

B2Branding

by *Martin Lindstrom*

Ensuring Growth via Branding.

Let's discuss a product category that's excruciatingly boring: rolling bearings and seals. I want to look at SKF, one of the world's largest manufacturers of rolling bearings and seals.

I don't know about you, but I couldn't think of a less sexy and uninspiring product line. If you didn't know this business or the brand, you'd think (when you visited [SKF's site](#)) you'd arrived at the wrong URL. SKF not only tells you about the company's support of one of the world's largest rock shows and how SKF products help their clients make delicious biscuits, it also has a special [postcard section](#). The SKF postcard facility allows you to download cute love letters or birthday postcards that you can send to your friends. For example, one of the postcards illustrates a couple who have just been married and are now kissing each other. The text reads, "We reduce friction to help you move the world forward." Another postcard bears two hearts created with an assemblage of rolling bearings. The title on this one reads, "You make my heart spin."

Keep in mind: This is a rolling bearings and seals company I'm talking about. Not Lewis, or Diesel, or Nike... but SKF!

Why must business-to-business (B2B) branding be as boring as the companies they represent? Why is B2B considered second-tier branding, requiring cursory, dubious management?

Companies are recognizing that their value doesn't lie only in turnover, assets, and new products, but also on the strength of their brands. They're responding to this realization by dedicating energy to annual reports and press releases. Hey, hang on. Are annual reports and press releases the alpha and omega of brand exposure? Far from it, as well you know. For some reason, most companies still favor these over the extensive menu of branding tools that are available.

A pure "business" person no longer exists. We -- you and I -- are all private people with emotions and feelings that allow us to be just as affected by branding when we're at home as when we're at work.

If you have a bad experience with a company at home or hear something negative about it when talking to your neighbor, would you forget the information as soon as you got to work? I doubt it. We're all subject to information intake across a range of social strata and within countless emotional contexts. This human factor opens the door for B2B branding.

Know what? I'm not in the market for rolling bearings, but if I were to become a decision maker in this area, I'd choose SKF products. Why? Because the company engages in human communication. It doesn't treat me like a boring businessman. It treats me like a person, using personal and relevant communications with twists of humor. I don't need to ask you to consider how boring SKF's site could be (you'd fall asleep before finishing this column). Just visit SKF's competitors (or 90 percent of the rest of B2B brands on the Internet, for that matter), and you'll fall asleep before you've scrolled past the pictures of their factories, CEO mug shots, and archives of their last 400 press releases.

That's not brand building. SKF's tactics are. SKF's communication not only reaches my brain, it touches my heart. That's what branding's all about, even if you're communicating with consumers who are wearing suits.

About the author.



Martin Lindstrom is recognized as one of the world's primary branding experts. A leading thinker in his field, a visionary and an educator in the rapidly growing field of wireless, on- and offline branding, Lindstrom has authored several best-selling books in partnership with industry

icons such as Don Peppers, Martha Rogers and Patricia B. Seybold on the use of emerging techniques for building strong, international brands.

Lindstrom is sought after as a advisor and speaker by companies and organizations throughout the world advising brands such as Yellow Pages, Nokia, LEGO, American Express, Mercedes-Benz, Pepsi and Mars. He energizes audiences with his creative genius and dynamic, unpredictable style. In addition, his acute insights have been featured in The Times, Fortune, BBC Radio, BBC World, BBC 1, The Daily Telegraph, The Observer, USA Today, The Australian and The Independent.

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