

What's the true measure of brand?



Science must be understood as a social phenomenon, a gutsy, human enterprise, not the work of robots programmed to collect pure information.

— Stephen Jay Gould
The Measure and Mismeasure of Man

As the branding and identity consultancy of longest standing in the U.S. we offer the notion that our discipline, at its best, can closely resemble science.

Odd ideas about brand value have cropped up the last several years. Dot-com ventures imagined they could create a brand out of an ad concept, viral marketing and media money, but they concocted phantoms. Attempts were made to deconstruct brand value as a percentage of market capitalization. The word “branding” came into vogue – often meaning building awareness without content – and the inevitable backlash created by these abuses threw the whole notion of brand into question.

Brand is about real value – value in human terms, which doesn’t mean only numbers. It’s what people do, usually together, to fulfill an implied promise. That’s hard to measure, as is often pointed out in this issue. The difficulty is, brand is also an economic proposition. It’s rooted in what companies provide and how well they provide it. And if brand is about company performance, it ought to be measurable. We believe it is, but not only in simplistic financial terms. In fact, the measurement process we espouse is more powerful – it affects business outcomes (see pages 9-13).

Brand often boils down to perception – a slippery, hard-to-get quality, not an in-the-bank quantity. Avon can come back from the brink, despite

years of cultural maladjustment and corporate disinterest, because of residual brand value and new vision, energy and discipline. IBM nearly fell apart as a brand (see details on page 18) yet rebounded with a new corporate strategy and a missionary sense of brand value.

In ten years will women still find Avon relevant? Executives opt for services from IBM? What makes people decide?

These, we believe, are better questions than the proverbial, “How much is my brand worth today?” And while the better questions are more difficult to answer, they provoke answers that build brands and invigorate companies.

This is the crux of the new issue of **Sense**: A celebration of brand at its best, a caution about brand at its most vulnerable, and a quizzical look at brand value distilled to a number. Distillation works for products, not for what’s human.

Let’s remember, our job is not just to measure a brand, but more about building and shaping it for the future.

Kenneth Roberts
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