

Weaving Story, Symbol and Sense Into Brands: The importance of asking *Why?*, *What?* and *How?*

Keeping your brand top of everyone's mind

The central argument of *Brand esSense* is that brands can leverage multiple touch points to enhance their brand identity by sending consistent messages across the stories they tell, the symbolism that they use and the way that they engage the different senses in customer experience of interacting with the brand. Building consistency and linkage across brand stories, symbols and sensory experience enables brands to build stronger assets that increase the mental and physical availability (i.e., visibility) that drive brand growth.

Byron Sharp defines physical availability as “making a brand as easy to notice and buy as possible, for as many consumers as possible, across as wide a range of potential buying situations as possible”. I believe that an additional step in this argument is to understand the emotional goal of customers and use archetypal thinking to link as many of a brand's assets to this goal. The underlying motivation and context of use provide what Romaniuk and Sharp call category entry points (CEPs) that are important markers for brand use.

Much of the core story of *Brand esSense* is the process of understanding human motivations within a specific context and translating this understanding into stories, symbols and sensory experiences that are intimately connected to the motivation in the customer's mind. Motivations can transcend multiple occasions or contexts, and as Sharp points out, salience is much more than top-of-mind awareness and is about building a network of memories and associations that link to the brand.

Telling a consistent story

One way to do this is by using multiple touch points to tell the same “story” through brand symbols, name, smell, taste, sound and touch as well as the visual look of the brand. When done consistently this can create a distinctive and consistent feel to the brand that is engaging with multiple parts of human memory, having a multiplier effect on brand salience within relevant contexts.

In *Brand esSense*, I therefore argue that brand identity should start with the “Why?” of the underlying brand story and the problem that the brand can help customers to solve, before then

building this into a set of symbols with the right meanings (“What?”) and making those meanings tangible through sensory experience (“How?”).

For example, if the core motivation of customers is to explore the world, feel authentic and express themselves as an individual (the Explorer archetype), then symbolism should reflect meanings relating to curiosity about the world a sense of being outside rather than inside and individualism rather than collectivism. These can be expressed through the senses in experiences that have multiple choices and are rich (and sometimes indulgent) such as the experience of spices from around the world or the customisation of Starbucks to offer thousands of combinations of drink.



Care and nurture in soup and soap

The need for nurture and care is a very different motivation, almost directly opposite that of exploration in the StoryWorks model. The meanings attached to the Caregiver archetype are much more about belonging (to a family) and associated with the role of raising children as well as those of care and compassion in the broadest sense.

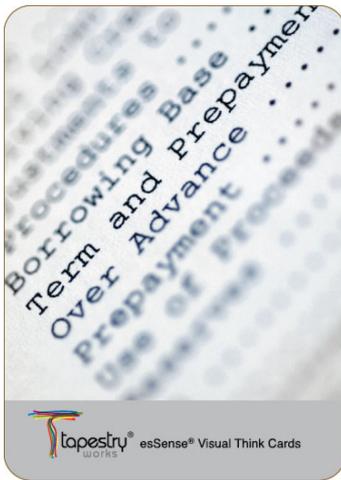
Such human warmth can be linked to the sensory experience of warmth (Campbell’s soup nourishing the soul in the middle of winter) as well as to the ideas of nurture that are portrayed by Dove in their real beauty campaign and through the rich and nourishing “milky” feel of their product experience.



Being a smart choice

By contrast, the need for knowledge and understanding is linked to meanings that are usually more serious, scientific and self-oriented. The owl is an old and common symbol of wisdom across many Western cultures, going back to ancient Greece where the owl was a common physical form of the goddess Pallas Athene. (However, beware of using this symbol in Africa and the Americas where owls are also harbingers of death.)

Knowledge and wisdom are often associated with spectacles, books and libraries and with scientific equations and serious typefaces rather than handwritten script. You are more likely to see women and men in white coats than people dressed in jeans and t-shirts and they won't necessarily have a warm smile like the Caregiver.



Brave enough to smell or taste?

The motivation of overcoming your fears is one used consistently and powerfully by Nike. Much of the symbolism around courage, bravery and independence links back to ideas of athleticism (i.e., physical power) and aggression. For example, the symbol of a soldier's helmet triggers the same emotions as the Nike swoosh (Nike is the name of the Greek goddess of victory).

Similarly, Dettol has long deployed a symbolic sword as part of its brand identity to support its "Mission for health". It has "aggressive" sensory characteristics too, in the strongly antiseptic smell and the "ouzo effect" of the milky emulsion that appears when it is dissolved in water, signifying its potent effects.



Associate with the right motivations

Thus, all humans learn to associate the motivations that drive their behaviour with symbols and sensory experiences that “feel” right for that particular context. Of course, such associations are often culturally specific rather than universal, although many do transcend multiple cultures. For example, the colour red is strongly associated with passion and aggression across most cultures, reflecting reds longer history than most colours and also the specific physiological effects that it triggers.

In much of TapestryWorks’ work, we use standardised visual projective tools to understand the implicit associations that link to a category or brand. Our visual approaches are fun for participants too, capturing their instinctive and unconscious feelings and thoughts in a playful way. Although playful, the results uncover rich insights into the “How?” of the experience, the “What?” of the symbolism that they associate with that experience, and the “How?” of the underlying motivation.

So when you are considering how to design your next new brand experience, consider how you can design the experience to reflect the core values of the brand. And if you would like to know more about TapestryWorks process for understanding and designing a stronger brand esSense® then please get in touch.

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This is the eighth in TapestryWorks’ series of case studies and white papers. TapestryWorks decodes people and culture to build consistent meaning into brand experiences. We help build culture sense for brands.