

Fresh perspectives redefine brands in the recession

The Brandalysis process uses a variety of innovative techniques with clients and customers to gain fresh and useful perspectives on brands, says **David Iddiols**, HPI

YOU'RE WALKING to your local shops. The route is totally familiar. You look right, left and ahead. Now imagine looking up – you suddenly encounter a new vista. A new element has entered and reshaped your world view.

Now transport the same principle to assessing brands. We have heard so many brand 'truths' that we have become blasé about what brands stand for. Much conventional research only contributes to the mountain of known data about brands. That's why marketers often lament that they have heard it all before.

This article focuses on Brandalysis – a research model designed to uncover powerful and genuinely new insights about brands. Stephen King once said: "A product is something that is made in a factory; a brand is something that is bought by a customer. A product can be copied... a brand is unique." Truly understanding what makes a brand unique is at the core of the model. It highlights weaknesses that urgently need to be addressed, previously unidentified (or forgotten) strengths to exploit, and 'perceptual gaps' between client-side views on the brand and those of target consumers.

Brands are entering uncharted, potentially hostile territory in the present economic climate, accentuating the value of new techniques that can keep us in line with the changing perceptions of consumers, who are increasingly media-savvy and sceptical about brands.

The Brandalysis process involves three interlocking steps – inspection, introspection and 'extrospection'.

Brand inspection

Researchers can best make a meaningful contribution to the life of a brand after developing a thorough understanding of its roots and how it is perceived by those who create and live inside it from day to day. A fundamental part of Brandalysis programmes is to carry out a detailed brand review. The inspection phase involves a trawl through all existing 'knowledge' about the brand, including past research, market data and competitor analysis.

It should also involve mining the views of the often unsung heroes in organis-

FIGURE 1

Brandalysis Dimensions	
1	Competitive context Who are the key rivals and how does your brand match up?
2	Brand relationship How do consumers connect with, and feel about, the brand?
3	Brand attributes What does the brand stand for, what makes it special?
4	Brand personality What is the character of the brand and, critically, what is notable about the brand's attitude?
5	Brand senses What is the brand's sensory footprint in terms of its aural, visual, taste, smell and touch qualities?
6	Brand elasticity How pliable or stretchable is the brand?

Source for all charts: HPI

ations, from factory floor workers to customer-facing staff. For example, research among cabin crew and ground staff of an airline unearthed a wealth of insights critical to proper understanding of the brand psyche. This was fed into the marketing team as an important building block ahead of the research enquiry.

Brand introspection

This is where things become more radical. Introspection entails innovative detection work among relevant brand custodians, be they marketers, insight managers or outside agencies. The research method can vary but is usually a battery of face-to-face interviews or a half-day workshops. In this phase, the brand is interrogated along six key dimensions (Figure 1).

The elements on which the brand is interrogated are not especially remarkable. The difference is in the nature of questioning and role-play ideas deployed with the client-side team.

A spectrum of projective techniques is used to understand the brand within each of the six territories. These can be in the form of off-the-wall 'brand imaging' scenarios, such as 'How does the brand feel about and behave at a school reunion?', or 'The brand is asked to sing karaoke, how does s/he respond?' or even 'Imagine yourself as the brand's lover; what is s/he like?'

Gaming exercises are also deployed, such as the 'Attribute Wheel' (Figure 2), where respondents are asked for the possible weaknesses or deficiencies in the brand's make-up in relation to their

favourite film, car and so on. Other games include 'Brand Steeplechase', where the brand competes against its key rivals on different dimensions, and an innovative card game known as Bedfellows, which explores the role and compatibility of different brands in the person's life.

Clients are also encouraged to consider the communication or creative assets surrounding the brand, both in terms of their salience and their contribution to brand identity. A recent study for Abbey/Santander pinpointed the potency of Formula 1 driver Lewis Hamilton and explored the symbolism of the colour red in connection with both Santander and Abbey. The key outputs are summarised in a 'Communication Equity Matrix' (Figure 3).

The projectives used in the introspection phase together create a wealth of new information about the brand. By being as adventurous with stakeholders as we would be with consumers in seeking ways to define the brand along the six dimensions, Brandalysis can unlock fertile new insights from the client's perspective, which begin to challenge some of the previously held wisdom or folklore surrounding the brand.

Brand extrospection

But what do the target consumers think? Extrospection involves research among key target consumer groups (variously heavy/light users, lapsed and/or prospective customers). Importantly, the same projectives used in the previous introspection phase with client-side personnel are deployed with these consumers. Imaging

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FIGURE 2

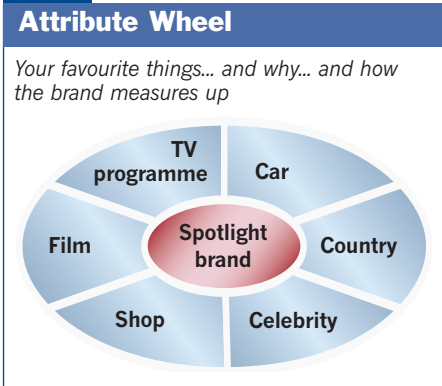
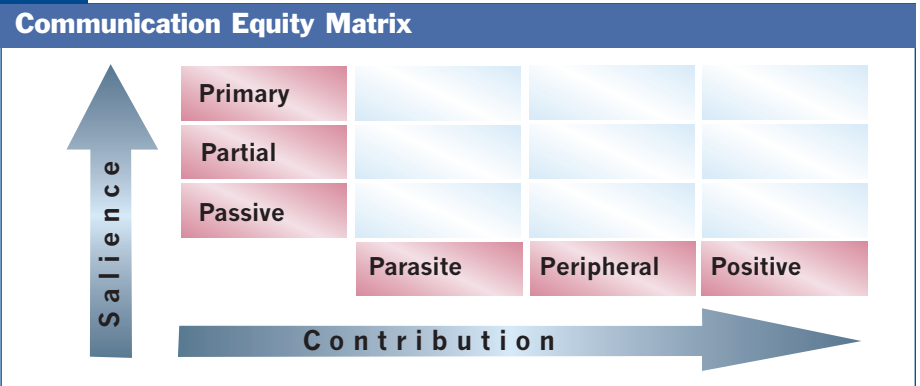


FIGURE 3



questions and projective games are used, as well as other techniques. Role play is a key part of the brand interrogation.

Especially insightful is 'Brand Walk-about', in which consumers (and clients in the introspection phase) are asked to take on the identity of the brand and its key competitors and physically tour a high street – shopping, visiting a pub and so on. Each person has to make relevant choices/purchases that they feel best reflect the character of the brand and how it might respond to new situations drawn from life outside the boardroom or viewing facility.

The benefit of this sort of role play is that it removes participants from the workshop environment and produces less rational and predictable thinking.

Another technique is the 'Elasticity Zoo', where a brand's potential stretchability to other product sectors is explored by asking target consumers to characterise the brand as a certain type of animal, depending on its perceived malleability. Thus, Sony emerges as a chameleon because it is regarded as having a strong sense of adaptability, while Sock Shop is characterised as an anteater – to a large extent constrained by its name.

Interrogation of brand senses also goes beyond the boundaries of convention, with sensory stimuli carefully selected in advance to encapsulate different smells, tastes and so on that could be pertinent to the brand. A study for UK tourist attraction the London Eye interrogated the relevance of different senses to the brand, with each being chosen according to its

perceived ability to impart a predefined brand value. In reality, we found through the sensory exploration that a number of additional values were readily associated by the client. It also uncovered aspirational as well as current senses applicable to the brand.

This set of techniques not only unearthed genuinely new brand insights, but enables direct comparisons between the views of clients and consumers, pinpointing any perceptual gaps that may exist. Also, any clear differences between, for example, brand loyalists and brand rejectors can be monitored.

The process is highly illuminating and ensures maximum client involvement. Allied to the novel and innovative nature of the different role play and gaming techniques, this helps to produce interactive and stimulating presentations upon completion of Brandalysis programmes. At this stage, devices such as the 'Analogy grid' (Figure 4) are used to help synthesise the key outputs.

Brandalysis has recently been used on projects in the financial, motoring and tobacco sectors. In the latter case, we drilled down into perceptions surrounding the iconic Dunhill brand. At a superficial level, users and non-users could characterise the brand in a similar fashion. By using Brandalysis, we discerned key attitudinal differences that have proved highly valuable to the brand team for future marketing. More generally, the approach has led consistently to a new layer of brand understanding, often

FIGURE 4



overturning accepted brand 'truths'.

The Brandalysis process is especially relevant in these recessionary times, when there is an even greater need to highlight hidden brand strengths.

Using a wide range of projective techniques, it has so far been used mostly as a qualitative tool, but the specific questions and gaming ideas could be applied more broadly and the outputs assessed from a quantitative perspective.

In the past, brands as diverse as Yorkie, Virgin and Häagen Dazs bucked the trend and found appropriate and compelling space in crowded markets. The benefit of the new thinking described here is that the brand is viewed from fresh angles, using unconventional projectives, with the result that it is never seen in quite the same way again.

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