



Do people see you as you want to be seen?

Brands – brands everywhere. Take a moment look to your left – look to your right - look in the mirror and tell yourself how many brands can you see. From people waking up to their alarm on a 'carefully chosen' mobile phone to being in the line to get the first morning branded skinny latte served in a 'carefully chosen' favourite coffee shop. As our society walks down the street feeling fantastic in 'carefully chosen' designer outfits on their way to a 'carefully chosen' life – ask yourself, 'did they choose the brands or did the brands choose them?' Don't feel dismayed if that question seems to hurt somewhat as there is no real logical answer to it. However, if we can begin to separate and clearly understand the power that brands have over our society, and learn from this power when making our own Living Brand, then success beyond your wildest dreams is waiting around the corner.

In today's busy brand environment what separates the winners from the mediocre is a question that needs addressing if you are going to use this status for both your career and in building key relationships with others in your life. Wikipedia defines brands as labels of ownership: name, term, design, and symbol. To me that sounds like your own personal business card and somewhat too simplistic for such a huge unconscious environment. However, today it is what brands do for people that matters much more, how they reflect and engage them, how they define their aspiration and enable them to do more. Powerful brands can drive success in competitive markets, and indeed become the organisation's most valuable assets. Harnessing this unconscious power and applying it to ourselves, staff and friends, lies in the simple understanding that brands are alive. They are created to exist in the hearts and minds of their users and in so have penetrated the two most valuable assets needed to assist in their growth.

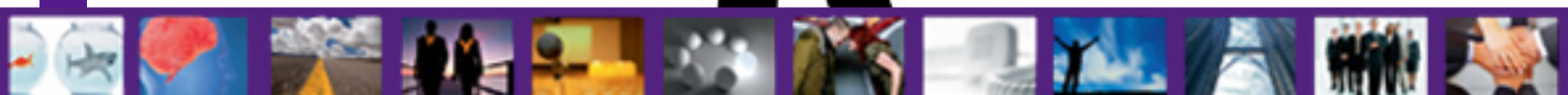
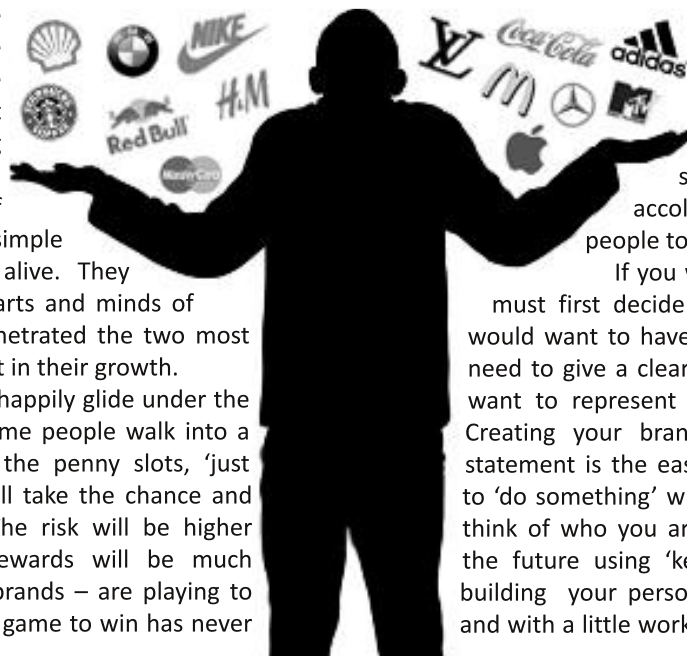
It is easy to play it safe and happily glide under the radar for most of your life. Some people walk into a casino and head straight for the penny slots, 'just playing not to lose'- others will take the chance and head for the pound slots. The risk will be higher however if they win, the rewards will be much greater. These people – like brands – are playing to succeed. Note that playing the game to win has never

been more complicated as people have higher expectations of the brands they both respect and trust. Hence if we are going to apply this methodology to our own personal development then we too must recognise that the search for talent and inspired individuals also follows and ever increasing expectation line. The secret behind successful brands is setting clear, honest and realistic expectations and consistently managing and delivering them.

The brands market is constantly being put under the microscope to ensure that they are living up to their brand expectation. Great brands, like successful leaders, are playing to win. They have a clearly defined plan of words and actions required to achieve their goal. Their success lies in their delivery and ensuring that you as a consumer are getting what you have come to expect. If you have ever been disappointed, dismayed or even disgusted with one of your respected brands then you may have found yourself saying 'I would have expected more from xxxx'. This is the dangerous side of brand development, as if you set the expectation line too high then the further you may fall if you are unable to maintain it. The loss of respect can far outweigh any gains that the success of the brand may have accomplished.

A true brand is not merely a marketing construct but a carefully developed pattern that represents a body of ideas and beliefs that inspire a culture and will drive a company's relationship with the world. It is conceived with values and a unique identity that develops, changes and adapts to its environment. Our most successful brands are embedded with their intended audiences and in doing so they enter into lasting relationships. The Living Brand follows the same process of evolution with both an identifiable point of view and an ability to develop into a powerful and recognisable force. It is with careful and clear guidance that successful brands reach such a high accolade and with the same construct, people too can benefit from conscience work.

If you want to grow your Living Brand, you must first decide the 'key defining words' that you would want to have attributed to you. You as a brand need to give a clear message to the world of what you want to represent and how you will engage with it. Creating your brand values words and the mission statement is the easiest part as later you will be asked to 'do something' with those words. Take a moment to think of who you are now and who you want to be in the future using 'key words'. The great thing about building your personal brand is that it can start today and with a little work you can leave some of the negative



past behind you. Come up with the words that you would like to have attached to you in both your work and personal life. Many people will start with professional, intelligent, talented, humorous, generous, and motivated etc. This list will be the foundation for your Living Brand – however, remember it is just a list of words, words and more words. Once this list is set you have just completed the stage one: Building your Brand.

Let's move on to stage two: Becoming the Brand, as work at this stage will get a little more intense and you will need to spend more time setting in place your actions. We are an action-based species and so if you want something you must do something, and more importantly if you want something different, then you will need to do something differently. Like the famous quote from Albert Einstein "the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result." It is important at this stage of your Living Brand that you put manageable and achievable actions against the words that you have established as your Living Brand guidelines. If you have 'professional' on your list, ask yourself what it means to you and what actions do you currently possess that will deliver this to your environment. Secondly review what else you can add into your rebrand to ensure that your Living Brand emanates this word. If one of your statements was 'outgoing' – run through the same process. Once this exercise has been

"if you want something different, then you will need to do something differently."

completed you now have a clear brand guide of what you need to do to launch your new Living Brand.

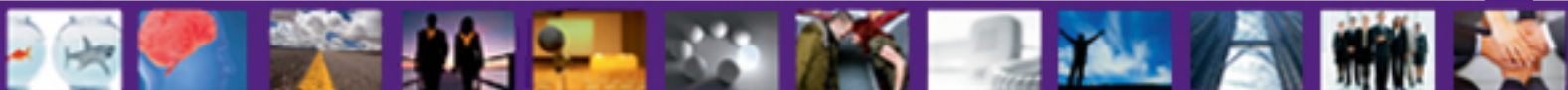
Now here comes the challenging part, stage three: Owning the Brand - however please remember that all our great and good, our local and global, our best of the best brands have not been built over night. They take time to cultivate their environment; they market research and test their ideas, look and feel before moving full steam ahead. More importantly they ensure that once they have set the expectation lines of its customers they will deliver time and time again. The pulse of our great brands moves with the times and they ensure that their core values are consistent and true to the brand. Once you have developed your list of actions you must firstly ensure that they are manageable and you will commit to them for the long term. Your Living Brand does not need to be complex, in fact the simpler the better, however, it must be able to give you the satisfaction required to continue to the final stage. It is better to spend the time to truly understand what each brand word means to you and how you will deliver it to your audience in the future.

4 stages to creating your living brand: Building the Brand Becoming the Brand Owning the Brand Keeping the Living Brand Alive

Once you have your clear Living Brand values, your achievable plan of how those words will be manifested through your actions and more importantly your commitment to deliver them ask yourself a few final questions. What gives my Living Brand the edge in our competitive business and personal relationship marketplace? What makes me different and what is at the real core of who I am and how do I want to be remembered? With these final questions answered you are now ready to launch your Living Brand into the market. As with all brands, never lose sight of your core values and the actions that you must manifest in order to show your brand. Just saying the words without deliverable actions is the main difference separating the winners from the mediocre. Saying it and living it are two very different sides of your living brand.

The final stage is 'Keeping the Living Brand Alive' and this key stage is all about implementation and how to ensure that you as a Living Brand are equipped and motivated to maintain the brand management status that you have reached. People development is about growth, nurturing, caring, respect and engagement and most of all it needs to be maintained, monitored and managed. Your Living Brand needs consistency, commitment and connection at all levels, hence it is important that you spend time reviewing the positive changes that you have made. To continue with the momentum you must bask in positive feedback and ensure that you listen and respond to your environment. In the true nature of brands it is a must to market and monitor the impact your Living Brand from day one. In secret give it a name and if you have the resource, a little logo and identity. This will allow you the opportunity to better manage the Living Brand experience in the final stage. Like all prospects of life change, you will need to remind yourself of the new you and how best to not slip back into old habits.

Creating your Living Brand is an opportunity to be more creative and more involved in the life that you have outlined. The 'Keeping the Living Brand Alive' stage needs to involve, take ideas from and encourage other Living Brands to keep the momentum alive and growing internally. If managed correctly through a detailed plan, continuous inspiration and future development then your living brand experience will last far in the future and will encourage you to embrace change. The words may look great on paper however the actions and the desire to deliver the brand promise is what makes truly exceptional and driven people succeed. Brands have great attitude and this attitude will only be delivered through the actions of your Living Brand.



About the Author

Dale Smith formed Bridge Training Events in 2005 after an extensive career in working with many organisations in both the UK and abroad. He wants to make a positive difference in business. His keen interest lies in behavioural science, branding and ensuring that customer service is met from all tiers within an organisation. He is passionate about enriching the lives of delegates and improving the customer service excellence with each organisation he works with.