuable information rather than just brand messages – information content as well as product content. (*See Alan Mitchell, page 9*).

Savvy brands are becoming softer around the edges. They appreciate that wooing customers today is not the black-and-white affair it used to be, but grey-coloured. Consistency, transparency, inquisitiveness and genuine involvement with consumers are four steps to help you along the way to loyalty and value.

This is my last leader as editor of *Brand Strategy* magazine, but I leave you in the capable hands of Ruth Mortimer. Writing the *Great Ikea* book has given me the writing bug, so I'm going to become a freelance writer. Thank you for your inspiration and contributions over the past four years. Please do keep in touch.

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