

Unorthodox Brand Alliances

Recently I was in a Copenhagen taxi, heading for the city's airport. My co-passenger was a lady who carried a fancy bag. A very nice bag, I'm sure, but what interested me was the combination of brands it represented. Samsonite produced the bag. No surprise there, as Samsonite is the world's largest luggage manufacturer. This Samsonite bag also represented Philippe Starck, a designer known for his work with furniture who, in this case, had designed the bag for Samsonite.

Brand combinations are indeed often surprising. These days, I often notice alliances I'd never have predicted.

Nestlé and L'Oréal recently announced a relationship. What do these two brands have in common? Anything?

Yes indeed. Nestlé's aim is to produce food that's healthy, not only for the insides of our bodies, but for our skin as well. Who's the

global market leader in skin care? You got it: L'Oréal.

This new, laterally inspired approach to brand alliances will change the way we build brands. In the good old days, the most obviously related brands teamed with each other. Market leaders joined with other market leaders. These days, there's every indication an alliance between a low- and a high-equity brand can be just as valuable for both parties as a marriage between equals.

Why is this development so relevant? Most likely you control an online business. If there's one business arena that can benefit from a brand alliance strategy via links, co-branding and general brand alliances, it's the interactive sector.

So try liberating your strategy from traditional alliances and think outside the box. Identify the values your brand stands for and ways the community perceives your brand, then identify other brands that share your brand's ethos, rationale, commitments or aims. Then, start

brainstorming. If you really want to heat up the creative debate, consider your nearest competitor. Determine which brands they'd have to team up with to give you a run for your money and to ignite corporate envy. Then, get in first. Approach potential partners before your competitors make their own proposals.

The good news is that not many brands have yet really considered alternative brand alliances. There are still lots of opportunities out there. But don't get complacent. It's only a matter of time before your competitor will run away with a partner that could have exposed your brand to a whole new world of business.



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