

# The Brand Story

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Once upon a time, the quirky and off-beat Saab brand was the envy of carmakers. Relative to its competitors, this now defunct brand attracted a small customer base—too small for the brand to survive—and it also maintained the most fanatically loyal following in the car industry. Saab owners built their own communities, organized their own clubs, held their own conventions and rallies, met for monthly group drives, and posted their favorite Saab stories online. They connected emotionally with the brand and with each other, ritualistically flashing their headlights whenever they saw another Saab on the road. This kind of organic **brand community** building often drives success, and it is seen in marketers' efforts to build and nurture communities for other brands like Harley-Davidson, WD-40, and Duncan Hines, among countless others.

### Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define a brand story and identify its main elements.
- Articulate the benefits of a well-developed brand story.
- Understand how to use the brand story to connect with consumers.

The American Marketing Association defines a **brand** as “a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers” (American Marketing Association, 2017). Yet, if that were all that a brand is, we likely would not have witnessed the kind of passion that Saab owners had for the brand or the outpouring of emotion when it died a slow and painful

death; as one *Car and Driver* writer explains, there exist many defunct car brands, “but the one departed marque that car people are still shedding genuine tears for is Saab” (McCall, 2012). Accounting for this kind of emotional connection, marketing guru, entrepreneur, and author Seth Godin defines a brand as a “set of expectations, memories, stories and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer’s decision to choose one product or service over another” (Godin, 2009). Other marketing thinkers take a similar but simpler approach, defining a brand as a collection of perceptions in the consumer’s mind.

Advertisers have long drawn on storytelling as a means for building perceptions around brands. More recently, storytelling has been recognized as driving corporate value by adding substance to numbers (Damodaran, 2017). While storytelling is certainly useful as a communication tool, it is also of strategic use in brand building. In this chapter, we will look at the language of the brand story and how that language serves to build the collection of perceptions that consumers hold about brands.

## Defining and Discovering the Brand Story

A **brand story** is the narrative that marketers and their creative partners invent and use to impart a brand’s essence to consumers. The essence of a brand—and its meaning to consumers—includes, but is much more than, its features, attributes, and functional benefits. Its essence operates on a deeper psychological level. A **brand essence** embodies to consumers what a brand stands for in a figurative sense; it answers emotional needs, enters into consumers’ lives, fulfills their aspirations, and reflects their values and beliefs. In a social sense, consumers signal their attitudes and values to others and, when they buy status brands, convey their socioeconomic position, or at least the position to which they aspire. When marketers craft their brand’s essence into a brand story, they imbue it with a sociocultural context and personality to which consumers can relate. Moreover, a brand with a distinctive narrative has more value in both a symbolic and a concrete sense.

### Narrative Impact

A study by Jennifer Escalas (2004) shows that narratives in advertising—stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end that feature a concrete protagonist—can help consumers establish strong connections to a brand and influence **brand preference**.

Brand storytelling can occur at two phases in a brand's development: (a) during a research discovery process, and (b) as part of the brand's messaging in print, on television, on radio, online, and other communications venues. Some marketers use storytelling as a heuristic marketing research device to access consumer attitudes toward and connections with brands and brand categories and to ignite creative thinking about how consumers engage with a brand category. During in-depth interviews, focus groups, and other types of qualitative research with target consumers, marketing ethnographies, researchers can elicit stories about how a brand fits within consumers' lives, and these stories can inform a brand's messaging strategy and creative executions (e.g., showing specific situations in which consumers are involved with a brand and are rewarded for doing so). Companies such as Storytellings conduct this kind of research. They express their promise on their website ([www.storytellings.com/whatis.htm](http://www.storytellings.com/whatis.htm)) as follows:

Storytellings is a market research process using stories and a proprietary analysis technique to help organizations discover the unconscious emotional motivations that drive consumer . . . behavior . . . Storytellings will help you discover your company or brand story and tell it . . . in a way that creates these enduring emotional bonds.

The second way that storytelling is used, how brands actually tell their story to consumers, will be illustrated later in this chapter.

## **The Functions of the Brand Story**

A brand with a compelling story can command a premium price and will engender customer loyalty because, when a brand story is well conceived and effectively told, the meaning of the brand adds meaning to the lives of its target consumers. More specifically, a well-told brand story serves several purposes:

- It expresses a brand's character and personality and enables a brand to "own" them.
- It cuts through advertising clutter and attracts attention from consumers.
- It enhances consumer memory of a brand's advertising.
- It increases consumer engagement with a brand online and offline.
- It helps consumers identify with a brand, especially when they imagine themselves in the story the brand tells.
- It leads to brand purchases to fulfill the brand's promise personally.

## **Telling the Brand Story**

Telling the brand story effectively often means developing characters—similar to those that appear in a novel, play, or movie—as well as a plot,

a series of interrelated events or story line with a beginning, middle, and end. It is through these characters and their interactions with the brand that consumers see what the brand is capable of doing for them—its benefits. Seeing the brand in action, so to speak, can be much more powerful than simply being told by the marketer in a commercial via a voice-over what the brand can do. In many ways, these kinds of advertisements mimic life. In everyday life, we encounter new and familiar objects, including brands, together with other people engaged in action. Consider, for example, how the American consumer came to know the Hoverboard, the self-balancing two-wheel board that ended up on many Christmas wish lists for 2015. Americans saw salespeople riding them through malls—characters in action—and heard from them how they learned to use the product. The vivid imagery associated with learning about brands this way not only helps consumers remember the brand and its benefits but also can influence the brand choices they make.

Research by Chiu, Hsieh, and Kuo (2012) uncovered four elements through which brand stories engage consumers and influence consumer attitudes toward brands:

1. Authenticity, or genuineness
2. Conciseness, or the expression of complete thoughts in as few words as possible
3. Reversal, or a turning point with a surprising twist
4. Humor, or a particular mood or state of mind

A series of experiments confirmed the persuasive power of each of these elements while also revealing some key differences based on a product's category. The researchers found that conciseness and humor affect attitudes toward branded search products like clothing and magazines, which consumers can easily evaluate before purchase. This is likely due to consumers' tendency to not engage significant cognitive effort when searching in either of these product categories; conciseness helps keep the required cognitive effort to a minimum, and humor provides a peripheral cue whereby consumers project their feelings about the story onto the brand.

The same study showed that authenticity and reversal heavily impact attitudes in direct experience categories like financial services and restaurants. Consumers cannot judge products in these categories until they use them. As the researchers explain, consumers tend to be more skeptical about brand claims for certain kinds of experience products because they cannot easily verify the claims. Authenticity can attenuate this skepticism by increasing consumer confidence in the advertiser. Similarly, a strong reversal story communicates the brand's problem-solving abilities and helps fill the informational void that exists prior to trying an experience product.

### **Unfolding the Story**

Brand stories can vary greatly in both length and velocity. When the length is relatively short and the velocity rather high, the story's structure—the beginning, middle, and end—must be clearly expressed. Consider, for example, Google's "Parisian Love" commercial. This 60-second spot, which first appeared on American television during the 2010 Super Bowl and made Google "one of advertising's most compelling storytellers," tells "a sweeping story of romance . . . entirely through dynamic screen shots of Google searches" (Nudd, 2011). The commercial has the elements of a good story, but what sets it apart and makes it so absorbing as a video is that it relies solely on words and eschews visuals of typical Parisian romantic settings and the couple in the story line. In doing so, the advertisement demonstrates that Google Search is more than a means to navigate life; it is a way to make life happen.

"Parisian Love" was so well received that the company developed a tool that allows users to personalize the Google brand story and make it their own. The tool, which appears on Google's official blog, allows users to fill in a series of seven search boxes, each of which can bring up search results, maps, news, blogs, images, products, or books. The user then chooses some music and "and—presto!—you've got your very own Search Story to share with your friends or showcase on our YouTube channel" (<https://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/04/make-your-own-search-story-video-in.html>).

The "Parisian Love" commercial expressed Google's brand story in a way that is short and sweet. Presenting a short story that can be read (or viewed) quickly is appropriate for the brand and consistent with the brand's functional benefits. For other brands, it may make sense for the brand story to unfold over multiple encounters and across a longer length of time. In fact, brands must build and update their stories over time in response to marketplace changes. To illustrate how language can help build, sustain, and update a brand story over time, let's take a close look at Centrum, a long-time leader in the multivitamin category.

Centrum was introduced in 1978 by Lederle Laboratories<sup>1</sup> with a campaign developed by advertising agency Carrafiello Diehl & Associates that was based on research showing that consumers felt their diets were nutritionally deficient. While marketing research studies indicated that consumers viewed nutritional supplements as insurance against not eating properly, the multivitamin brands on the market during the late 1970s lacked many essential vitamins and minerals. Centrum stood apart because the brand assured consumers not only that it contained more vitamins and minerals than other brands (a superiority claim) but also that it was "Complete from A to Zinc" (Figure 3.1). The completeness claim conveyed superiority even though it was not a superiority claim; it was a preemptive, declarative one. Marketing based upon this

positioning via advertising, packaging, and other vehicles helped propel Centrum to category leadership.

During the late 1980s, marketing research demonstrated that consumers could be motivated to buy Centrum with an advertising narrative that connected scientific findings about nutrition to Centrum's commitment to nutritional science. Between 1988 and 1999, to grow and protect its marketplace leadership, Centrum spent millions of dollars on advertising that linked Centrum's "completeness" to ongoing advances in scientific studies of nutrition. During this period, Centrum solidified its category leadership position because it distinguished itself from its competition through this messaging.

### Centrum Nutritional News Advertising

**Man:** We keep up on nutritional news.

**Woman:** The more things change, the more reasons there are to stick with Centrum.

**Announcer:** Take Centrum and you'll always feel assured that you are getting the best of what today's science has learned about nutrition. That's the completeness of Centrum.



Figure 3.1 A Centrum Package

Centrum's marketplace success is instructive because it was achieved in a category where the effects of taking a multivitamin are not felt or seen in the same sense as the vast majority of other consumer health care products. Unlike a headache remedy that delivers relief in minutes, consumers take the promise of a multivitamin on faith because its benefits are not apparent. This is precisely why the language inherent in "The Science of Centrum" selling line succeeded. Science provided the proof that personal experience did not. "The Science of Centrum" buttressed existing consumer faith in Centrum with objective science and provided Centrum with a distinctive selling proposition that, by insinuation, relegated competitive brands to a lesser position. Consumers who wanted to believe a multivitamin is beneficial now had a reason to believe. Centrum's sales soared, and its share of market versus other multivitamin brands expanded.

As recently as 2014, Centrum continued to link itself to nutritional science or at least imply that it is a science-based brand. At that time, Centrum responded to objective research widely reported in the national US press that demonstrated vitamin supplements may do more harm than good. The advertisement in Figure 3.2 shows how Centrum, like other advertisers, can use language to convey a brand message in the face of contrary information or nonexistent support. The headline, "Behind every Centrum multivitamin are over 1 million hours of research," does not actually make a performance claim; the research could, in fact, be



Figure 3.2 A Print Ad for Centrum

consistent with the objective report that denounces vitamins and minerals. The claim, “Inside every Centrum multivitamin are specific vitamin and minerals to help support your heart, brain and eyes” is followed by an asterisk that leads to a statement at the bottom of the ad in an almost unreadable typeface that says, “This statement has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.” This disclaimer, required by the FDA, refutes the very claim the advertisement makes.

### ***The Sensory Components of a Brand Story***

As the Centrum case shows, a brand story can be built based on its history, its claims, or a deep understanding of the needs and wants of target consumers. Because consumers cannot readily perceive how vitamins impact their health, the backing of science was key for making the Centrum story credible. Another effective way to build a credible brand story is to connect with consumers’ senses. To demonstrate, let’s consider the coffee category. Coffee has physical and sensory qualities such as appearance, texture, smell, taste, and level of intensity (e.g., French roast, dark, or light). It can be regular or decaffeinated and can have added flavor options like vanilla, hazelnut, or chocolate. Coffee brands, like brands in other categories, can choose to tell their story by tapping into a product history or manufacturing process or by generating creative narratives to sway customers. For example, a coffee brand could build a narrative based upon a certain kind of brewing; emotional appeals to consumers about the way drinking a brand of coffee fits into their lives or expresses an idealized life; or a broader cultural context, such as how artisan coffee makers reflect social trends. Marketing research anthropologists Sunderland and Denny (2007) discuss the meaning of coffee from a cultural perspective and describe the local meaning of coffee in Bangkok, Thailand. Expanding on their culturally informed analysis with additional narrative dimensions, Figure 3.3 illustrates some of the choices a marketer can make to tell a coffee brand’s story. To generate these story lines, a marketer could brainstorm on branding strategies in a conference room or, more wisely, field research to decode the meaning of coffee in consumers’ lives. Brand managers and their creative agencies would then construct a strategy that includes the brand story. As part of this process, specific language and visual cues would be selected that enable a brand to tell its story in a distinctively compelling enough manner to induce consumer purchase.

Let’s take a look at how leading coffee brands frame themselves within a unique narrative. Procter & Gamble’s Folgers Coffee has long used the jingle, “The best part of waking up is Folgers in your cup.” The language reflects the aim of the Folgers brand to “own the morning.” The Folgers

## Coffee: Multiple Meanings and Varied Experiences



Figure 3.3 Multiple Meanings of Coffee

brand website, [www.folgerscoffee.com](http://www.folgerscoffee.com), tells that story and even includes the Folgers jingle. Another venerable coffee brand, Chock full o' Nuts, tells a very different story; the company markets the brand by connecting consumers to a past they may covet. The Chock full o' Nuts narrative, as expressed in the accompanying print advertisement in Figure 3.4, stresses the brand's heritage and how it can contribute to the kind of close social relationships that some people feel fast-moving contemporary life precludes. The language in the advertisement asks the reader to "enjoy deliciously simple Chock full o' Nuts today, and let its enticing aroma and smooth taste take you back to a simpler time, when the front porch was the perfect place to connect."

Starbucks, while succeeding as the "third place" its architect Howard Schulz described in his book, *Pour Your Heart Into It* (1997), has often merchandized its obsessive focus on the quality of the coffee itself. Yet, Starbucks's brand story is about much more than coffee beans; it also incorporates a buying experience in Starbucks's retail chain. A linguistic component of this retail experience is seen in the way that Starbucks

Chat Room.

**100% Coffee. No Nuts.**

Remember when chatting meant meeting face-to-face with a friend over a cup of coffee? Get back to what's good with Chock full o' Nuts Coffee. Because the original Chock Café opened its doors in 1932 as a nut shop, the word "nuts" has always been part of our name and our history. But nuts in our coffee? Never. There's nothing but pure coffee in every can. Enjoy deliciously simple Chock full o' Nuts today and let its enticing aroma and smooth taste take you back to a simpler time, when the front porch was the perfect place to connect.

MANUFACTURER'S COUPON  
EXPIRES 12/31/13

\$1.00  
OFF

any one package

0071038-072461

**To the consumer:** This coupon is good for \$1 off the purchase price of any one (1) package of Chock Full o' Nuts® Coffee. Any other use constitutes fraud. Coupon may not be reproduced, copied, transferred or sold, including on internet auction sites. Limit one coupon per purchase.  
**To the retailer:** For each coupon you accept from a customer purchasing the above-described product, Massimo Zaretti Beverage USA, Inc. will reimburse you the face value of the coupon plus 5¢ handling, provided that the coupon is redeemed in compliance with our coupon policy. A copy of the policy will be sent upon request. Void if prohibited, faded or misused. Redeem by mailing to: Massimo Zaretti Beverage USA, Inc., P.O. Box 670035, El Paso, TX 88567.

www.chockfullonuts.com © 2013 Massimo Zaretti Beverage USA

Figure 3.4 An Ad for Chock Full o' Nuts

evokes an Italian heritage in what would otherwise be everyday terms for ordering one's preferred Starbucks beverage. If you drink coffee and have visited a Starbucks, the chances are that you know the distinctive Starbucks language where "tall" means regular, "grande" means large, and "venti" means extra large. If you prefer less caffeine in your coffee, you would order a half caff. For a more indulgent drink, you might try a "trenta" Super Cream Coffee Frappuccino. Frappuccino may sound Italian, but both the product and the name are a Starbucks invention. These foreign-sounding coffee terms serve Starbucks's Euro-coffee story well, but they made good fodder, and a strong competitive story line,

for Dunkin' Donuts, which in its 2006 commercial touted that to get one of their own lattes, "You order them in English, not Fritalian," the Starbucks-invented blend of French and Italian. Dunkin' Donuts, which has long used the advertising line "America Runs on Dunkin'," was underscoring its domestic equity and repositioning Starbucks as effete. Whereas "Fritalian" is **on brand** for Starbucks, English terms for all their offerings are "on brand" for Dunkin' Donuts.

### **The Lingo of Harley-Davidson Riders**

An ethnographic study performed by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) reveals the language of the Harley-Davidson brand community. Harley insiders have developed acronyms to describe riders who don't have the same commitment as the Harley "outlaws" who built the community. As reported in the study, outlaws have created their own vocabulary to describe the various classes of "inauthentic pretenders," which include RUBies (Rich Urban Bikers), RIOTs (Retired Idiots On Tour), and AHABs (Aspiring HARDass Bikers). In contrast, outlaw club names like Hell's Angels, Satan's Slaves, and Pagans reinforce the outlaw image of both the Harley brand and its most visible users.

Words in the Starbucks brand language—tall, grande, venti, Frappuccino, half caff, and others—would be literally and figuratively foreign to Dunkin' Donuts customers. For Starbucks, these terms convey the brand story at every moment of consumer-brand interaction, especially in store from the customer to the preparer of the Starbucks beverage, the barista—another Italian term that Starbucks has adopted. The distinctive Starbucks brand language is a system of communication that is used by all members of the Starbucks brand community, from the company's employees at headquarters, to those working behind the counter in the retail stores, and, of course, the millions of Starbucks drinkers worldwide. The Starbucks language not only underscores the brand but also ensures that its professional and customer community speaks with one voice. Less indoctrinated customers have difficulty with the language in Starbucks's retail shops, while loyal customers know Starbucks talk and speak it with ease. For better or worse, the Starbucks terminology has attracted attention to the brand, differentiated it from its competitors, and helped define the customer buying experience.

Starbucks is not the only brand with its own language. Disney has long referred to its employees as cast members (as in the cast members who

perform roles, or characters in a film or play), and theme park visitors as guests, a term now used by a variety of retailers—Target is an example—in place of the word “customers.” In these instances, and others like it, brands create ways of separating themselves and their customers from their competition. And in cases where the customers learn and use the language—as with Starbucks—the experience creates a sense of belonging and enhanced loyalty to the brand.

### **Emotional Connections**

Many elements in Google’s “Parisian Love” commercial serve to evoke emotions. Most notable, perhaps, is the music that builds to a crescendo as it becomes clear through search that the romance has turned into a serious relationship. Language can also be used to evoke this kind of emotion. Olay is an example of a brand that uses language to connect with women emotionally as they age. In the print advertisement in Figure 3.5, Olay Total Effects recognizes that women worry about the impact of stress on their skin and that they have a strong desire to combat the signs of aging. The phrase “Because fighting 7 signs of aging only gets more challenging” is both a scare tactic and a call to action to use “Our *most* concentrated formula ever.” The brand itself plays the role of an ally in the war against aging. The combat metaphor is a narrative device that is reinforced by the marketer. Metaphors like this are commonplace in the way people think of abstract concepts (like aging). It is

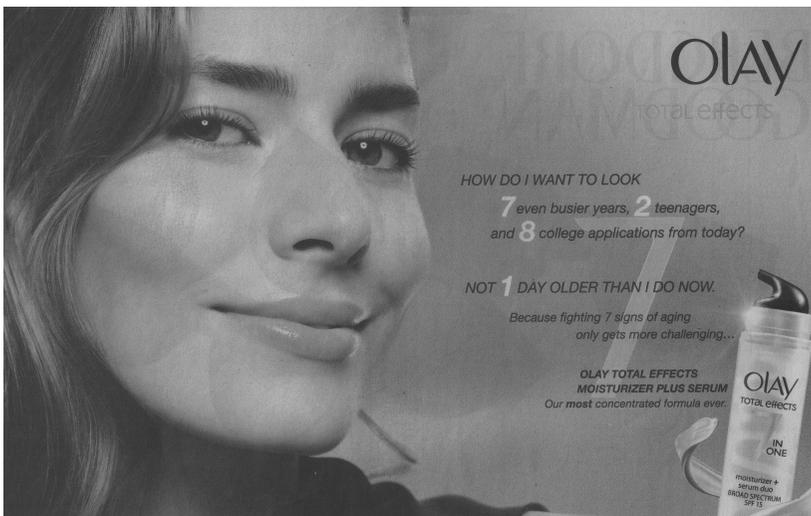


Figure 3.5 An Ad for Olay

a way to make them more concrete and give them a tangibility of sorts (Lakoff, 1987).

### **Consumer Values and Attitudes**

A brand story often speaks to consumers' personal values and attitudes: what they believe and feel matters, and how they wish to see themselves and be seen by others. The watch category is an interesting example of how marketers connect with consumer values and attitudes to motivate brand purchase. A famous Longines advertisement, for example, features a celebrity and a horse, both symbols, in this context, of elegance, along with the phrase "Elegance is an attitude" above a photograph of a Longines's Conquest Classic watch. As another example, Patek Philippe emphasizes its brand's history and its pursuit of perfection. The company website expresses its values this way:

The unparalleled renown and prestige that Patek Philippe has acquired amongst connoisseurs is not due solely to the perfection of the watches and the resources of knowledge and skill contained in the workshops. This undisputed supremacy also stems from the consistency with which the company has applied its philosophy of excellence ever since it was founded in 1839. That spirit is embodied in ten values that have always represented the very essence of Patek Philippe and will continue to do so for generations to come.

([www.patek.com/contents/default/en/values.html](http://www.patek.com/contents/default/en/values.html))

The key words and phrases here are "renown," "prestige," "connoisseurs," "perfection," "resources of knowledge and skills," "undisputed supremacy," "consistency," and "philosophy of excellence." The reference to "ten values that have always represented the very essence of Patek Philippe and will continue to do so for generations to come" also speaks to the brand's enduring commitment to excellence. A long-running Patek Philippe print advertising campaign expresses the brand's narrative in the context of a cross-generational narrative of gift giving, shown in Figure 3.6.

### **The Role of Research**

Marketing research often plays a major role in the creation of a brand story. In a research study reported in Malefy and Morais (2012) for the brand Targon, a mouthwash marketed to smokers, consumers who smoked cigarettes were given an exercise adapted from clinical psychology that tapped into their personal history. During the course of in-depth interviews, smokers initially described themselves as feeling like pariahs

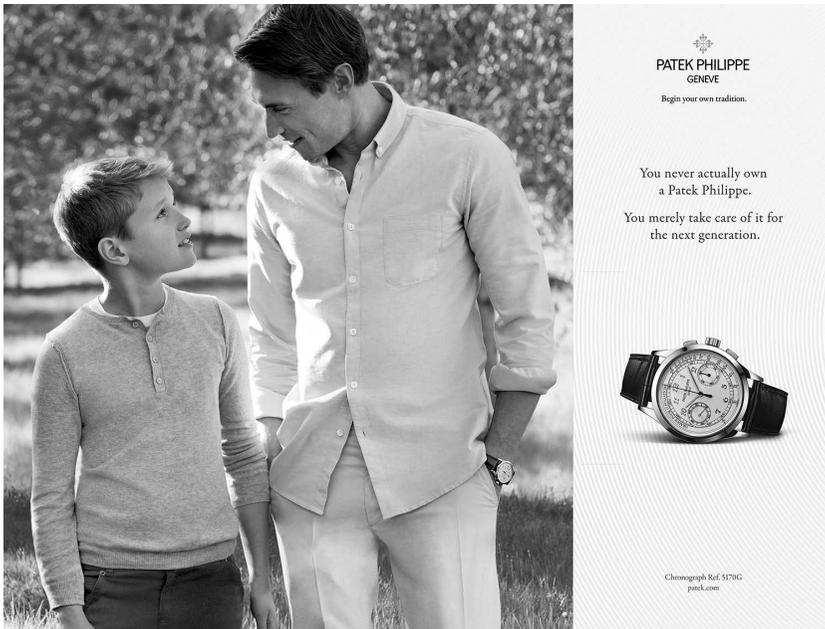


Figure 3.6 An Ad for Patek Philippe

because of their smoking habit and, by extension, they themselves were judged negatively by nonsmokers. In that research, smokers were asked to reflect back on previous experiences where they felt a similar emotion. Several respondents mentioned embarrassing events during their middle school years when suffering from a social stigma made them wish to be “invisible” to their peers.

The stories ignited an idea about a Targon brand story that would deliver on smokers’ desire for invisibility in the presence of nonsmokers. This narrative had two key marketplace advantages: it distinguished Targon from mouthwashes that emphasized breath freshening that smokers felt was not effective, and it demonstrated that the Targon brand understood the sentiments of smokers in an antismoking era. Targon television advertising featured a man and a woman meeting at a restaurant and then kissing. The woman, not sensing the expected scent of tobacco during this intimate moment, asks the man, “Did you quit smoking?” He replies, “Did I?” The man’s question telegraphed the brand story—and the **brand promise**: Targon rendered the smoker’s habit invisible. A midcommercial audiovisual demonstration of how Targon worked supported this contention. Premarket advertising testing and in-market

results demonstrated that this narrative—so well encapsulated in the language used by the actors in the commercial and derived from smokers' comments in marketing research interviews—resonated with smokers who, whether we approve or not, wanted to mask their habit from those close to them.

## **Corporate Image and Brand Language**

Some companies merchandize brands in their own name or market sub-brands and products that are closely associated with the corporate name and story. Baby food brand Ella's Kitchen is an example of this approach, telling its story in a highly personal way through a statement by the original founder, Paul Lindley. The text on the Ella's Kitchen website begins with "I set up Ella's Kitchen because I passionately believe that Ella, my daughter, along with her generation, should have the opportunity to eat better food and also to discover that healthy food can be fun, tasty, and cool." (For more, see [www.ellaskitchen.com/our-story](http://www.ellaskitchen.com/our-story).) Coca-Cola manufactures and markets a wide array of beverages. Not long ago, the Coca-Cola Company created a print advertisement for several of its beverages that attempted to burnish the overall company image through wordplay on their ingredients. The headline, "Our Formula for Success," above a row of beverages was followed by a list of "Ingredients" that included such words as "respect," "leadership," "diversity," and "quality," among others. These word choices, which speak to highly positive personal and corporate values, aim to engender goodwill regarding the Coca-Cola Company as a corporation.

## **A Look Back: How Brands Tell Their Stories Through Selling Lines**

Brands do not always use language to tell their story, but they often do, as illustrated when, in 1999, *Advertising Age* devoted an issue to "The Advertising Century." The editors' choices for the 100 best advertising campaigns over the course of the 20th century not only included iconic brands but also, in most cases, featured the selling line that defined the brand. The selling lines served, in essence, as a "title" for the brand story. The sample that follows, derived from the top 100 (Garfield, 1999), shows how many brands used—and still use—compelling wording to encapsulate an image, benefit, call to action, or emotional consumer connection:

- 7 Up (1970s): "The Uncola"
- AT&T (1979): "Reach out and touch someone"
- BMW (1975): "The ultimate driving machine"

- Budweiser (1970s): “This Bud’s for you”
- Burger King (1973): “Have it your way”
- Campbell Soup (1930s): “Mmm mmm good!”
- Chanel (1979): “Share the fantasy”
- Charmin (1964): “Please don’t squeeze the Charmin”
- Chevrolet (1950s): “See the USA in your Chevrolet”
- Clairol (1957): “Does she or doesn’t she?”
- Coca-Cola (1929): “The pause that refreshes”
- DeBeers (1948): “A diamond is forever”
- Foster Grant (1965): “Who’s behind those Foster Grants?”
- Ivory Soap (1882): “99 and 44/100% pure”
- Kellogg’s Rice Krispies (1940s): “Snap! Crackle! Pop!”
- Levy’s Rye Bread (1949): “You don’t have to be Jewish to love Levy’s Rye Bread”
- M&Ms (1954): “Melts in your mouth, not in your hands”
- Maxwell House (1959): “Good to the last drop”
- McDonald’s (1971): “You deserve a break today”
- Miller Lite Beer (1974): “Tastes great, less filling”
- Nike (1988): “Just do it”
- Pepsi Cola (1964): “The Pepsi generation”
- Perdue Chicken (1971): “It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken”
- Reagan for President (1984): “It’s morning again in America”
- Saturn (1989): “A different kind of company. A different kind of car.”
- Timex (1950s): “Takes a licking and keeps on ticking”
- US Army (1981): “Be all you can be”
- US Forest Service (1944): “Only you can prevent forest fires”
- Volkswagen (1959): “Think small”
- Wendy’s (1984): “Where’s the beef?”
- Wheaties (1930s): “Breakfast of champions”
- Wisk (1968): “Ring around the collar”

## Language and Authenticity

As we have seen in this chapter, brand language can convey a brand’s heritage and, by insinuation, its authenticity. In a cross-cultural study that described the approaches of Italian food sellers and New York City-based Asian American advertising executives, Cavanaugh and Shankar (2014) describe how these producers (who are worlds apart) select linguistic cues to build stories of authenticity and appeal to their target consumers. In northern Italy, Bergamo farmers employ specific words to underscore their products’ place and history. For example, Bergamasco, the local vernacular, is used instead of Italian to name and market local products, (e.g., “*ol salam bergamasc*”) to convey the local production of

Bergamasco salami and the Bergamasco name, *scalet*, in a brochure while much of the rest of the brochure is in Italian. Asian American advertising executives in New York apply a process they call “**transcreation**,” which incorporates language and culture to appeal to their Chinese American target consumers. For one client, they rewrote lyrics in Mandarin for an American rock song (“Love Hurts”) and paid special attention to preserving the tonality of Mandarin within the context of the source material. This proved to be a difficult task but one that was essential if their target consumers were to feel that the brand story was meant for them, since narratives are culturally bound.

Regardless of any required cultural adaptation, brands must tell stories that are true to the brand’s values. Many contemporary consumers demand that their brands are authentic. Marketers must be cautious and be certain that their brand stories fit the personality of their brand. For instance, if the brand’s personality revolves around adventure and self-affirmation, brand stories should include, if not feature, such themes. Otherwise, the brand will be perceived as inauthentic, even if the alternative themes (family orientation or culinary-themed stories) are attractive to consumers.

### **Final Words: Telling Stories, Selling Brands**

When well crafted, a brand story can be a powerful form of persuasive communication that creates an emotional bond between the consumer and the brand. This can be particularly helpful to a marketer in so-called low-involvement categories or contexts—that is, those where consumers tend not to be especially interested in spending time or cognitive effort learning about product or brand choices. If the story is sufficiently engaging, consumers will become wrapped up in it, and their feelings about the brand will be driven by its story. In this way, brand stories become part of the brand experience and can facilitate a connection with the consumer independent of the actual product claims.

In his book *The Invisible Grail*, John Simmons (2006) suggests that using plain, straightforward language helps build a foundation for a brand, but it does not necessarily help to differentiate one brand from another. To win in competitive marketplaces, a brand must create clear yet *expressive* language that engages audiences and evokes a bond with consumers that goes deeper than functional features, attributes, or benefits. A successful brand language will speak to consumers in a way that reflects their daily lives and aspirations and is consistent with their beliefs and values. For brands that have a sound strategy and effective message delivery, the brand story will become part of their consumers’ life stories. These brands will attract and retain their customers for the long term.

## Exercises

1. Create a brand and write the brand story in about 100 words. Discuss the brand's origin, its reason for being, its personality, and why it is worthy of consumer preference.
2. Write a short narrative involving the brand. Develop characters, a plot, and use literary devices like metaphors.
3. Choose a brand with which you are familiar. Then:
  - a. Write a page like a brand's autobiography.
  - b. Write a screenplay where the brand plays a leading role.
  - c. Write the cover letter that the brand would send when applying for a job.
  - d. Write a dialog representing the conversation that you would expect to have with the brand were the two of you to meet at a party or some other venue.

## Note

- 1 Centrum is now owned by Pfizer.

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