

## branding, to be or not to be...

It's not uncommon for people to believe that branding developed in the early days of the industrial revolution - the beginning of packaging and mass-produced consumer goods. As a result, branding has become associated with commercialization. With this in mind, many tend to think that branding is a form of exploitation which, in the long run has caused both resentment and mistrust within today's marketplace.

Although branding is neutral, there's no doubt it's been used to manipulate and persuade consumers, especially in the early days of marketing for example; In 1886 Coca-Cola was developed by a pharmacist known as Dr. John Smith Pemberton. Understanding the addictive powers of the coca leaf, Dr. Pemberton created the first cola known as "an invigorator of the brain." "Coca-Cola" starts with the name of the leaf used to manufacture cocaine: the coca leaf. From the late 1800's, Coca-Cola contained varying amounts of cocaine all the way up until 1929, when cocaine was finally removed from its formula. Not surprisingly, the Coca-Cola Company claimed all sorts of health benefits for their product. Coca-Cola was introduced in 1886 as "a valuable brain-tonic and cure for all nervous afflictions." Its slogan in 1900 was, "For headache and exhaustion, drink Coca-Cola," a slogan that now seems ridiculous for a beverage perhaps known best for its ability to cause obesity. A 1904 Coca-Cola slogan claims, "Coca-Cola is a delightful, palatable, healthful beverage," and even in recent years, Coca-Cola has called its product "a wholesome beverage."

This is just one of many examples of brand manipulation. Because of cases like this, it's not hard to understand why some people think branding is downright evil. However, it is important to note that, for every example of manipulative branding, you can find thousands that are straightforward, names like Patagonia, Oprah and Red Cross who make it clear what they're offering you, enrich, ease or protect your life and give to the common good.

The term "branding" did not exist in the early days of marketing, instead, marketing, advertising or corporate identity were the terms used. Branding is a relatively new term that combines all of the above and more. But because branding is often identified with greedy profit and abuse of power, people often respond negatively to the idea. They may replace it with "identity" or "style" or some other word to displace the stigma associated with it, however, it is what it is, regardless of what you choose to call it.

Branding is simply a tool-and the tendency to brand is inherent in us all, for better or for worse (The idea has been around since the beginning of mankind, how else could the second human tribe distinguish itself from the first?). Identity (or branding) is a confirmation of who we are. It's a way of establishing individuality. Branding is a systematic way of establishing identity and how we're perceived by others. We brand ourselves everyday. We choose the clothing we wear, the cars we drive and the houses we live in based on our personalities, what we like and how we want to be perceived. Countries, cultures, religions, military, athletic teams, schools, and businesses across the world brand themselves to make themselves distinguishable from one another and they do it through the use of color, clothing, art and symbols - it's all part of human nature.

You might be asking yourself “so how does all this relate to me?” the answer...everything! Your brand is who you are and how you want yourself and or your business to be perceived. It’s about finding your “big idea” the core you and putting it out in the world to fulfill itself. It can be used as a technique for success in portraying your best qualities and attracting the type of people, clients or customers you want to attract. Successful brands celebrate their content and thrive on loyalty. Your personal brand requires no less of you than loyalty to its mission and a celebration in all it stands for.

Branding is necessary and it’s happening whether you’ve taken charge of it or not. Branding, identity, style, and marketing – whatever you want to call it, it’s there to be taken advantage of by you!