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## THOUGHTS: BRANDING IS A CASE OF CONTEXT

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One of the most common misconceptions many businesses have is that the message is the brand. That is, the assumption that the ad campaign and its supporting communications and brand are the same/interchangeable.

I prefer to think of branding as 'creating context.' The message is then delivered against the backdrop of this context. And so, a brand is the perception or reputation that exists in the mind of your target consumer and conditions your consumer on how to receive the message. Branding sets the scene, if you will, and the message is the script.

For example, imagine Tata and not Toyota had launched the Prius motor vehicle with its breakthrough eco-friendly motoring technology. Would the vehicle have been as successful with Tata's mark on its sleeve? Arguably not, as the perception of Tata is nearer that of a low-priced, cheap & cheerful entry level car. But launched on Toyota's stage, however, the vehicle has been perceived as highly credible and well received. This is no happy accident, but because over the years, Toyota has built a reputation for engineering excellence, consistent improvement, value for money quality and assured reliability. This reputation did not merely arise from its advertising - with the strap line 'Lead the way Toyota' - but was built through the management of its consistent staff interactions, the performance of its vehicles, the delivery on its promise, the quality showrooms and strategic sponsorships. It was built through the careful and coordinated 'context' that the brand orchestrated across a variety of media. While the benefits of building a great brand and creating the correct context should be quite obvious, one of the most important is the leverage a brand provides; the added clout if you will.

By investing in the brand and creating appropriate context, the effectiveness of your messaging, advertising and communications campaign - and, by extension, your budget - is greatly enhanced and the chance of your targeted consumer actually acting on your message is substantially improved. Thus your campaign spend goes the extra mile over that of your competitor's with an inferior brand.

Establishing and building this brand is an ongoing task that requires meticulous attention to all aspects of your business. This process starts with where your brand is, followed by a shared and inspirational view of where it needs to go. Only then can you plan how to achieve this vision and, just as importantly, how you lead your customer on this journey. A clear brand strategy enables this process and guides interventions along the way.

Design plays an integral role in creating this context and nobody put it better than Paul Rand who describes a logo as providing "the pleasure of recognition and the promise of meaning." It is not the be-all and end-all of branding, but it is the flag bearer of everything to come.

The visual language associated with the identity should continue the conversation. If your business also features a built environment, these same design cues need to be carried through in a consistent manner. Finally, your people need to deliver the requisite service that resonates with the brand vision. What would kulula air be without their zany air crew and their fresh, irreverent approach to in-flight announcements? Of course, the list of touch-points is vast but each needs to be considered in terms of how it contributes to creating the correct context for your brand.

Receiving your ethically sourced, environmentally-friendly Body Shop cosmetics made from organic hemp and recyclable ingredients in a standard government-issue plastic bag would undermine everything the brand stands for and ultimately damage the carefully cultivated context The Body Shop has created.

So, the primary job of branding is to create context and it should in no way be confused with the message. Ideally a business should engage with "context specialists", brand consultants, to create the long-term vision for the brand if it doesn't already exist and use these brand partners on a consistent basis to manage and design the brand touch-points and experiences. There has never been a better time to begin this process; as the world that emerges (hopefully soon!) from this crisis, we will be faced with a very different market from the one we know as people re-evaluate their values and beliefs and commonly held views - businesses will therefore require a whole new context in which to sell their goods and services.