

# A resonating brand

*Lisa Baxter* writes about making your brand essential rather than desirable

For an arts brand to survive in this climate, it needs to become essential rather than desirable, and the key to differentiating between the two is resonance.

I'm sure it will come as no surprise when I say that we operate in a radically changing marketplace which has seen an explosive proliferation of online leisure options. This has resulted in the dramatically increased market share of the 'niche' (Anderson 2007) as people surf and search for increasingly individualised cultural encounters. Society is becoming more discerning, 'curating' its leisure experience from a plethora of available choices rather than simply buying 'off the shelf'. What people are selecting is a mix of experiences that will add not only quality and value to their lives, but satisfy their need for fulfilment and self-actualisation. As desires become increasingly sophisticated and abstract, 'customers are moving up Maslow's hierarchy of needs' (Curry and Stanier, 2002).

The consequences for arts organisations are potentially dire: 'Consumers understand what it means to be your own curator, and derive great satisfaction from arranging art around them to the satisfaction of their own aesthetic – especially music and visual art ... against this backdrop, most arts groups offer a preset programme at a fixed time in a single location, and ask you to buy it six months or more in advance' (Brown 2006).

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The future survival of our brands lies in appealing on an emotional, personal or subconscious level in order to resonate and foster deeper, more meaningful

1 FUNCTIONAL NEEDS	2 SOCIAL NEEDS	3 PERSONAL NEEDS
<i>'What makes this experience practically desirable?'</i>	<i>'What makes this a great sharing experience?'</i>	<i>'What do I get out of it?'</i>
e.g. Parking Refreshments Comfort Customer service Physical access Public transport	e.g. Entertainment Quality Ambience Timing Social time and space	e.g. Entertainment Emotion Experience something new Me-time Stimulation Provocation

relationships with people. We need to move closer to what Kevin Roberts (CEO of Worldwide Saatchi & Saatchi) refers to as a 'lovemark' – a brand capable of generating an intimate, emotional connection with the consumer that makes it an essential part of their identity: 'Take a brand away and people will find a replacement. Take a lovemark away and people will protest its absence. Lovemarks are a relationship, not a mere transaction. You don't just buy lovemarks, you embrace them passionately' ([www.lovemarks.com](http://www.lovemarks.com)).

In the push and pull of customer/producer dynamics, we need to offer less 'push' in throwing out messages to passive audiences and generate more 'pull' by encouraging an audience to adopt us (Grant 2006). However, it can only be achieved by identifying points of resonance with our audiences in

order to create brands that people buy into, not just buy.

Of course, by the very nature of the 'product' we are dealing with, the arts are best placed to achieve this. However, we need a much more creative, lateral, intuitive and qualitative approach to brand development that taps into people's higher motivations ... and the starting point is empathy.

Through qualitative research you can explore emotional as opposed to rational cues in a way quantitative research cannot, and develop genuine insights into your users' and potential users' motivations, needs and self-perception. From this, you can then explore the degrees of desirability and points of resonance of your brand from their perspectives.



#### 4 PERSONALITY AND FRIENDSHIP

*'What is it about this organisation/company that I really warm to?'*

- e.g.
- Charisma
- Authenticity
- Fearlessness
- Passion
- Friendliness

#### 5 SHARED VALUES

*'What values do we share and what does buying into those values say about me?'*

- e.g.
- Belief in the intrinsic value of art
- Love of music
- Celebrating my cultural/regional roots
- Inclusivity
- Flying in the face of convention

#### 6 SELF-ACTUALISATION

*'How do I perceive myself and how does the experience support that?'*

- e.g.
- I am cultured and sophisticated = I choose work of prestige and quality.
- I am an intelligent, enquiring person = I like an experience that broadens my horizons and makes me think or see things differently.

The key to a successful brand therefore is the passion that drives it, and the passion it instils in others.

In the box on the previous page, I have outlined a simple set of questions or 'ways in' to initiating a dialogue which will offer indicators and insights into the real and potential strength (pull) and resonance of your brand. These questions are not exhaustive or prescriptive, and in exploring them, different organisations will find value to different degrees in different areas. The ensuing dialogue can inform how and what you should or could communicate to different audiences and shape their experiences in order to support your overall brand proposition.

But in saying this, we must never allow ourselves to be led by consumer insights. The creative process and impetus behind the cultural experiences we are marketing are paramount. In the arts, it is the creators, the curators and the

programmers who are the impassioned individuals who have the vision and commitment to do what they uniquely do.

The key to a successful brand therefore is the passion that drives it, and the passion it instils in others. An invaluable space must be created to look inwards and reflect on what your organisation stands for and believes in, in order to identify potential points of resonance that could strike a chord with audiences. As marketers, our job is to bring both sides of the coin together – the internal and external perspectives – and see where those resonances ring out ... and with these influential building blocks, founded on authenticity and truth, we can start to build, refine or redefine our brands. ■

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