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Discovering Needs, Wishes, Wants, Desires
-The Only Goal for Research-
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A long time ago it became clear to me that marketing research had only one purpose: to search for the consumer need, wish, want or desires that, if you discovered, will be the key to the finding the marketing "money river" (if you follow my euphemism). What I've found is that while this is an honorable goal, it is a very elusive one.

The Wall Street Journal recently published an article entitled "It's the Purpose Brand, Stupid." It was co-authored by Clayton Christensen of the Harvard Business School: Scott Cook, chairman of Intuit and Taddy Hall, chief strategy officer of the Advertising Research Foundation. This provocative article states "that marketers would be far better served if they started to look at their brands "from the standpoint of understanding what jobs customers need to do—and to build products that serve those specific purposes." (WSJ, 11/28/05).

The authors go on to say that, "When people find themselves with jobs to be done, they essentially hire products to do those jobs." They argue that we must develop "Purpose Brands," or brands that consumers inextricably associate with the jobs they want done.

While this article puts a name to my goal, i.e., developing "Purpose Brands," I'm left with the same issue I've always had. How do we discover the consumer need, wish, want or desire that will cause a brand to have a purpose?

In "Guerrilla Marketing Research", I noted that "Consumers buy products because they **need** them, e.g., an inexpensive Chevy simply to go back and forth. They buy products because they **want** them, e.g., a BMW because it makes a strong statement about their success. They buy products they **wish** for, e.g., a Porsche because it is a symbol of automobile perfection. They buy products they **desire**, e.g., a PT Cruiser because it takes them back to their childhood."

I would argue that by deftly finding their identity along the need, want, wish and desire continuum, Chevy, BMW, Porsche and the PT Cruiser have become "purpose brands." In essence, there is no disagreement with the purpose brand argument. But to state simply that brands should be viewed "from the standpoint

of understanding what jobs customers need to do and position them as Purpose Brands is only half the story.

The other half, the hard part, is to determine clearly the job a brand can uniquely and believably execute so that consumers can indeed understand its purpose.

Our economy is a highly sophisticated and competitive one. For most brands, products and services, we have choices that are far beyond the simple fulfillment of basic needs and wants. We have moved to a point where research that simply uncovers and exploits what might have been a significant need or want in the past is now basic to just remaining competitive. And it's far short of identifying unique "Brand Purpose."

Market researchers can share in much of the blame for the fact that more than 90% of all new products fail. The brands they study continue to be marked by sameness and lack of clear differentiation because the research techniques they use are usually old hat. Researchers must face the fact that they have failed to provide the new tools and approaches that effectively identify the deep-seated wishes and desires that are critical to identifying the purpose their brands should serve.

Consider some examples:

- What does Home Depot differ from Lowe's its brand purpose?
- What about Staples vs. Office Depot vs. OfficeMax?
- How about the cars that General Motors manufacturers vs. the ones manufacture red by Ford?
- Consider Allstate vs. State Farm or CitiBank vs. Chase.
- Or look at Coke vs. Pepsi or Bud vs. Miller.

While these marketers would certainly argue that their brands are positioned with a purpose, the job that each one of them would do for consumers seems identical. I can't begin to distinguish a differentiating need, want, wish or desire that they claim as their own and that would turn these brands into ones that could be referred to as "Purpose Brands." Can you?

It simply isn't enough for the research community to use the same tired research techniques that worked 20 years ago and assume they are relevant in today's ultra-sophisticated marketplace. For marketing research to be a useful tool today, creativity and innovation are needed more than ever. Unfortunately, it is a rare that a researcher in a large corporation will insist on trying new research approaches that are risky and seek to develop new research paradigms. Yet, these are the very paradigms that show promise in teasing out unconscious consumer wishes and desires, that once understood, will allow brands to have a distinct purpose.

Today many new experimental research models and promising research approaches go beyond ones that are traditionally used. Ethnographic research, recall focus groups, focus group panels, consumer overtime behavior studies, observation studies, consumers as creative sources, etc. The point is, we can't really begin to understand the jobs consumers need brands do if research continues to report results using traditional approaches.

Think about a two-hour focus group. Is this state-of-the-art? The moderator asks the questions and respondents give their top-of-mind responses. At the end of the group, after all the moderator probing and projective techniques are exhausted, marketers get their two hours of information, or four, six or eight hours when multiple groups are conducted. Usually, they think they've learned something. Mostly they get the same understanding of their brands and products that their competition gets in their focus group studies. No wonder so many brands look the same. They are all firing from the same gun!

The problem is that often what consumers say in focus groups and what they do are different—and research has long been behind the 8-ball when it comes to reconciling attitudes vs. behavior. I would argue that until management gives research the time and money to develop new tools to understand this dichotomy (and researchers must become more demanding of management support to do so) we're a long way from the era of the "Purpose Brand."

So what to do? Well, would there be a deeper level of understanding, more insightful information if respondents returned for a second or third focus group session...or even beyond? Would more profound needs, wants, wishes and desires surface if consumers were given the time to think about our brands and the jobs they can do? Would combinations of recalling consumers and also observing them going about life in their homes or businesses provide breakthrough brand thinking? Does the whole notion of peaking consumer awareness about the products and brands they use get us closer to the jobs we and our brands can do to make their lives easier? I think so, but if you don't give me something better.

The way research is practiced today taps into the consumer spontaneous attitudes. While this may be all that is needed for many of our focus group studies, it's rare that top-of-mind spontaneous attitudes provide breakthrough Brand Positions. So, what ever you believe about market research, know that without new approaches that dig below the surface, and allow us to truly understand the jobs for which consumers would "hire our brands," we'll be comfortable in the much of the sameness spawned by the era of "positioning."

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Needs, wants, wishes and desires. They are all part and parcel of uncovering the jobs that our brands can uniquely accomplish. Suffice it to say, a catchy phrase (It's about being a "Purpose Brand") is oversimplifying a very complex issue.

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