

THE SHARE THIEF

A DIGEST OF IDEAS TO STEAL MARKET SHARE

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Delta's Repeat of A Wasteful Idea

A Marketing Quagmire

Probably the most understated misconception in marketing today is in the definition of the word, "brand" or "branding." The confusion in the word is clearly illustrated by the two definitions found in *Webster's New Millennium™ Dictionary of English*:

1. In marketing, the sum total of a company's value, including products, services, people, advertising, positioning, and culture;
2. In marketing, the use of logos, symbols, or product design to promote consumer awareness of goods and services

After reading these definitions, no wonder there is mass confusion concerning this topic. In the first definition, brand is defined as a total sum of many different aspects of an organization while the second definition is primarily concerned with the imagery that SHOULD be encapsulated in the first definition.

For most marketing departments and "marketing companies," creating a "brand" based on the second definition is by far the easiest to execute. Marketers are accustomed to being creative and creativity is the focus for creating a new "look." This "look," in terms of logo, symbols, and tagline, are now what most people believe the word "brand" is defined as. Because the second definition of the word "brand" is much easier to communicate and get clients to understand, that is what the primary definition of the word has become. Brand in this sense, is soft in the gut and provides no impetus for the organization to act any differently than it always has. This definition of the word brand short-changes and limits the scope of what good branding can accomplish and as that definition of the word brand is second in Webster's, it should always be secondary in any brand building effort.

What is BRAND — Really?

The first definition of the word, brand – "In marketing, the sum total of a company's value, including products, services, people, advertising, positioning, and culture" – is a much better starting point in the understanding and execution of brand. However, there is a key point of clarification that is also missing from this definition. The real definition should read:

"In marketing, the sum total of a company's value, including products, services, people, advertising, positioning, and cul-

ture which are borne out of the core beliefs of the target market, connecting with them on a highly emotionally charged level."

This is the true definition of the word brand. "Brand" is meaningless and utterly useless unless it comes from and resonates with the value set of the target audience ultimately creating an emotional attachment that drives the purchase decision. This definition also illustrates why most marketers shy away from attempting to execute or communicate brand using this definition. It is difficult, intensive, and takes real commitment from an organization to maximize its value. However, the rewards for branding in this way are prolonged growth, increased preference, and increased margins. We, at Stealing Share, believe that consumers choose brands that are a reflection of who the consumer believes they are.

With few exceptions, an industry that has completely focused on the execution of brand

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in terms of Webster's second definition is the airline industry. Anyone who travels only a couple times a year knows this to be true. If the entire airline industry could be summed up by a single word, it would be mediocrity. As airline passengers, we have been conditioned to accept and expect mediocrity – delayed flights, damaged or lost baggage, cramped and uncomfortable planes, rude and unresponsive staff, and embarrassing in-flight service (some airlines do not even give you a FULL soft drink anymore). Other than brands like Virgin, Southwest, Midwest, and a few others, major carriers have relied on cost cutting and corporate imagery to build their brand rather than creating a brand by repositioning themselves as something more than "an airline" in the minds of their target audience. A great example of this is with Delta's

recent "emergence" from Chapter 11.

Delta has come out of bankruptcy and is now attempting to position itself as a new and better alternative. Armed with its "new brand" made up of its revamped triangular logo, aggressive PR campaign, and soon-to-see "advertainment" Delta, hopes to mimic the success of Song Airlines, Delta's low-cost airline marketed to hip, style-conscious women. Unfortunately, Song flew its last flight in April of 2006 and was swallowed up by Delta, this, after spending enormous amounts of money on creating a "look" without creating a BRAND. Had Song really created a brand, they would be increasing their preference and margins, not to mention still be in business and perhaps they would have been the one to "absorb" Delta. However, their reliance on nothing more than corporate image to build their brand, spelled their doom. Now, Delta's VP of consumer marketing and former president of Song, Joanne Smith, is now attempting to do what she did with Song at Delta – "rebrand" through corporate imagery – and we know how that turned out for Song.

Delta is Confused

The reasons that Delta seems so hell-bent on going down the same path as Song is somewhat confusing. If Song was such a success, what happened? Why did Delta decide to take all of Song's aircraft and retrofit them to conventional Delta standards by adding more seats, reducing overall comfort, and diminishing the flying experience? Because at the end of the day, the Song brand, and Delta's for that matter is not about the consumer, it is about the company. "Rebranding" through corporate imagery is always about the company and never about the customer. Granted, a new mark or logo can represent a change within an organization, but it is by no means a replacement for what branding should be – an active reflection of the core values of the target market whose sole purpose is to create an emotional response that drives the purchasing decision. Following Song's mold, Delta may get a short-term bump in preference but unless Delta can create a meaningful representation of who the customer is (or wants to be) then they too will go the way of

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