

## 2

# A Short History of the World of Brands—Really Short

Before we move on to how the best brands do what they do, I want to make sure we're not operating in a vacuum. That wouldn't be any more helpful than over-complicating issues. Here's some basic historical background on brands and branding so you can make sense of where we do go from here, and why.

In the beginning there was light. No, it wasn't GE. Actually, it was fire. The word "brand" comes from the Old Norse word *brandr*, which means "to burn." The Vikings branded their animals to identify them. In ancient China, Greece, and Rome, artisans marked—or branded—their wares to signal identity and also to help villagers establish preferences. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, various craft guilds required artisans to "brand" their goods as a means of legal protection. In the case of gold and silversmiths, it was also to guarantee the quality of the materials.

Real brand names as we know them today first appeared in the sixteenth century. Whiskey distillers burned the name of the producer of the potent potables into the top of each barrel. In the eighteenth century, brand names were chosen to make products easier to remember and to differentiate one from another. Competition was born and along with it the need to establish differentiation and relevance.

By the nineteenth century, brands had kicked in big time. Brand names were used to enhance a product's perceived value. "Old Smuggler. Scotch with a History" was one of the first. Among all the other

## BrandSimple

things they brought with them, Europeans brought branding to America.

In the United States, tobacco and patent medicine manufacturers were among the branding pioneers. The signals they created—the packaging, posters, ads, and more—have become collectors' items. Individual manufacturers used this early branding to promote their wares to customers. Prior to this, local general stores sold bulk goods out of crates and barrels.

Railroads became the primary distribution channels as the country expanded, making products available nationwide. National brands emerged. Mass production made it possible for almost anyone who wanted something to have it. Communication channels, specifically newspapers and magazines, increased in number. Advertising became a significant means of funding these publications. The job of media buyer was created.

Companies like Procter & Gamble, Colgate Palmolive, General Foods, and H. J. Heinz improved on the art and science of individual packaging as well as print advertising. They discovered early on how powerful and even magical the right signals could be as a means of influencing consumers with regard to purchase decisions. Along with media buyer, industrial design became a good career choice. Long before we even knew what a computer file folder was, brands began to find residence in those of the mental variety.

The country grew. The population grew. Prosperity grew. The number of consumer choices grew, in both the number of products and the number of brands. And today, as we all know, you can apply branding to just about anything: a product, a company, an organization, a service, a retail experience, a place, a blog, or even a person.

### Early Signals Were a Piece of Cake (or Chocolate)

Branding in early modern times, let's say the 1930s or 1940s, was relatively easy. As now, branding started with a simple idea that was different in meaning from similar brands yet relevant to the people you wanted to reach. Branding signals generally took the form of advertising, packaging, and promotions. Branding trademark symbols, popularized earlier as a way to distinguish one brand from another,

## A Short History of the World of Brands

were used even more extensively and very effectively. The Land O' Lakes™ Indian maiden and the Jolly Green Giant™ joined the little Uneeda™ biscuit boy, Tony the Tiger™, and the snappy Mr. Peanut™ on grocery store shelves. Symbols like these signaled freshness. They signaled quality. They signaled authenticity and grrrrreatness. These were easy signals to remember and they represented very good brands. At this time, marketing and advertising departments were mostly responsible for creating branding signals. Talented copywriters and graphic designers were in great demand.

Back in those days, the number of brands was far smaller than today. For that reason, branding signals had a better chance of reaching and registering with consumers. There wasn't too much competition—mental desktops were a lot less cluttered. You could safely assume without too much worry that your brand would find a place to reside in the consumer's head.

Just as there weren't as many brands as there are today, there weren't too many choices when it came to the size, shape, or dimension these signals took. In developing a branding strategy, your choices were generally newspapers and magazines, billboards, and radio. A great many radio broadcasts were totally funded by one brand, and the stars of the programs became associated with those brands. Not too many people today remember that Jack Benny's show was responsible for selling a lot of Jell-O. Afternoon drives in the country were brought to you by the Barbasol, Esso, and Coca-Cola signs that dotted the roadsides. Fast food hadn't been invented, nor had backseat arguments about where to stop for lunch. As always, word of mouth played a big role in spreading news of brands. Families still lived in the same three-block radius and shared Sunday supper. Mothers told mothers about the best new baby products. Branding at this time—the creation and management of signals—was one part art, one part understanding what people listened to on the radio, and one part family values.

### Then Things Got More Complicated

Now let's fast forward a couple of decades, to the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. During this period, brands by the dozens started to crop up. This was the result of more efficient manufacturing and delivery capabilities

## BrandSimple

and the financial strength of industry giants like Procter & Gamble, Colgate Palmolive, and Johnson & Johnson. A new playing field was taking shape and along with it a whole new set of branding rules. The need to find a different yet relevant point of view for a brand became increasingly challenging. Globalization was also becoming a critical factor in the brand and branding business. How will a brand play from one country to another? Can it, given all the diversity and cultural implications?

Beyond the proliferation of material goods and services, this era also ushered in new ways and means to signal a brand. As mental desktops began to fill up, attention to branding strategy became more critical. Whom do you want to talk to? Where are they? What are they reading, watching, or doing? Branding signals began to take on different dimensions. Radio gave way to television and a nation of couch potatoes. Although there were fewer newspapers, magazines took up three times more room on the corner newsstands. You could find publications for ladies, gentlemen, and children of all ages, not to mention gardeners, sports enthusiasts, runners, cooks, and news junkies, to name a few. Audience segmentation became a key consideration when determining to whom, how, and where to signal your brand idea.

The signals over which brands had immediate control were still more or less of the traditional media and media channel variety: TV ads, print ads, direct mail, radio spots, the emergence of telemarketing, promotions that involved movies, and the plastic toys inside McDonald's Happy Meal boxes. Word of mouth was, of course, still powerful, but the Internet had yet to exert its power.

Just as the competition among brands for space in people's heads was starting to heat up, so was the competition for space on the airwaves and on the page. Advertising agencies were hotter and cooler than they'd ever been. The quest for sensational creative minds took on even greater importance than before. Touting a basic feature or benefit no longer was enough. Anything of a commodity nature was simply cost of entry. Innovative thinkers were needed. Agencies like Ogilvy & Mather, BBDO, Ammirati & Puris, J. Walter Thomas, and McCann Erikson competed for clients and talent.

Branding took on greater importance as the contest to set a brand apart became more heated. The challenge to establish a different

## A Short History of the World of Brands

meaning on which to base a brand idea and determine how to best express this difference became harder. The ability to capture a message cohesively and coherently—make it shorthand—was the Holy Grail. Brand was the battle. Branding was the war. It became the niftiest game in town.

### What I Learned From the 1970s

As I said earlier, I was fortunate to start my career at Ogilvy & Mather in the late 1970s. Advertising was at the top of its game. David Ogilvy, although retired, popped in once or twice a year from his chateau in France and randomly dropped by the offices of young account executives, as I was. He'd ask what you were up to. I can only hope I was up to something good when he dropped in on me.

I learned many things in those early days, but there was one thing that stuck with me more than anything else—the need to identify a simple but meaningfully different idea on which to base your brand and then to create and transmit the branding signals necessary to bring the idea to life. At the time, advertising was among the most powerful branding signals a brand could use to communicate what it stood for.

Ogilvy and a number of other agencies used advertising with a degree of expertise that continues to set standards for excellence and effectiveness. This ability has led to some very long-standing brand relationships. Although I didn't work on the American Express account, my colleague and teaching partner Jed Bernstein did and provided me with great insight on the idea behind the brand, and some of the branding signals from the 1970s that expressed the idea.

"Think about the number-one concern travelers had back then," Jed said. "I'm going to lose my cash or my traveler's checks. American Express not only had a product that addressed this concern, but they had an incredibly effective way of differentiating the idea. It was the idea of the security provided by American Express Travelers Cheques and an incredibly effective and powerful signal with which to communicate its idea: Karl Malden.

"Karl Malden, a well-respected actor, played a detective on a show called *The Streets of San Francisco*. He was a stern, no-nonsense character. Although we all knew that Karl Malden wasn't

## BrandSimple

really a detective, it was suggested in the way the ad campaign was written that we could trust this man when he admonished us not to leave home without them, referring to American Express Travelers Cheques. The point was that if your Travelers Cheques were stolen, they would be replaced.”

Malden was a branding signal—a simple, forceful, and emotionally persuasive image of the security provided by American Express. Dressed in his trench coat, he looked exactly like a detective, or even an agent from the U.S. Embassy who’d come to your hotel to help you out in an emergency. American Express was able to make Karl Malden, the ultimate detective, a powerful branding signal of its “Don’t leave home without it” brand idea. Karl Malden was the voice of authority. He communicated the security associated with carrying American Express Travelers Cheques. Protection and security are pillars of the brand.

Another American Express branding signal was associated with the prestige of carrying the Card. The famous line “Do you know me?” accompanied a sensational advertising campaign. The brand idea and this long-running signal (used for over twenty years) came as a result of the wonderful insight had by American Express that all businesspeople share a similar fear—the fear of being embarrassed at an important client dinner meeting as the result of not having their credit card accepted. The business strategy behind the American Express Card is that it’s a charge card, which means there is no preset spending limit. You pay as you go. The brand idea linked to this strategy is that you can have the confidence that you (the Card) will always be accepted.

I talked to Jed about the advertising campaign. “Yes, everyone does have a fear of having their credit card rejected—even the most well-known people,” he said. “This campaign employed people who were all famous in some way, but not in obvious ways. You knew their faces but didn’t know their names, or you knew their names but didn’t know their faces: William Miller, who was a vice presidential candidate, the authors James Michener and Stephen King, the musicians James Galway and Itzhak Perlman, even Tom Landry was in the campaign.

“The way the ads were constructed was almost game-like. Each ad opened with the line ‘Do you know me?’ While the person in the ad talked to you about his or her accomplishments, it was a race to

## A Short History of the World of Brands

the finish to see if you could remember the name of the person before the name clicked its way across the bottom of an American Express Card in the last frame of the commercial. The campaign never got boring. There was always someone relevant to use in the ads, which were both in print and on television. The simple premise was that if shopkeepers and restaurant owners might not recognize names and faces—even famous names and faces—they'd always recognize and accept the American Express Card. It was the ultimate signal of prestige and acceptance for anyone who carried it."

Another of the people I spoke to was Ken Roman, who ran Ogilvy when I joined it. My job interview with him all those years ago has stayed in my memory. I was ready for some very tough analytical questions about segmentation models and subjects of that nature. Instead, Ken asked me about the last book I had read, the last museum exhibition I had seen. He knew that others in the firm with whom I had interviewed with earlier would have covered the business stuff. He wanted to know if I was creatively aware, because a good account person must be aware of contemporary trends and social issues in order to serve clients well.

Ken talked to me about American Express and a number of other Ogilvy clients. "American Express came out of the gate with a simple philosophy," Ken said. "They called it PSS: Prestige. Service. Security. They've stayed on message—this very simple idea—since the beginning. They've changed branding tactics to keep up with the times, of course, but American Express has never wavered from its philosophy: American Express will be there for you."

Although advertising and branding had evolved considerably by the late 1980s, Americans remained a nation of believers when it came to brands. Despite the fact that we were beginning to see an increase in the number of brands and the number of brand claims and promises, we weren't yet a nation of cynics. We weren't yet bombarded by the unsolicited messages made possible through the Internet. We were only just beginning to feel the effects of being overly stimulated by communications channels. We paid attention to Karl Malden, and we believed him when he told us what to do to protect our vacation money.

We paid attention when Tip O'Neill, Robert Ludlum, Red Adair, and Beverly Sills asked us if we knew them. What they were trying to

## **BrandSimple**

tell us validated our most basic concerns. They, like us, worry about being embarrassed. American Express ads gave us permission to feel the same concern—and to enjoy the same security provided by the American Express Card. Advertising as a branding signal transmitted exactly the associations American Express wanted us to file in our mental file folders about its brand idea. It was an idea worth “saving as.”

### **“One-Quarter Cleansing Cream”**

The Dove soap story is another success story Ken Roman shared with me. “Dove soap is a beautiful example of establishing a simple proposition, or idea, and staying with it,” he said. “David Ogilvy’s original proposition for Dove soap has become legend. It was an idea conveyed by the simple image of velvety cream being poured gently into a bar of soap.”

This image was used in all types of advertising, from television to print and billboards, and became an indelible branding signal. In fact, this signal, like other memorable signals, became the foundation for Dove’s unsurpassed success as a brand. “Dove soap doesn’t dry your skin because it’s one-quarter cleansing cream.” An undeniably simple idea transmitted by a persuasive image—an unassailable signal for its message.

As the soap category started to diversify in brand names and claims, Dove was able to identify something different to say, something that was extremely relevant to a huge percentage of the population. Ask a woman fearful of drying skin and wrinkles, and you can understand the power of the image of moisturizing cream as a branding signal. To this day, I can walk down a supermarket aisle, scan the incredible number of soap brands, catch sight of a Dove package, and think, “one-quarter cleansing cream.” No matter what type of Dove product it is, the simple idea behind the brand has evolved beautifully.

### **Time for a Little Snuggle**

I got my first inkling of just how powerful the right branding signals could be—and how exacting the process to identify them—when I



## A Short History of the World of Brands

was a brand manager at Lever Brothers. At the time, Lever was playing catch-up with Procter & Gamble in a lot of product categories. Most of the time it was able to develop products as well as P & G, but rarely better. Lever was in a slow-follower mode. With the exception of a few brands, such as Wisk, which pioneered the liquid laundry detergent segment, and Dove, which was superior to Ivory, Lever's products often were in the number-three or -four spot. For those unfamiliar with the business of packaged goods, it's harder and harder to make real money if your brand doesn't occupy the first- or second-place position. In fact, today many big retailers such as Wal-Mart and Costco distribute only the number-one or -two brands. Winning is not only a question of relative profitability but of survival.

At the time, I was working with the team on Final Touch fabric softener. Final Touch had long been taking a beating from P & G's Downy brand. No matter what we did, we couldn't come up with an idea for the brand that could contend with Downy. We couldn't get consumers to believe that Final Touch made clothes softer. We tried facts and we tried figures, and we even tried customer testimonials. Despite the fact that Downy and Final Touch were virtual parity products, nothing we did worked. Why?

First of all, P&G has always been masterful at understanding brands, how to connect with consumers, and how to transmit the right branding signals to get its ideas across. The name powerfully signaled the differentiated, relevant idea: Downy made your clothes soft. It was an emotional idea and made for visceral associations consumers could tuck away in their mental file folders. Besides its name, another of its branding signals is the trademarked symbol on its packaging: the picture of a sweet little girl with a soft, fluffy towel wrapped around her head.

The second reason Lever was taking a clobbering was that consumers don't connect with facts and figures. P&G knows that the best brands connect on an emotional level, not on a rational level, and that these ideas are signaled accordingly. It's a rare brand that can use mathematical equations to its advantage. Obviously, to succeed on any measure, the Lever team needed to find a way to approach people on a more emotional level. It needed an idea as simple and as compelling as Downy's, but something that established its own

## BrandSimple

meaningfully different fabric softening idea. It was a challenge and Lever had a challenger brand. What could possibly say “soft clothes your family will appreciate” better than a brand named Downy?

The team in Europe, where Lever held a stronger category position, helped with the answer. A French brand of Lever fabric softener had come up with the simple idea to use a teddy bear to signal its softening ability. Its advertising showed a teddy bear being dropped onto a basket of freshly washed clothing. Both the idea—teddy bear softness—and the branding signals were connecting with consumers, and the French brand was proving a huge success. Lever decided to add another fabric softener brand to its line of American products and to use the idea of a teddy bear to sell it.

This is not the end of the story. Although it might have seemed that all Lever needed to do to succeed with its new product was bring the teddy bear back to America, it turned out to be more challenging than that. I received not only a lesson on brands and branding, but a lesson in the challenges of global branding.

To begin with, Lever wanted to make more of the teddy bear as a signal than the French were doing. Research told Lever that American consumers wouldn't connect with an inanimate bear. American audiences, it seemed, required a little more life in their brand icons—a personality. Choosing a bear with a personality didn't prove as easy an assignment as you might think. I would pass the firm's largest conference room and see zillions of teddy bears on the conference table surrounded by fifteen adults discussing how many fingers the bear should have, the texture of the fur, the size of the tummy, and on and on. One of Jim Henson's original puppeteers—a real “Muppet” guy—was brought in to assist. The Lever bear team debated attributes of teddy bears I didn't know existed. The process the team went through sounds amusing in retrospect, but it was serious business. For a branding signal to be a good one, it has to generate exactly the associations you want it to. The Lever team wanted a lovable, animated little bear consumers would associate with the softening ability of its brand. It finally succeeded in finding one—the current little fellow who was found to embody all the right emotional attributes the team members were looking for. They found something that could compete with Downy.

## A Short History of the World of Brands

In the course of the teddy bear assessment, the decision was made to name the American version of the fabric softener Snuggle. This evocative name provided greater focus in the search for the bear. Remember, the more focused a brand idea is, the more effective your branding signals will be. The simple idea behind a fabric softener named Snuggle gave the team more clearly defined parameters for the choice of spokesbear (although it wasn't until just recently that the bear actually said anything). After some very interesting discussions, Lever finally found its Snuggle bear and gave Downy a run for its softness. (As a footnote, Final Touch was one of a number of household brands, including Rit and Niagara, sold by Unilever to Phoenix Brands.)

### A Simple Idea Turned Sour

One client assignment taught me two lessons: the importance of a simple idea based on something of an emotional nature, rather than on facts and figures, even when functionality is a critical cost of entry, and what can happen when consumer faith in your idea is undermined. (In other words, what happens when consumers feel hoodwinked?) In this case, the product category was powdered lemonade mixes. The brand I was assigned to was Country Time Lemonade.

Country Time was created back in the early 1970s through the marketing power of General Foods and Ogilvy & Mather. At the time, General Foods was doing extremely well with another brand they'd created, Kool-Aid—a powdered mix to which you added water to make a variety of flavored drinks. The problem with Kool-Aid (besides associations with the horrific Jonestown story) was that it was hard to convince someone over ten years old to drink it. It was a kids' drink. The challenge for General Foods and Ogilvy became how to sell Kool-Aid to grown-ups.

The team began by examining the soft drink market, specifically the powdered drink market, and it came upon a brand called Wyler's powdered lemonade mix sitting on the shelf. Wyler's was marketed by Borden's and was sold in a canister. The Wyler's brand idea was based on functionality: its taste, which happened to be like real lemonade. The food technicians at General Foods went to work and in fairly

## BrandSimple

short order developed a lemon-flavored powdered mix that tasted much better than Wyler's.

But that wasn't the answer. I'd learned (or been taught) that a brand idea based on a functional claim rarely wins. Here's a tip: Look for a category that is all about facts and figures and functionality, and see if you can go in with an emotional brand idea. Emotion almost always wins over function, even in the most commonly used or ubiquitous products. For example, we never used to care about the claims made by distributors of fresh chicken products until a man by the name of Frank Perdue came along. All of a sudden we cared. Here was a "tough man" offering us "tender chicken." I'd never met a poultry farmer in my life, but if I could have imagined what one would look like, he would be Frank Perdue. I wanted Frank's chickens.

But back to the lemonade. Our General Foods lemonade mix tasted as good, if not better, than Wyler's, but what emotionally differentiated idea could we use to win in the category? The brand teams at Ogilvy and General Foods did their homework, talking to consumers about how they felt about lemonade. In doing so they came upon what's known as the gold standard in branding—the one thing you can say to communicate that your brand is the best. The gold standard for a lemonade brand was the simple promise that it could taste like good, old-fashioned lemonade.

With this bit of information in mind, the first thing the team did was create one of the most powerful branding signals a brand can own—and transmit—to express an idea: the *name* of the brand. The right name can go a long way in transmitting and embedding the right brand associations. The name developed by the team was Country Time. With the idea and the name, the idea was very well focused. What other signals could be created to communicate the idea? Because advertising was still incredibly effective in those days, the team chose to use a story as a branding signal. A story by way of an ad campaign that featured a lovable, white-haired grandfather, suspenders and all, sitting on a sun-drenched porch on a sizzling summer day mixing up a pitcher of ice-cold lemonade. The pitcher was dripping with those little beads of sweat that captured the authenticity the brand hoped to convey. It was the sort of picture con-

## A Short History of the World of Brands

sumers talked about when they were asked about the idea of old-fashioned lemonade.

Once the name of the brand and the lovable grandpa sent out the powerful branding signals, the brand found its way onto mental desktops. Consumers craving good, old-fashioned lemonade ran to the grocery store shelves and left Wyler's high and dry. General Foods and Ogilvy had solved the problem of how to go about selling lemon Kool-Aid to adults. By the time I joined the account team, the brand was already being expanded into ready-to-drink cans and the diet drink market. Grandpa was rocking and rolling. He stayed rocking until the day Minute Maid introduced an ad for a new lemonade mix. That ad was the beginning of the end of the mix-it-yourself lemonade category.

The TV spokesperson in the ad had three canisters in front of him: Country Time, Wyler's, and Minute Maid. He announced with authority that Minute Maid was made from the juice of twenty lemons, Wyler's was made from the juice of two lemons, and Country Time was made from the juice of—uh-oh—no lemons. Which lemonade would you buy, ladies and gentleman, no-lemon lemonade, or twenty-lemon lemonade?

After seeing the spots, we knew it would not be business as usual for Country Time. Our team went back into the field to see how consumers were reacting to this new player in the category. Turns out facts and figures had people stumped. No one could remember which brand had two lemons and, while some folks did recall that Minute Maid had twenty, it wasn't enough to motivate them to try it. What people did remember, unfortunately, was that Country Time had zero lemons. How could you sell lemonade without lemons?

We thought about the idea of reformulating Country Time and reintroducing it as the lemonade with twenty-one lemons. In testing, however, that idea only brought attention to the initial negative response of having started out with no lemons. We toyed with telling consumers that Country Time still tasted better than Minute Maid (which it did), but we still heard the refrain, "No lemons!" We thought about talking about how Country Time got its tart and tangy flavor from lemon peels, but few consumers were interested in a chemistry lesson.

## BrandSimple

The first lesson I learned from all of this was that you can't sell lemonade with facts. Emotion sells. The second, more important, lesson I learned was that you should never, ever break your bond of trust with consumers. When people found out there were no lemons in Country Time, they felt hoodwinked and cheated. They felt the brand had broken its promise to them. Although Country Time ads never said anything about the composition of the lemonade, the brand seemed to have lost its authenticity. When I saw Grandpa, I believed in Country Time. Now, I don't trust the brand—or the lemonade mix category. Good lessons, frustrating story.

### **"Simple Trumps Everything"**

I spoke with Bob Pittman, former CEO of AOL, who was responsible for inventing many powerful brands, including MTV and Nickelodeon. In fact, he revolutionized the television category with those brands. When I explained the "simple" premise of this book, he intuitively understood what I was talking about. He's put the premise into practice with great success countless times. "I got to AOL in the mid-1990s," he said. "It was a fabulous brand, but it was starting to get complicated. It was losing its focus. The good news was that AOL could do many things—and it could do them all well. The reality is that it was getting complicated for us to tell potential users what AOL was all about. We needed to boil things down to a simple idea. What do we have permission to be? Let's get to the core of what our brand stands for. What is our relationship with the customer? I've learned that before you can do anything, you must understand the brand's relationship with the customer.

"Now, these were ordinary mass-market customers we were dealing with. They made it clear they didn't want any mumbo-jumbo. They didn't want to spend their days configuring things. They wanted the benefits of e-mail and the Internet made easy. They let us know through focus groups that they didn't find any joy in the technological end of it. They just wanted things to be easy and to work. We needed to find a differentiated idea that would communicate we understood what they were telling us. And we had to make it credible."

## A Short History of the World of Brands

I asked Bob how AOL made it happen. He told me the company came up with a line that it used to both drive internal branding activities, from engineering improvements to customer service, and as the tagline: “So easy to use, no wonder we’re number one.” It summed up exactly what AOL wanted to be known for. “If you’re a number-one brand, I like to say it,” Bob said. “The fact that we said ‘easy’ was okay. It was reinforcement for the promise we were making, so it wasn’t seen as bragging. This simple idea became the powerful force that drove everyone and everything inside the company. Everyone from our engineers to our manufacturing reps understood what this brand idea had to do with them, and they understood the effect it would have on our consumers. For example, the engineers knew that what they created meant no extra clicks or fancy technology. With the AOL brand—actually with any brand—I’ve found simple trumps everything.”

About four years ago Landor had the opportunity to pitch AOL for a chance to do some rebranding work. We talked to the company about the idea of going back to its roots, to what had differentiated it in the beginning: Bob’s idea of simplicity. The brand’s idea had gotten a bit muddled after he left the company. We presented AOL with the idea of using its well-known yellow “running man” icon as a more powerful signal, as he represents both friendliness and accessibility, both indications of simplicity. We suggested that AOL “tip” the little fellow into all sorts of online and off-line ads and promotions to inject energy and hipness into the brand. BBDO picked up the charge and launched a wonderful new campaign signaling AOL’s message of accessible simplicity.

The point is that simple does trump everything. If your brand idea is simple and focused, you can execute it more easily, with greater clarity and creativity—and in a consistent manner—at all the points that a customer comes into contact with the brand. Your branding signals will express exactly what you’d like to get across. The essence of a great brand, Ken Roman emphasized, is “sacrifice.” “What’s the one thing you can say, the single, simple message you can send about your brand you know people will care about? Is it dry happy babies, security away from home, soft skin, a car that will keep your family safe? Sacrifice everything else and tell *this* simple story.”

