

Brand Your Navigation

Back in 1915, Earl R. Dean, who was working at the Root Glass Company, was asked to design a bottle. The brief required that Mr Dean produce a design which could not only be recognized in the dark, but which, even broken into many pieces, could be identified at a glance.

Taking his inspiration from the pod of the cocoa bean, Dean produced a bottle with ridged contours. And the design he came up with fulfilled the brief beyond all expectations. The Coca-Cola Company's distinctive bottle had been born and the contours that defined it became synonymous with the brand. The contouring became a design strategy, which spoke for Coca-Cola's identity, and the bottle became a design icon. Still in service and still recognizable, the bottle has been passing the dark test and the smash test for over 80 years.

This design story is revealing from a brand-building perspective because, in theory, all brand identifiers and vehicles

should be able to pass these sorts of tests.

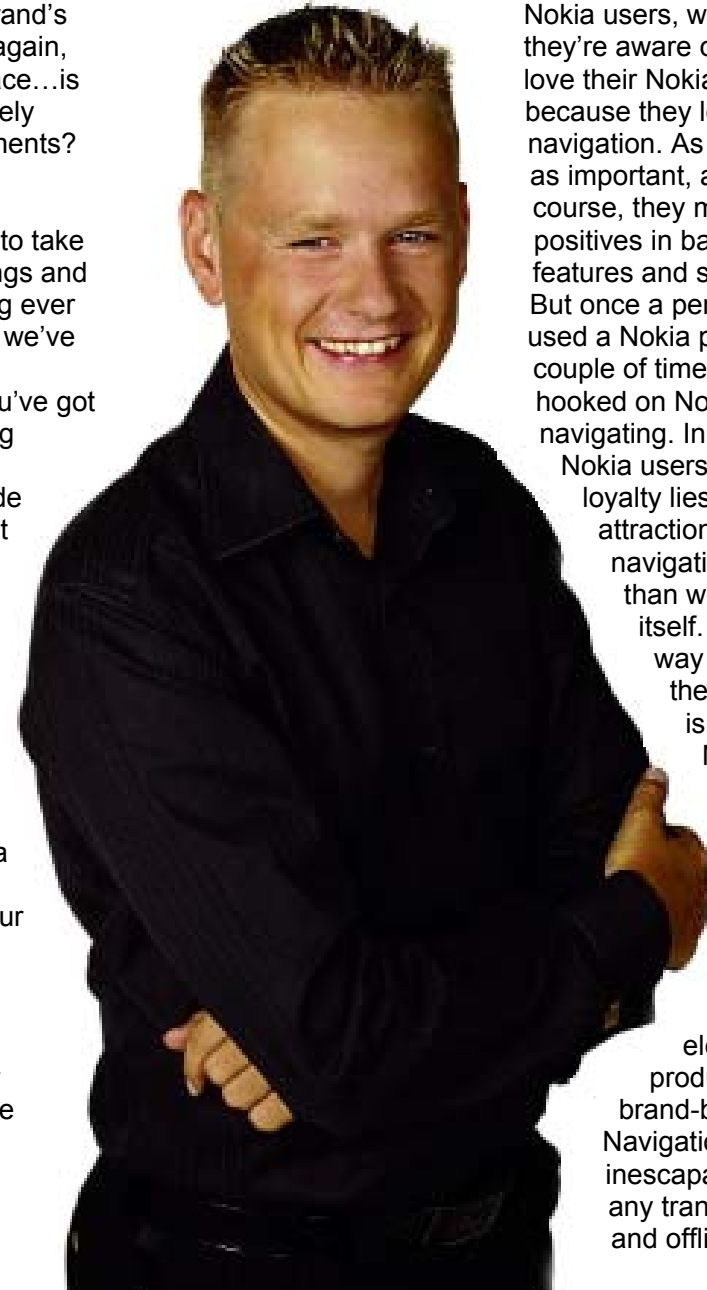
Let's consider this proposition in the most literal of terms. If you removed the logo from your brand identifiers and vehicles – livery, stationary, products, vehicles, signage, and so on - would people still recognize those items as being representatives of your brand? Let's look at your packaging. What's left once the logo disappears. Copy: would it speak for your brand? Colours: would they invoke recognition of your brand? How about your design – graphics, font, spacing – would they convey your brand's identity?

Now let's consider this proposition in terms of your website. Remove the logo entirely and you'll embark on an interesting and instructive exercise which relieves you of any logo-fixations you may still have lurking in your mind and which forces you into brand-building: an operational and managerial philosophy that values the part every communication element

plays in defining a brand's identity. Think copy again, colour, graphics, space...is your brand immediately evident in these elements?

As in all analytical exercises, you need to take cues from your findings and explore their meaning ever more deeply. So far, we've considered the two-dimensional tools you've got at your brand-building disposal. You might have gone a mile wide with this analysis, but so far, we're just an inch deep. Online there's the asset, for brand-builders, of interactivity. How does your brand use this property to express itself? Take away the logo; take away a few other design elements – would your brand's personality speak?

I'm talking about you navigation. Can your navigation survive the dark test and the smash test?



Nokia users, whether they're aware of it or not, love their Nokia cell phones because they love Nokia's navigation. As simple, yet as important, as that. Of course, they might notice positives in battery time, features and signal range. But once a person has used a Nokia phone a couple of times, they're hooked on Nokia's way of navigating. In fact, most Nokia users' brand loyalty lies in their attraction to the navigation, rather than with the brand itself. They like the way it works. But the way it works is uniquely Nokia.

It's a fact that should make us think about how we use the unobvious elements in our products' lives for brand-building gain. Navigation is an inescapable part of any transaction, on-and offline. Use it as

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a brand-building asset.

But we're all victims of habit. Once you become used to a certain way of shopping, driving, surfing ... you name it, that method becomes our own and we like it. Your favoured, most habitual methods build your loyalty to a certain store, or driving route, or beach. Your navigation becomes an accidental part of a brand's attraction for you. There's powerful brand building inherent in harnessing habits. But people can be persuaded to change their habits. People are adaptable and undeviating navigational choice is rarely an obsessive fixation.

If you happen to be amongst those who at some point changed from Apple to PC, you'll remember your frustration over learning a new way of navigating. But once you're used to that new environment, you think you couldn't use anything else. Just use any laptop – you'll have a proprietary navigation technique, the trackball, at your fingertips. You see the trackball is a

trademarked navigation technique. It too is a means of harnessing brand loyalty.

And this premise goes for websites. If I 'smashed your website', could I still tell it was yours by what was left - its structuring? Could I recognize your brand in the way the navigation works? And could I recognize that navigational style not only across your many web pages, but consistently also across channels, from web to wireless to PDA?

Have you, in fact, developed branded navigation?

Amazon.com has, with the trademarked '1-Click' ordering concept. Others have tried to copy this, and been sued for their efforts. The big question is do you have a '1-Click' ordering, trackball or Nokia way of navigation? What are the navigational components on your site, and across all your interactive channels? Are they used consistently? Is your navigation so readily appreciated by your customers, who know what to expect and how to handle

your service through its happily consistent nature, that it's that operational facility that they know your brand for? Do they recognize your navigation as easily as they do your logo?

If not, it might be time to reconsider your navigation strategy and to see it as just as important a part of your brand recipe as your colours, fonts and logo.

About Martin Lindstrom

Martin Lindstrom is recognized as one of the world's primary branding gurus by The Chartered Institute of Marketing. He's next book BRAND sense – can be pre-ordered at Amazon. Lindstrom is the author of several best-selling branding books including BRANDchild with Patricia B. Seybold (Customer.com), Clicks, Bricks & Brands with Don



Peppers & Martha Rogers (1to1 Marketing) and Brand Building on the Internet. He's an advisor to Fortune 100 brands including Microsoft, Reuters, Pepsi, Yellow Pages, Nokia, Disney and Mars. More information on BRAND sense can be found at BRANDsense.com or MartinLindstrom.com

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