

The Story Behind Lovemarks

The Constancy of Human Nature

We have an extraordinary opportunity to make profound new emotional connections with customers. The unchanging emotional repertoire of human beings, our shared heritage, ensures that the world of tomorrow will be basically as familiar to us as the world of yesterday.

One of my themes is the constancy of human nature. Why? Because to adapt best to a changing world, you have to know what should not change, and you should base that on what cannot change. My contention is that what should not change is whatever we do that connects most powerfully with people. With human nature.

I'm talking about people, and not consumers, very deliberately. I'm convinced that the spirit of this new millennium is shifting us from consumption powered by transactions and information to emotional connections created by relationships. The balance of power switched from manufacturers to retailers in the '90s – it's now switching from retailers to customers. To people.

Tapping Deep Into Human Emotion

That's not a revelation, right? It's in every business book and magazine you pick up. But when you just nod to emotional connections and get on with business as usual, you're missing out on a transforming wave of opportunity. An opportunity to truly connect with people. An opportunity to tap into human emotion more deeply than we have ever done before. And have people love us for it.

Let me show you what I mean. Since 2000 I have been using a device I invented called the Love/Respect Axis.

The Love / Respect Axis

The optimum relationship draws on both high love and high respect. This is where enduring marriages and life-time love affairs belong, along with the places you really want to work, and the destinations in life that inspire and excite you. My contention is that the Love/Respect Axis serves as the absolute measure of emotional heat and commitment.



The High Respect Quadrant is where most successful businesses fit. Great products based on solid R&D, intensive customer research and excellent delivery have led to many outstanding brands. But today these brands are just playing with table stakes. They are simply staying in the game.

Stop Racing After Every Possibility

Why? The last five years or so have seen significant change in business and in marketing. The challenges of the Internet and fragmenting media, the possibilities of personalisation and customisation, the pressures of globalisation. Infinite possibilities seem to proliferate like viruses. And they can rapidly spin out of control, without meaning, direction or firm purpose.

I believe that we must stop racing after every new possibility on the media map. We must instead fix on the fundamentals of human nature. We must turn our attention to the uncharted territory opened up by the Love dimension of the Love/Respect axis.

I always sense scepticism and discomfort when I mention the “L” word, but I can’t think of any other way to express what I know is missing. You may have read the interview with me about Trustmarks in the September 2000 edition of Fast Company. I said there this thinking was a work-in-progress and I meant it. Trustmarks were a transitional phase in my thinking. The Love/Respect Axis tells me that what was missing is Love.

Brands: Death of a Thousand Yawns

Brands and branding are approaching the end-game. The discipline has been buffed by so many smart and eager practitioners that there is little traction left. Refinements on refinements on refinements are now called exciting new developments. Forget it. Everyone is chewing on the same bone and let me tell you – there’s no marrow left.

I see a game-breaking opportunity opening up in the reinvention of brands. Brands today are

suffering the death of a thousand yawns. How do we wake up? By acknowledging that great brands have always been created with love, with inspiration, with emotion. By keeping the emotional juice of brands that must never change, and dumping all those formulas and processes.

I Call Them "Lovemarks"

Today a few great brands run so far ahead of the pack that I call them something else entirely. I call them Lovemarks. They belong here, in the High Love Quadrant of my Love/Respect Axis. They build on respect, but they also make those crucial emotional connections. This is the ground where the future will be won and lost. This reflects the power shift to customers. Our future lies with emotional connections built on respect, sure, but suffused with Love.

Greatest Connections Built On Love

We all know that the greatest connections in life are built on Love. This is how our partners, our friends and our families touch us. We all know that Love links us in many different ways - as couples who have been together for years, as parents and children, as close friends, as lovers. We all know that Love needs time. And we all know that Love cannot be demanded. It can only be given.

It is from this knowledge that every human being shares, from this emotional truth that Lovemarks have emerged. I suggest that connecting with people is something we are not doing very well right now. And putting this right brings us straight into the arms of Love and Lovemarks.

To me what makes Lovemarks stand out is their mystery, their sensuality and their intimacy.

Mystery

First up, let's look at mystery. I see Lovemarks wrapped in great stories and great metaphors. Many of them are infused with secret ingredients and iconic characters.

They skillfully combine past, present and future. They have that sustaining ability to tap into our dreams and aspirations. Sure it is hard to quantify mystery; as Homer Simpson might say: "That's why it is mysterious".

All I know is that it wells up from the rich alchemy of human emotion. And that when you find people starting fan websites and trading collectibles, you're close.

Sensuality

Along with mystery I know a Lovemark has sensuality. They cry out to be touched. There is no way we can understand the world without experiencing it first through the radar of our five senses. The American poet and essayist Diane Ackerman tells us why: "The latest findings in physiology suggest that the mind doesn't really dwell in the brain but travels the whole body on caravans of hormone and enzyme, busily making sense of the compound wonders we catalogue as touch, taste, scent, hearing and vision."

These elements both play to and challenge every aspect of what you do, from your product development and design to your packaging and your advertising.

The five sensuality factors are a simple and humanistic matrix that you could roll across your company tomorrow.

These degrees of sensuality are probably why the research vampires go so wrong when they attempt to plumb emotion with their questionnaires and interviews. The tools are blunt and measure the wrong things: respect, awareness, benefits, market share, sales. And what do they tell us? What people know, what they say, and what they do. Not good enough. We need to know what people feel. Our big questions have to be: "Do they love it?" And, "How can they love it longer, faster, more?"

Think about the I-Mac. It plays to all the senses. Have you ever seen anyone faced with an I-Mac for the first time, who didn't want to touch it? And how did Apple evoke taste? Remember the billboard that simply said: "Yum!"

Intimacy

The third signature of a Lovemark is that people feel they have an intimate connection with it. Intimacy is about body contact, scent, touch. You want to be close. You feel pain when it is withdrawn. The signposts about community, loyalty and relationships fit right here.

Mystery, sensuality, intimacy: these three add up to Love. People have to love, truly love the experience you offer. I'm not talking affection or even lust but that enduring love that allows for a few foibles. It is the sort of love that gets families through the hard times. The love that works on autopilot when you are distracted or inattentive. Love in the bank, if you like.

Dauids and Goliaths

Only a few, a very few of the great brands are also Lovemarks. But I've learnt that this Lovemark standing, this state of grace, is sought after by the Davids as well as the Goliaths.

I've had micro-breweries, pizza makers, car audio specialists and a spiritual motivator for queer folk from Amsterdam all email me wanting the secrets of Lovemarks. I've had some heavy-duty global companies after the same thing.

These Davids have given me a special insight. The adage about love holds true: to love others you first have to love yourself.

These people all LOVE what they do, and LOVE whom they are doing it for. They're permanently infatuated.

Getting the Premium From Love

We learn something from everyone who tells us what they think, and most importantly, what they feel. This is not advertising rubbish – it's about selling more at higher prices more frequently to more people because you have exclusive relationships with them based not only on trust and respect, but on that most powerful of emotions - Love.