

Contextual Branding™

By Martin Lindstrom

The Future of Brand Optimization.

For decades communication agencies have been doing their best to avoid the most critical of questions: What is the return on their marketing investment? In this article Martin Lindstrom introduces you to world of Contextual Branding. Is Contextual Branding the answer to the next generation of branding we all have been desperately searching for?

When I first surfed the Net, some six years ago, I clicked on every bannerad that came before me. I reckon this was, not so much because I was in desperate need for home loan advice, flyfishing equipment or wedding dresses, but because I was curious to see what a bannerad was all about. I can promise you, I'm not curious any longer!

But I am still curious about ads that appear in logical contexts. In these cases, the advertising message makes sense and, piquing my curiosity because of this fact, encourages me to revert to my earlier discovery-oriented behaviour.

I wonder if I'm the only user in the world behaving like this. Hard to tell because, according to Digitas, less than 1% of larger sites compile meaningful profiles on their customers. And, as a result of this lack of consumer behavior data, even fewer manage to situate their messages in within appropriate, interest-compelling contexts.

You might have occasion to claim that a great offer on a respected brand compels

consumer attention. But the reality is that such opportunities are rare. In fact, according to another study conducted by AC Nielsen in Northern Europe, less than 0.05% of bannerads' messages are blessed with the uniqueness that harnesses the attention of consumers beyond the ads' main target groups.

Maybe m-commerce will solve this problem: the Japanese I-Mode phones can you that a friend is in your vicinity and about to pass by, and can then offer an online coupon which you redeem by taking the passing friend to a nearby coffee shop; a bookstore will inform you that the book you've been searching for is available in-store, at the very minute you're passing by the shop. But even though technology like this in Europe and Japan is miles ahead of that in the USA, the fact is that m-commerce represented less than 0.002% of the e-commerce that took place over the last year.

This fact leads me back to the premise which prompted this article: the urgent need for a revision of the way we serve our message, the timing of the message and ... you guessed it — context.

Contextual Branding is simple. It's about how, when and where you serve your message to achieve the best possible result. It's not a surprise that Amazon.com's business model is based on retaining each customer for a significant number of years

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— up to an astonishing twelve years according to some analysts' forecasts. Why is this possible? Because every year a customer is with you, the more you learn. The more you learn, the more value you can squeeze out of your marketing dollars.

I want to see every piece of communication doing what J&J's Tylenol banner ads for headache reliever is doing. The Tylenol banner ad appears on e-broker's sites whenever the stock market falls by more than 100 points. Or how about what Unilever's mobile recipe book is about to do, a concept, which is available on digital mobile phones in Europe. Intended for use while shopping, the mobile tool suggests receipts and breaks them down into their requisite ingredients, identifying, wherever possible, Unilever products. I'd like to see American Airlines alert their customers to flight delays when I'm about to leave for the airport, rather than once I'm there.

Let's be straight. What I'd like is to see advertisers become more creative. To see them think through their consumers' behavior and figure out when the need for their products is at its peak. Put your brand in context by understanding consumer behavior and need.

Contextual Branding is what professional marketers have been doing for decades. But brands now need another push to get them even closer to their consumers' recognition of need. This can only happen by using three ingredients: knowledge of and insight into consumer behavior, an understanding of what technology is available to get as close as possible to the consumer (without interfering with privacy), and tireless creativity.

At least, that's my contextual branding cocktail.
How will you make yours?

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 consultant 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, Newsweek, BBC Radio, BBC World, BBC 1, The Daily Telegraph, The Observer, USA Today, The Australian and The Independent

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