

# Brand New

From celebrity scents to retail empires, bubbly drinks, pet food and phones, Ivey grads are helping to build brands that stand out in a crowded marketplace.





A portly man is stretched out on the back of a couch in the family room, rumped and sleepy. A woman enters the room, followed by a nicely-dressed couple. “Boris, our neighbors are here,” she announces brightly. Boris turns onto his substantial belly and asks grumpily, “Did they bring any food?”

Boris, although played by a human actor, is of course a cat. He stars in one of a series of TV advertisements that breathed new life into the Whiskas cat food brand. “Real cat people recognize that the moments of affection with their cats are few and far between, and that food is often involved,” says Jay Bertram, HBA ’83, President of TBWA/Canada. “By celebrating the essence of cats, we were able to disrupt the category and refresh the brand.”

Bertram is one of many Ivey alumni who practice the arcane art and science of brand management. A brand, says Stephen Quinn, MBA ’84, Chief Marketing Officer for Wal-Mart Stores U.S.A., is “shorthand for the promise that a company makes to its target audience.” Victoria Caswell, HBA ’97, Senior Brand Manager for Diet Coke, agrees, adding that brands promise both functional and emotional benefits. “Diet Coke offers great taste and no calories,” she says, “and it also stands for style and sophistication.”

Wade Oosterman, MBA ’86, Chief Brand Officer for Bell Canada, argues that branding is even broader. “A brand is the embodiment of what a company stands for,” he says. “It’s a clear set of expectations that customers have of that organization, and everything—pricing, product development, customer service—must be aligned with it.”

Branding can differentiate a

product or service, encourage more people to try it, build customer loyalty by transforming a transaction into a relationship, and in many cases, command a premium price. But it’s also important to understand what a brand can’t do, says Luke Sklar, HBA ’78, whose company Sklar Wilton works with icons like Mars, Heinz and Harvey’s. “A brand can’t compensate for a weak product or inferior performance. It can’t manage your expenses or ensure excellent execution.”

According to Niraj Dawar, the R.A. Barford Professor in Marketing Communications at Ivey, every enterprise has a brand. “The real question is whether you’re managing your brand effectively, or just letting it happen.” Building and sustaining a powerful brand takes a lot more than clever advertising. “If you do brand work carefully, nothing is accidental,” says Oosterman. “Everything has a purpose, a reason and a logic behind it.”

Based on his research, Dawar identifies five key elements in branding: targeting the right customers, making a promise that’s relevant to their needs, delivering on your promise, being consistent, and executing with imagination.

#### Hit the target

Choosing a target audience and developing a relevant brand can help to clarify a company’s strategy, says Quinn. “It’s tempting to think that you

can be all things to all people, but as a brand that’s impossible to communicate and simply not credible,” he says. “In Wal-Mart’s case, we went back to our customers and they told us that what they valued was low prices and saving money.” With that insight in hand, marketers developed “Save Money. Live Better.” The tagline has also become a company mission. Wal-Mart continues to engage with its customers on a daily basis, using new customer insights to inform every aspect of branding.

#### Be relevant

TBWA helps its clients develop a relevant brand through a process called “disruption.” The agency researches the conventions around the category, and then creates a vision that turns those conventions on their head. The Whiskas ads are an example of a successful disruption. The campaign was wildly popular with cat owners and pushed sales up substantially.

#### Stand and deliver

Bertram notes that in today’s fast-moving and crowded marketplace, companies face a “crisis of attention” and a “crisis of credibility.” That’s why he encourages his clients to base their branding on a belief system and a set of associated brand behaviors. “When brand belief and brand behavior are aligned, that’s when you get →

“Television can’t do everything for your brand. The landscape has become much more fragmented in terms of how people receive messages. Marketers must take a look at what else is available to them to reach their consumers. With on-line channels you can reach people with more tailored branding messages because you know who you’re talking to.”

Victoria Caswell, HBA ’97, Senior Brand Manager, Diet Coke

“Consumers are human and humans are rational but they’re also very emotional. When you create and deliver a promise that consumers can integrate into their lives, you create something with magic. You build a long-term relationship.”

Jeff Caswell, HBA ’95, Vice President of Marketing, Evian



“Our goal is to create a new market space by understanding the conventions that are constraining the category and unleashing the hidden aspirations within the organization by disrupting those conventions.”

Jay Bertram, HBA '83, President of TBWA/Canada



“Our company holds a mirror up to our clients and asks if they really understand the hopes, dreams, fears and needs of their customers. The more they understand, the better they can place their product or service in a positive yet truthful light. Vision is powerful, but in this world of high stakes, it’s helpful to confirm vision with real consumer input.”

Luke Sklar, HBA '78, President, Sklar Wilton & Associates

“If your customers believe that your company does the right thing and is honest and fair, then you’re already halfway home when something goes wrong. If you continue to be open and upfront and to communicate effectively about what happened and what you’re doing about it, I think dealing with a crisis can be relatively straightforward.”

Wade Oosterman, MBA '86, Chief Brand Officer, Bell Canada

powerful traction in the marketplace.”

Oosterman agrees that authenticity is critical. “If the brand is what the company stands for, then all the products and services you deliver have to be supportive of that. There must be truth in advertising.”

### Stay the Course

Consistency is what makes a brand a brand: once consumers decide they like a product, they know they can count on it to taste or perform the same way each time they buy it. But Jeff Caswell, HBA '95, VP Marketing for Evian, notes that brands are also dynamic, constantly changing in response to the needs of their customers. “Branding is not linear,” he says. “It’s a circle that starts with the brand’s history and heritage, works with consumers, and then evolves based on what we are learning.” Evian, for example, is named for a health spa established in the 18th century. Yet Caswell and teams from around the world meet every six weeks to discuss the brand in the context of consumer research. One way Evian has moved with the times is by modifying packaging to be more environmentally friendly, and committing to become a carbon-neutral brand by 2011.

Oosterman recently oversaw a complete re-launch of the Bell brand, supporting a new corporate strategy based on improved customer service and enhanced network investment. “The new brand,” he says, “is clear, bold and instantly recognizable. The taglines ‘Today just got better’ and ‘La vie est Bell’ reflect our commitment as a company to deliver on our strategy.”

### Imagineering

Dawar says the best brands use imagination in every aspect of execution, from understanding consumer needs to formulating a unique promise and delivering the message memorably. Quinn agrees. “The real magic happens when you pull the story together in a way that is

credible and believable and gets into the mind of the very savvy consumer.” Bertram calls this process “media arts”—using every available medium to its best advantage in a way that is consistent with the brand belief system.

### When the going gets tough

Branding is traditionally associated with glitzy full-on marketing campaigns. So what happens when times are tough and marketing budgets are trimmed? “Great brands can emerge even stronger with more share at a time when their weaker competitors are more vulnerable,” says Sklar. Winning during a downturn doesn’t necessarily mean a big investment: it could be product innovation, packaging, distribution, or improvements in service. Bertram agrees, pointing to research that shows that companies that maintained or increased their investment in branding during the 1970s recession emerged with a significantly larger market share.

Caswell notes that when the economy is poor, consumers make “trade up” and “trade down” decisions. Evian, primarily served in expensive restaurants in North America, is hoping that consumers who are no longer going out as much may buy Evian to help re-create the restaurant experience at home.

Wal-Mart was identified as one of the winners in the otherwise bleak holiday season of '08. Although Quinn agrees that the company’s focus on saving money is timely, he doesn’t think brands should be adjusted dramatically in response to the economy. “For retailers with brands that stand for say, fashionable or tech savvy, it would be a mistake to try to stand for low prices,” he says. “It’s just not credible and they’re putting their original brand at risk when things improve.”

Boris would surely agree. After all, he knows that only cats can be cats. <—



## Branding with Britney

If you live on Planet Earth, you’re probably aware that Britney Spears has been through some tough times in recent years. For most of us, her escapades helped fill a few minutes in a waiting room or on a treadmill. For Tamara Steele, HBA '85, they’re serious business.

Steele is Senior VP Marketing at Elizabeth Arden, a publicly-traded company with \$1.3 billion in sales. Most of its revenue comes from the sale of fragrances—Elizabeth Arden’s own brands, brands associated with leading designers, and an extensive portfolio of celebrity brands that include Spears, Elizabeth Taylor, Hilary Duff, Mariah Carey and Usher.

Steele says celebrity brands sell because they’re aspirational. “When you wear White Diamonds by Elizabeth Taylor, you feel glamorous, beautiful, and elegant. All the imagery associated with the celebrity is built into the product.” Spears attracts a different demographic but the appeal is similar. Her first fragrance, Curious, was targeted at women 16 to 28, says Steele. “They are women who like her music and her style while recognizing that she goes through real-life situations and pushes boundaries. They understand her.” Both celebrities come with millions of loyal fans.

Of course, there are risks associated with celebrity brands. While negative publicity about Spears’ personal life cooled the enthusiasm of some retailers for a brief period of time before her return to the spotlight in late 2008, most of her fans continued to purchase her fragrances. Steele says it’s crucial that a celebrity brand be more than the celebrity—it must be a sophisticated and high quality product with strong brand positioning and marketing programs carefully crafted to meet the needs of the target market.

Some people might be surprised to learn that celebrities are quite involved in the development and marketing of their own fragrances. Elizabeth Taylor, who has several fragrances under her name and whose White Diamonds fragrance has generated over \$1 billion in retail sales, sees everything and gives unambiguous feedback. Says Steele: “If she doesn’t like something, it’s very clear.”

What do celebrity brands tell us about the nature of branding itself? “The world of celebrities and the world of celebrity branding blur”, says Steele. “Celebrities understand that branding is a powerful tool through which they can manage their image, add value to consumers, evolve and even reinvent themselves. In reality celebrities are brands.” <—