



In the recent furor surrounding a Danish newspaper's cartoons of the prophet Muhammed, one UK TV channel carried footage from a riot that took place in Peshawar, Pakistan. The visual centerpiece of this report was a burnt out Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant. Despite being a blackened shell, part of the chain's sign remained and was instantly recognizable from its bright colours and the piece of the Colonel that was left.

While a bad example of riot control by the Peshawar police force, the burning of the KFC and its subsequent appearance on TV was also a good example of the power of branding. The KFC was attacked, not for poor service or one grizzled batch of chicken wings too many, but because it represents the West. And the main reason the news

station covered it, along with many other international media outlets, was because KFC represented a link between the distant streets of Peshawar and our own high streets full of KFC, McDonalds and Pizza Hut outlets (the latter two also suffered attacks during further rioting in Lahore).

While it's a sad indictment of humanity that the best emotional link the news station could come up with centred around fried chicken in a paper bucket, the report did successfully demonstrate the potency of the KFC brand and that station's reliance on the resonance its appearance would carry with many of its viewers. But what makes a brand what it is, and how is it developed into what it eventually comes to stand for?

From the outset brands aspire to fame and, explains Nich Lee, marketing manager for Staedtler UK, attempt to create a niche that they can own. But fame does not necessarily equate to quality (see Channel 4's Big Brother contestants).

"The easiest way to see this is to compare polar opposites – take Mont Blanc versus Bic Crystal," says Lee. "Both, arguably, are equally famous, but the quality association is very different."

According to Jamie Faulkner, marketing director of Sanford UK which owns such brand names as Paper Mate and Parker, consumers choose brands for a number of reasons; it could be quality, aspiration or loyalty. "The perceptions of quality and innovation surrounding the Sanford brands,"

# BRANDED!

Big name brands swagger about the market like they own the place. But how do they develop, what do they really mean and how do you set about selling them? Chris Allsop asks around.

says Faulkner, "has been developed through integrated marketing campaigns including strong advertising, targeted public relations, and in-store and in-catalogue activity."

Another factor in the creation of a strong brand is longevity. Tactical marketing manager for Acco Brands, Tuli Mitra, explains that the 10 strong brands in the Acco Brands Corporation portfolio benefit from their cumulative survival.

"The history of Acco Brands has sustained great competition over the years and will continue to do so," says Mitra. "With consumer choice increasing, Acco initially created brand perception by offering product solutions in any working environment from the office to school to home. Each Acco brand

has evolved over time with the growth of new product ranges into an ever changing market."

Consistency is also important in the establishment of a strong brand (backfiring for the Peshawar KFC where the uniform shop front made it an easily identifiable target for missiles, as opposed to its usual hungry patrons) and Jane Rowe, marketing director at John Dickinson Stationery flags it up as the central tenet to her company's Black n' Red brand's success.

"Independent focus group surveys of our customers have shown that they see Black n' Red as a brand that stands for quality and professionalism; it is robust and durable and has a personality that is almost iconic," says Rowe. "This perception has been created

through many years of consistent performance."

But consistency does not necessarily mean that a brand's message remains static. Brands evolve, whether by design or through market forces, and Rowe cites the example of the Sony Walkman for the latter, which may have experienced a shift in brand perception as the popularity of the Apple iPod has grown.

A main drawback to the building up and maintenance of brand awareness in the market is that the exercise costs money. Just ask Apple, Sony or the employers of Rowe, Faulkner, Mitra or Lee. This cost is frequently passed down to the consumer and presents one of the main issues that brand manufacturers have to overcome: >>

## BRAND FACT

Once a brand has created positive sentiment among a target audience, the firm is said to have built brand equity

is it really worth the money to buy a brand name product when you can buy something similar and relatively unknown for cheaper?

It all depends on your requirements, says Staedtler's Lee. "Brands promise a level of 'value' – that is, a standard of quality at a particular price point. This will not be relevant for everyone – some people are happier paying as little as possible and replacing product more frequently when it dries up. Others are happier paying a significant premium for style and image. Consumers all have different requirements, which is why the market supports such a diverse range of products – it would be boring to have one pen that everyone used!"

For Mitra, brand loyalty, with its implied acceptance of higher prices, arises when the consumer feels that they are being offered something with a difference. "Most branded products do," she says. "The reason they are premium priced is for extra manufacturing excellence, a service package or uniqueness in product status. It is the brand owner's responsibility to justify the extra cost."

For this and other reasons, brands are never bullet proof and Faulkner warns that the end user always has an alternative. "You can't rest on your laurels," he adds, "and you have to improve brands by consistently striving to bring new innovations into the market."

However, recent research completed by M-real, producers of the Data Copy brand of office paper, supports the good work completed by brand enforcing marketeers in the office products industry. Despite the proliferation of unbranded alternatives, the company's research, which targeted a variety of business segments across key European markets, indicated that end users perceive low cost, unknown brands as riskier than the trusted brand names. When asked, they said they prefer to use a manufacturer branded paper.

**Why is branding important to dealers? Brands smooth each phase of the purchase decision by reducing the unknown and, there is a further benefit, because brands invariably support a premium price, there should be more profit in the transaction.**

**GARY CARR,  
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M-real's Paul O'Shaughnessy, brand manager Office Papers, commented, "It seems that despite the commoditisation of office papers, the big brands are still a force to be reckoned with. We are committed to continuing to develop our brands to make sure we keep giving our customers reasons to choose us over a low cost competitor."

That choice will be made via the consumer's perception. A brand is in the eye of the beholder – otherwise it is merely a logo or a collection of associated products, explains Rowe.

"It is important that sales people believe in the brands that they sell. Speaking from experience is much more genuine than just following a prescribed sales patter," she says. "But, at the end of the day, the customer should make the decision based on the benefits and value that the brand offers to them, or their business."

Something that can be augmented by manufacturer training, as Mitra explains. "Brand owners like Acco need to be hands on and instil faith in our brands with training,

sampling, product messages, and demonstrations to give sales people a comprehensive message based on fact and knowledge to go out and sell the product," she says. "There needs to be a strong alliance between the manufacturer and the dealer sales person."

Lee advises that sales people remember that not every purchase opportunity is relevant to all brands quoting the old faithful sales phrase 'hats on hooks'. "Find out what the specific consumer's needs are and deliver an appropriate solution. If someone is solely concerned with obtaining the cheapest product, Staedtler is not the brand or product to fit this need."

Brand names are constructed to appeal to their target audiences. In the world of these strongly defined names, it is wise to remember that it isn't a case of one size fits all. Pitch according to the customer but feel confident in the extra marketing mileage that has already gone into making the sell that much easier. Ok, enough advice, now do any of our manufacturers know the pen brand of choice for Danish cartoonists? ■