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The uninvited brand

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Abstract   Brands rushed into social media, viewing social networks, video sharing, online communities, and microblogging sites as the panacea to diminishing returns for traditional brand building routes. But as more branding activity moves to the Web, marketers are confronted with the stark realization that social media was made for people, not for brands. In this article, we explore the emergent cultural landscape of open source branding, and identify marketing strategies directed at the hunt for consumer engagement on the People's Web. These strategies present a paradox, for to gain coveted resonance, the brand must relinquish control. We discuss how Web-based power struggles between marketers and consumer brand authors challenge accepted branding truths and paradigms: where short-term brands can trump long-term icons; where marketing looks more like public relations; where brand building gives way to brand protection; and brand value is driven by risk, not returns.
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1. The party crashers: Marketers and the Social Web

Brands today claim hundreds of thousands of Facebook friends, Twitter followers, online community members, and YouTube fans; yet, it is a lonely, scary time to be a brand manager. Despite marketers' desires to leverage Web 2.0 technologies to their advantage, a stark truth presents itself: the Web was created not to sell branded products, but to link people together in collective conversational webs. As more branding activity moves online, marketers are confronted with the realization that brands are not always welcome in social media. Amid the cultural conversation, most brands seem inauthentic; their presence intrusive and out of place. Brands, as much as we might wish otherwise, are uninvited crashers of the Web 2.0 party. The technology that was supposed to empower marketers has empowered consumers instead.

Brands rushed into social media, viewing social networks, video sharing sites, online communities, and microblogging sites as the panacea to diminishing returns in traditional mass media. Despite declining audiences, consumers' increasing desire and ability to skip advertising embedded in programming, and a tremendous amount of clutter, prices for traditional media increased steadily year over year. Social media, by comparison, looked cheap and easy; a matter simply of switching spending from traditional to online forms. The shift seemed

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like a no-brainer, with the average consumer in 2010 devoting 32% of his or her media consumption to online channels, up from 26% in 2008 (Lang, 2010).

The Social Web offered a toolbox of tantalizing technologies for delivering against brand management goals. Web 2.0 technologies permitted two-way conversations with customers, and rare opportunities for the brand to listen to consumers and respond. Web 2.0 afforded the collection of in-depth information about consumer preferences and lifestyles, enabling micro-targeting and ad-dressable, customized messaging. By all counts, emerging Web technologies would finally grant marketers the power to deliver on relationship marketing in the true spirit and intention of the term.

Unfortunately, brands' early attempts to crash the social media party were largely ignored and rebuffed. When marketers jury-rigged their television advertising and posted ads to YouTube and Facebook, consumers largely ignored them. As more branding activity migrated to the Web, consumers resisted advertising in their new social spaces. The Web, after all, was made for people and their conversations; it was not a new media channel for communications about marketers' brands.

An interesting paradox presented itself: in social media, everyone—and no one—was the audience. While YouTube served up over 2 billion videos per day, no one was compelled to tune into a branded video, and most did not. Brand marketers no longer controlled the reach of their messages, consumers did. Exposure was a function not of audience size but of consumer volition; a by-product of viewers who voluntarily rated and ranked content, shared it with friend networks, or re-posted it to content-sharing sites like Digg.com. Marketers lost control of their content and the reach, frequency, and timing of the distribution of their messages (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Brands could be everywhere in social media and yet still be ignored.

While disheartening, this failure to break through the clutter was not the most troublesome part of the Web 2.0 branding game. As brands struggled to leverage social media, consumers learned how to leverage brands for their own purposes and ends. Marketers hoping to nurture relationships with their consumers launched online communities and Facebook profile pages, but people came looking for price deals or a convenient place to complain. When marketers created stylized content that could be spread virally through Web 2.0 technologies, they were horrified to see these same sharing capabilities used against them. Consumers hijacked brand messages and turned them into parodies. They played with brands to entertain themselves. They exposed company weaknesses and shortcomings. In an ironic turn

of the tables, consumers were using social media to target brands and companies, rather than brands using social media to target them. Branding had become an open source activity, via which anyone and everyone had a say in matters of the brand.

Herein, we explore the branding challenges associated with the shift in power from marketers to consumers on the People's Web. In the ensuing sections, we illuminate the emergent landscape of what we call *open source branding* and identify marketing strategies directed at the hunt for consumer engagement on the People's Web. These strategies present a paradox, for in gaining resonance, the brand relinquishes control. We discuss how Web-based power struggles between marketers and consumer brand authors challenge accepted branding truths and paradigms: where small, short-term brands can trump large, long-term icons; where marketing looks more like public relations; where brand building gives way to brand protection; and brand value is a function of risks, not returns.

2. The landscape of open source branding

Open source branding takes place when a brand is embedded in a cultural conversation such that consumers gain an equal, if not greater, say than marketers in what the brand looks like and how it behaves. Open source branding implicates participatory, collaborative, and socially-linked behaviors whereby consumers serve as creators and disseminators of branded content. Social media technologies such as blogging, video sharing, social bookmarking, social networking, and community platforms enable open source branding by empowering consumers to create their own personalized experiences and by providing venues via which they can easily share content with like-minded friends. A new branding landscape has developed in the context of these novel technologies: one that is complex and challenging, and perhaps not as inviting or collaborative as many critiques suggest. Next, we talk about these shifts in context, organizing our discussion around four powerful and challenging Web-enabled themes: The Age of the Social Collective, The Age of Transparency, The Age of Criticism, and The Age of Parody.

Within our discussions of the Ages, we report on different strategies that brands have adopted in order to cope with each new cultural dynamic. Our analysis suggests three overarching managerial approaches—The Path of Least Resistence; Playing Their Game; Leveraging Web 2.0 Interconnectedness—each varying in its risks and rewards. The Path of Least Resistance involves ceding control of the brand to

consumers, bowing to social media pressure, and essentially admitting to consumers: You win, it's yours. Many consider this strategy inevitable; in Web 2.0, when the collective talks, brands are supposed to listen. When executed well, the brand can also gain much-coveted citizenship credentials and actually come off looking quite good.

Playing Their Game entails brands seeking to gain cultural resonance by being where the action is on social media, and fitting in seamlessly with what is happening there. This approach requires mastery of the nuanced principles, styles, and mechanisms governing the new cultural environment such that the brand can dilute its inherent intrusiveness on the People's Web.

Finally, Leveraging Web 2.0 Interconnectedness takes consumers and feeds into their evolving habits to entice them to 'play the brand's game.' This strategy strives to tip the power scales back to marketing by providing fodder to get consumers to work on behalf of the brand. Examples from each of these different strategies are brought to bear in bringing the cultural brandscape alive. Our article closes with broader implications of the open source environment for the practice and philosophy of brand marketing overall.

2.1. The Age of the Social Collective

The dramatic rise and success of the Internet arguably traces to its delivery against one of the most basic human motivations: the desire to feel accepted, to fit in, and to belong. Web 2.0 fosters a sense of community through virtual connections among like-minded people and enables the search for and celebration of micro-targeted niche groups to which people can easily belong. Status updates and micro-blogging allow people to feel and stay connected to each other through low-energy, casual participation. Online communities offer opportunities for in-depth discussion of shared interests, strengthening group bonds. With the click of a 'Share This' button, people are brought together in mutual camaraderie, if only briefly or over trivialities like jokes and videos on YouTube.

Brand consumption can serve as social glue connecting consumers to each other, and social media technologies enable these connections. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Ning provide people with easy ways to 'friend' or 'follow' favorite brands, identify relevant brand communities, and build peer-to-peer relationships within which they can collaborate and share brand information. While some social media brand favorites like Apple and Starbucks are predictable given their sizable offline fan bases, others are more surprising. For example,

the Facebook page for Ferrero's Nutella brand claimed status as the third most popular page in 2009, uniting 4.9 million fans of the chocolate and hazelnut spread who gather together to share their brand experiences (Wasserman, 2009). Nutella's page was originally created by a fan, and Ferrero's hands-off approach to site management helps keep authenticity strong. The second most popular Facebook page is Coca-Cola's (Klaassen, 2009). Like Nutella, the site was originally built by aficionados whose efforts helped cultivate a fan base of 14 million. Coca-Cola's philosophy regarding brand control was put to a difficult test when Facebook instituted a policy change regarding the ownership and management of branded pages. Confronted with a decision to either take over the Coke fan site or close it down, Coca-Cola boldly announced that it would share ownership with its fan base. The site's originators now co-manage the site alongside Coca-Cola, which plays a decidedly backseat role. Most companies find it hard to cede control to consumers when push comes to shove. Hasbro forced the shutdown of *Scrabulous*, a consumer-created online version of its classic Scrabble board game, which claimed supporters a half-million strong. Apple is embroiled in a lawsuit against one of the many rumor websites dedicated to the company. Brands like Nutella and Coca-Cola recognize that the support of the collective is garnered only when management acknowledges consumers' rightful ownership and relinquishes brand control.

Wal-Mart learned this lesson the hard way when its Facebook page dedicated to dorm-room design was immediately overrun by zealous protesters. One poster wrote: "Facebook should take the number of negative comments on this page as a note that we don't support this company [for] its use of a space for social networking. This space is for people talking to other people" (Havenstein, 2007). By the end of 2009, Wal-Mart had experimented with several more Facebook iterations, the most successful of these garnering only 18,000 fans (McDevitt, 2009). Successful brands earn the right to participate in consumers' social spaces. They know that when brands crash the social media party, they can generally expect a fight.

Managers adopt a variety of strategies for interfacing with the power shift. Some brands start from scratch and develop business models founded on the very principle of collective power (Pitt, Berthon, Watson, & Zinkhan, 2002). Groupon's value proposition is based on the online interconnectedness of consumers and the combined power that social networks can afford. Groupon offers its members a daily opportunity to buy into a coupon for local attractions, events, restaurants, and stores, but the offers are valid only if enough people sign up

to receive them. People are motivated to cull their social networks to grant the offer's needed scale and scope. BuyVIP.com, Gilt.com, and Rue La La are other businesses that entice consumers to build shopper communities in order to earn 'mobdeals': discounted merchandise available for short time periods, only to those in the club.

Targeted programs can also be designed to focus the power of the collective on brand objectives, as in the case of the Paramount/DreamWorks movie, *Paranormal Activity*. Via the company's Fans Demand It promotion, Paramount Pictures (2009) committed to releasing the movie nationwide if 1 million consumers banded together online to command it. Backed by a groundswell of pre-formed demand, the film garnered stature as one of the most profitable movies of all time. President Barack Obama is well-known for focusing the power of the collective to garner support for his own and the Democratic Party brands. Starting with an online campaign that raised funds through shared social networks and encouraged the spread of campaign messaging, the President now uses his own site to blog and solicit citizens' comments on proposed legislation, YouTube to distribute video content, and Twitter to keep voters informed. Obama's use of social media not only builds public ownership in the legislative process, but also provides needed support to senators and congressmen by bringing the power of the collective solidly in line.

Managers can also cede power to the collective for specific brand decisions and tasks. Websites like Lego Mindstorms, MyStarbucksIdea.com, and MySearsCommunity.com solicit and capture consumer feedback to inform product pipelines and advertising promotions. Chiquita used crowd-sourcing to identify brand messages for its oval product label. At Frito-Lay, the Lays brand regularly solicits consumer input on flavor extensions, and Doritos has three times run consumer-generated Superbowl ads. Mountain Dew's Dewmocracy campaign (www.dewmocracy.com) taps into the collective intelligence of consumer communities on many levels. As consumers generate ideas for new flavors, Mountain Dew produces them in small batches and samples them around the country, collecting votes along the way. Fifty 'super fan' Web influencers are mailed tasting kits and video cameras, and asked to debate the different flavors and post their video commentaries to the Web. Various constituencies of consumers generate product names, package designs, and advertising for the leading contenders. In each of these examples, companies gain partnership points in exchange for brand control rights.

The Pepsi Refresh campaign (Sviokla, 2010) takes the idea of consumer-driven programs one step further, granting not just decision-making rights to consumers, but allowing them to reshape brand values at their core. In this case, the company redirected Superbowl advertising funds to consumer-identified and voted causes in local communities. Rather than spending $20 million communicating a carefully-crafted brand message via television advertising, Pepsi now relies on consumer-directed Refresh Everything grants it extends to health, environmental, cultural, and educational causes to communicate the story of its brand.

Skittles also advanced the notion of branding via the consumer collective when it redesigned its corporate website as entirely open source. The Skittles site uses widgets to continuously capture and display live, un-moderated, consumer-generated content feeds from Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (French, 2009). The Skittles homepage comes directly from a Facebook fan page; a product information tab is fed from Wikipedia; a news update tab feeds from Twitter. By ceding complete control to consumers, the Skittles website represents exactly what the people are saying about the brand at any particular moment; corporate messaging is noticeably absent in the public face of the brand. Rather than using Web 2.0 to open two-way conversations with consumers, Skittles remains silent on brand matters and relinquishes the floor.

Hijacking is another approach to interfacing with consumer-created Web content, whereby marketers engage rigorous searches for organically-created brand messages that can be co-opted for the benefit of the firm. By associating brands with social media events that are already on their way to becoming viral sensations, marketers hope to borrow Web 2.0 cultural currency, fly a bit under the radar, and encourage a halo effect of authenticity onto their brands. Harley-Davidson offers an example of coat-tailing on the heels of organic brand activity. In 2006, skateboarding sensation Heath Kirchart decided that his band of boarders would ride Harley-Davidson motorcycles on their summer tour, and uploaded a video of their experience—Emerica: The Wild Ride—to YouTube. Harley-Davidson took notice, as the brand was dramatically underrepresented among youth. Two years later, Harley became the official sponsor of Kirchart's tours. This move allowed the company to reap the benefits of branded content that leveraged the shared love of adventure and risk-taking uniting motorcycle riders and boarders across generational lines.

Sometimes it takes marketers awhile to see the benefits of harnessing consumer content, especially when that content seems only remotely related to the brand. In 2006, Fritz Grobe and Stephen Voltz began producing and distributing a series of videos

demonstrating what happens when Diet Coke and Mentos candies are mixed. Hilarious videos featuring geysers of shooting soda, in increasingly sophisticated chain reactions, were quickly passed from consumer to consumer, generating over 12 million downloads. Susan McDermott, spokesperson for Diet Coke, did not see the humor: ''We would hope people want to drink [Diet Coke] more than try experiments with it. . . .[The] craziness with Mentos. . .doesn't fit with the personality [of Diet Coke]'' (Schneider, 2007). Mentos, on the other hand, capitalized on the opportunity, reaching out to sponsor the two creators, prominently featuring the videos on the Mentos homepage, and running a contest soliciting more videos for its site. Only after the phenomenon hit the mainstream media, with appearances on *Late Night with David Letterman* and *The Today Show*, did Diet Coke jump on the bandwagon and sponsor videos for its corporate site.

Active listening is critical if a company wants to appropriate what the social collective is doing; brands cannot take advantage of organic content if they do not know what is going on. Significant investments are being made in eavesdropping infrastructures, such that companies can intervene in consumer conversations when the opportunity seems ripe. Mission Control, Gatorade's social media center (SMC), monitors social media 24 hours a day using a proprietary set of protocols developed by IBM, social media tracker Radian6, and others, measuring the amount and sentiment of the Web buzz about its brand and its celebrity spokespeople (Bauerlein, 2010). One of the four full-time employees dedicated to the effort claims the system allows Gatorade to contribute to consumer conversations in real time, supplying desired information just when consumers need it, as—for example—when posters misrepresent that Gatorade contains high fructose corn syrup, or wonder about the best time to hydrate. ''It's like we're a person in their social circle now,'' claims chief marketing officer Sarah Robb O'Hagan (Buss, 2010).

But, active listening can put the brand on a path whose consequences are detrimental to the company and brand. Consider the case of *Jericho*, a low-viewership TV series slated for cancellation by CBS (Wyatt, 2007). When *Jericho* fans, spurred on by social media activity, expressed their anger by sending 40,000 pounds of peanuts to corporate headquarters, CBS bowed to pressure and produced seven more episodes. Still, economics remained in line with consumers' revealed preferences, and less than a year later, continued low viewership caused CBS to quietly cancel the show (Toff, 2008).

Repercussions of giving in to the collective can extend deeper: from a short-term hit to the company's balance sheet, to the very business model that undergirds the brand. Consumers' brand directives can be in conflict with the brand mission, and can veer the brand dangerously off track. Frito-Lay's decision to jettison its 100% biodegradable Sun Chips packaging, after consumers complained that it was too noisy, provides a stark case in point (Brady, 2010). After 3 years of research and development, the brand is now scrambling to assuage consumers with a new packaging design that delivers 'quietly' against the company's environmental goals.

These examples highlight an important element of the Web-empowered social collective: despite marketers' hopes that it could be otherwise, the social collective is an inherently self-interested entity whose activities are not necessarily aligned with the best interests of the brand. Consider the case of Porsche and its introduction of the Cayenne SUV sub-brand (Avery, 2007). Porsche sports car owners felt threatened by SUV-driving soccer moms, despite Porsche's hope that its most loyal customers would welcome new drivers into the fold. In protest, online fans banded together to exclude Cayenne SUV owners from joining their discussions or claiming heritage connections to 'their brand.' This distancing move forced the company to run a family-of-brands advertising campaign claiming that all Porsche sub-brands were legitimate and equally respected. The campaign backfired and fed the flames of anti-Cayenne sentiment in online forums. The criticism made its way into traditional media, weakening the overall equity of the Porsche brand.

The power of consumer collectives can invite unintended consequences that challenge not only brand equity, but the very purpose and stature of marketing. Outdoorseiten.com, a German outdoor lifestyle community brand, demonstrates how marketing can be downgraded when consumers hold brand control (Fuller & Von Hippel, 2008). As the Outdoorseiten advice and information community organically developed its website, members decided to create their own outdoor lifestyle goods brand. A new type of tent was called for; shoes with a certain sole optimized for rugged terrains were needed; kids deserved child-sized hiking poles. The community eventually reached out to marketing professionals for help with the brand mission, but emphatically downgraded their role. Consumers would serve as brand stewards and owners, with marketers relegated to outsourced distribution and manufacturing roles.

Although the Web was originally praised for the rare opportunity it afforded two-way, reciprocating relationships, these examples tell a different story. For all intents and purposes, the scales on the

People's Web are in favor of consumers and in opposition to the brand.

2.2. The Age of Transparency

Availability of and convenient access to information is one of the more empowering and revolutionary forces of the Internet. Previously the venue of trained journalists, now anyone with a casual interest can decipher the story behind the story and figure out when a company is misrepresenting the truth. If there is one truism driving Web 2.0 branding, it is that everything that can be exposed will be exposed; for all intents and purposes, muckraking has become a mainstream sport (Zaslow, 2010). Facing the ticking time bomb of publicity, where no contentious action goes unnoticed or unannounced, contemporary brands seem to have no choice but to adopt proactive positions of full disclosure. *Wired Magazine* calls it 'Radical Transparency' (Thompson, 2007), while Tapscott and Ticoll (2003) talk about 'The Naked Corporation.' Whatever the label, the move from secrecy to transparency involves a slippery, scary slope.

We are all too familiar with examples of unearthed information that, spread like wildfire via social media, weaken iconic brands. Alec Baldwin's voicemail rant to his daughter and Tiger Woods' frantic text messages to his girlfriends readily come to mind. Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty serves as another classic example, as exposed corporate connections with the misogynistic Axe brand and skin-lightening cream Fair & Lovely dealt the award-winning campaign a social media blow (Semuels, 2007). In the words of *Socialnomics* author Erik Qualman (2009, p. 47): ''What happens in Vegas stays on YouTube.'' The effects on brand equity are lasting and strong.

The damage of unearthed information can extend beyond corporate reputations to the provision of legally-binding indications of culpability and intent. E-mails from Goldman Sachs expressed a corporate attitude of opportunism and consumer disregard that weighed heavily in governmental investigations into the company's financial meltdown. Enron's e-mails exposed the depth and breadth of its accounting fraud. Internal company documents at Toyota left little room for wondering exactly what company executives knew, and when they knew it. In open source branding, secrecy is no longer a legitimate competitive strategy for a firm.

Internal employees are increasingly in on the game of forced transparency. Consider the fashion photograph retoucher, hired by Unilever's advertising agency, who exposed photo-shopping in the production of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty ads (Collins, 2008); likewise, the Astra-Zeneca sales representative who posted a YouTube video describing how he was coached by the company to misrepresent side effects of its Zyprexa brand (Thomaselli, 2007). When employees turn their own authenticity against their companies, they use corporate credibility to expose and weaken their brands.

Authenticity is the critical currency in establishing transparency, and the qualifications are difficult and high. An authentic brand demonstrates veridicality and genuineness in the brand's claimed position; its messaging, assertions, and behaviors are all supportive and aligned. The authentic brand adjusts its face to the risks that confront it; the brand is justifiably what it says it is. The authentic brand is willingly open and honest. You see what you get with an authentic brand, for that brand has nothing to hide.

The United States Army embraced radical transparency in its Straight from Iraq video series, a Web-relayed recruitment initiative which bore the additional challenge of selling participation in a very unpopular war (Elliott, 2008). The campaign was designed to appeal to a younger generation who had lost faith in The Establishment and who preferred to learn about products and services not from low-credibility advertising executions, but from unfiltered words-on-the-street uttered by their peers on the scene. By inviting people to text questions to soldiers stationed in the Middle East, the campaign put the target audience in direct contact with individuals who were actually engaged in the conflict, providing an uncensored and first-hand look at the war.

The recent fiasco surrounding BP's leaking Deepwater Horizon oil rig provides a striking case of the very real risks the proclaimed authentic brand confronts. For 10 years, BP had billed itself as the environmentally-friendly petroleum company, changing its logo to a green sun, hosting a website called The Green Curve, and building eco-friendly gas stations. The company promoted environmental concerns as one of the brand's four primary values. As the Deepwater Horizon disaster unfolded, with protracted and painful daily exposure of details regarding shortcomings in company environmental policies and procedures, the brand's green positioning was revealed as nothing more than a marketing game. Greenpeace awarded the company an Emerald Paintbrush for its 'greenwashing.' Brand Key's founder, Robert Passikoff, provides a pointed observation: ''Today, reputation is your brand positioning minus what you've been caught doing. That is exactly what we are seeing here, and BP is in a lot of trouble'' (Mahoney, 2010).

While the younger generations seem quite comfortable with the exchange of privacy for Web-enabled benefits, companies typically find this an

unnerving game. Few are as comfortable with playing the transparency card as Redfin, a struggling online brokerage firm that tried to turn the industry upside down by refunding people two-thirds of the commission that real estate brokers typically charge. When the industry rebelled against Redfin for cutting into its margins, CEO Glenn Kelman started a Redfin blog. As Kelman's posts called out questionable practices in the real estate industry, provided details behind company operations, and exposed uncertainties in the company's own decision making, the company's sales grew in response. According to Kelman: "I honestly believe that if Redfin were stripped absolutely bare for all the world to see, naked and humiliated in the sunlight, more people would do business with us" (Thompson, 2007). Other brave companies like Sun Microsystems, Progressive Insurance, Southwest Airlines, Comcast, and Zappos.com have followed in Kelman's the-more-they-know-us-the-more-they'll-like-us footsteps, encouraging unencumbered information flow thorough wikis, Twitter streams, corporate blogs, and Digg interviews. By posting internal memos, apologies, and reflections rather than crafted PR statements, these companies provide insight into daily brand actions and grant a deeper understanding of what companies are like when the media machine is not in charge.

As brands rush to provide evidence of their newfound openness and authenticity, they also confront the sometimes-embarrassing realities of innate tendencies to hold on and not let go. After a cover spread in *Wired Magazine* touted Microsoft for the sea-changes wrought by its employee blogging program, an internal Microsoft briefing surfaced, describing how the company was trying to 'manage' the reporter who wrote the story (Vogelstein, 2007). Try as they might, some companies just cannot bear to let untethered information flow. Flogs (i.e., fake blogs) and sock puppets can be readily identified (Roy & Chattopadhyay, 2010), as for example with Whole Foods CEO John Mackey, who assumed an alias to defend and hype his company online. The exposure of Wal-Mart's fake bloggers in 2006 highlighted a blatant, albeit ironic, manipulation of the very tools of transparency and authenticity guiding Web 2.0 brands (Gogoi, 2006). In the arsenal of supposed transparency tactics dedicated to granting brand authenticity we also find ghost blogging, ghost tweeting, and astroturfing: the practice of paying people to create fake grassroots sentiment online. Try as they might to be transparent, brands have a hard time coming clean about the tactics they engage in order to manage their reputations; they remain conflicted about tactical transparency issues: what, when, and how much they should actually disclose. At one time, secrecy about internal workings mattered precisely because those details were secret. Marketers are still inclined to seek control and ownership over their brand messages, even as they risk the authenticity credentials that grant them equity in branding 2.0.

Some brands have taken a different tack: they mock transparency via stealth marketing that intentionally pulls the wool over consumers' eyes (Roy & Chattopadhyay, 2010). There is perhaps no better example than South African premium t-shirt brand Love Jozi, a cult favorite for people-in-the-know. The entity covertly launched Luv Jozi, its own counterfeit knock-off brand (Campbell, 2010). The calculated campaign relayed an impression that the brand had been ripped off by opportunists: the logo was misspelled (Luv versus Love); the website suggested Chinese company origins; the product was sold at flea markets, on urban street corners, and through Chinese-owned clothing stores known for distributing counterfeit goods. Blogs picked up on the story, alerting the company that 'someone was messing with the Love Jozi brand.' After 2 years, the company revealed its ruse to the media: In a nutshell, we faked ourselves. Love Jozi, the company explained, had a legitimate diffusion line: a lower-priced, lower-quality version for those who could not afford designer goods.

Nicole 'Snooki' Polizzi from MTV's *Jersey Shore* provides another inversion of the transparency formula enacted through marketers' hands (Doonan, 2010). When Snooki began carrying Gucci and other luxury handbags, fans assumed that Gucci had seeded the bags to gain publicity. As it turns out, the placements were arranged not by Gucci but rather its competitors, who hoped to hoodwink the less-than-savory actress into carrying a Gucci branded bag.

No doubt, radical transparency invites the truth from brand authors and can serve as a stimulus for positive change. Witness Unilever's recent announcement regarding its purchase of GreenPalm certificates which promote the sustainable harvest of palm oil, a direct result of online efforts coordinated by Greenpeace to expose the damaging effects of sourcing palm oil used in the manufacturing of Dove lotions and soaps. Some companies have stepped up to become proactively transparent in recognition of likely exposure down the road. For example, Kraft Foods and Frito Lay undertook significant changes before the health implications of trans fats became a legal imperative and cause célèbre, changing product recipes, funding public education, and developing new alternatives to high-fat foods. In a similar vein, Pfizer, Glaxo Smith Kline, and Eli Lilly recently announced that they will disclose payments to physicians, healthcare professionals, and clinical

investigators. A coalition within the advertising industry has launched a Stop the Adness initiative to promote responsible selling. AOL's recent print campaign, in noting that advertisers own one-third of the Web, probes readers to 'imagine actually enjoying that 33.3%.' AOL is 'starting a revolution. . .to make the Internet as useful as it can be.' In the Age of Transparency, companies have learned it is best to be out in front of all matters that touch the positioning of the brand.

2.3. The Age of Criticism

Online consumers have emerged as ardent brand arbiters and commentators, providing authoritative judgment and critique of companies and brands. On Facebook, consumers indicate support by clicking 'I Like This' links; Twitter 're-tweets' indicate consumer approval; content is marked as 'favorite' or re-posted with 'thumbs up/thumbs down' ratings to aggregators like Digg.com. In Web 2.0, the brand message and source no longer provide claims to authority. Brand culture is authenticated by the masses; cultural populism determines how messages are interpreted and what value brands afford.

All this rating, ranking, and scrutinizing has made consumers much more critical of companies and their brands. While consumers networked together can serve as powerful allies, critical consumers networked together can wreak havoc on a brand. Web technologies such as blogging make criticizing easier, and linked social networks help the content of criticism travel fast and far (Pitt et al., 2002). Negative critiques are inherently interesting and shareable; they leap from social sites into the welcoming arms of news-hungry journalists and the mainstream press. Without warning, brands can find themselves at the center of a vortex, to which they must bend or otherwise respond. McNeil Consumer Healthcare earned 'most tweeted' brand status when consumers labeled its online advertising campaign for Motrin as insulting and insensitive to mothers (Belkin, 2008). Within a weekend, YouTube videos of the original ad and critiques of it generated over 500,000 views, and posts on Twitter called for a boycott. United Airlines learned this same lesson when staff damaged the guitar of a little-known country singer, prompting him to produce a series of disparaging 'United Breaks Guitars' music videos that promptly generated over 10 million YouTube views (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2010; Reynolds, 2009).

One does not have to look hard for examples of companies which hope to avert negative attention by bending early, as soon as denigration starts, to the interests of critical consumers. It took Frito-Lay only 1 month to back off of its multi-million dollar repackaging for Sun Chips; Tropicana bowed to consumer protest within weeks of its new packaging hitting the shelves (Elliott, 2009). When Gap's redesigned logo met with vitriolic consumer response, the company so hastily reassigned the job to consumer crowd-sourcing that the press wondered if the problem was a set-up from inside (Birchall, 2010).

Certainly, some companies turn customer complaint maelstroms into learning opportunities that strengthen the equity of the brand. For instance, Domino's engaged a complete product redesign and marketing campaign around vocal consumer protests that charged its pizzas had 'sauce that tastes like ketchup' and 'crust that tastes like cardboard.' Using social media and $75 million dollars' worth of traditional advertising, Domino's seeded its harshest critics with reformulated product and tried to woo them over to the cause (Stanley, 2010). The award-winning campaign streams unedited posts and tweets to the company website, transparently airing the new product's pros and cons.

JetBlue provides another classic example of runaway brand criticism that prompted positive change (Morrill, 2008). After JetBlue passengers were stuck on the tarmac at New York's JFK airport for up to 11 hours during a winter storm, JetBlue CEO David Neeleman issued a public apology via YouTube. JetBlue began actively monitoring and responding to customer comments on the CEO's blog and Twitter, setting up mechanisms for customers to receive immediate attention when they found themselves in distress. A Customer Bill of Rights was announced in another YouTube posting, promising compensation for flight cancellations and delays. Just 5 months later, JetBlue posted a strong J.D. Power (2007) satisfaction score—810 out of 1,000—indicating regained goodwill among the airline's customer base. JetBlue's contract and social outreach served as a watershed moment for the industry, as well as the brand.

Keeping up with brand critics can become a full-time job, especially in industries suffering from low customer satisfaction. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 60) warn that "firms have been increasingly relegated to the sidelines as mere observers, having neither the knowledge nor the chance—or, sometimes, even the right—to alter publicly posted comments provided by their customers." An effective social media strategy that targets sources of disgruntlement can help firms get involved. The classic example concerns DellHell.com, a popular website established by blogger Jeff Jarvis (2005) for Dell consumers to share their product and service complaints. To counter the site's

growing popularity, and as evidence of Dell's commitment to turning the situation around, a 14-year veteran employee was assigned to individually and publicly address the issues surfacing on DellHell.com. Many responsible companies have followed suit. Comcast's Frank Eliason actively seeks out customers who use Twitter and other social media venues to air their product and service complaints (Reisner, 2009). Under the Twitter handle #ComcastCares, Eliason politely interrupts with a 'Can I help?' query, and works to resolve customers' problems in real time. While Eliason takes some complaints offline, preferring to e-mail directly with the concerned individual, he solves many complaints within the original Twitter stream, giving the public exposed to the original complaint the chance to see the problem resolution. Eliason has garnered 13,000 Twitter followers and has sent over 22,000 tweets himself. Eliason's Twitter following is paying dividends: followers often jump in to assist others who are complaining, helping Comcast leverage the power of the collective to build equity in its brand.

Sometimes companies respond to consumer criticism not by giving in, but by actively fighting back. When Pampers introduced a new product formulation called Dry Max, users began grumbling on parenting sites that the product caused diaper rash (Byron, 2010). Pampers' managers began actively monitoring online buzz but remained confident in their product, noting that the number of consumers experiencing problems was relatively small and in line with industry standards. As the online dialogue heated up to include graphic posts and photographs proclaiming chemical burns on babies, and disgruntled parents formed Facebook pages to solicit support for a boycott, the company began engaging individually with those who were having problems. Angry parents continued to rage against the brand, and circulated rumors that the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) had issued a product recall. When the story jumped from social media to mainstream media outlets including CNN and ABC News, Pampers went on the offensive, enlisting prominent pediatricians to back up its safety claims and working closely with the CPSC to track complaints. Using social media, parent company Procter & Gamble issued a series of blog posts and YouTube videos to reassure parents that the company was listening and actively investigating the situation, but most importantly, that Pampers products were safe. Ubiquitous online banner ads leveraged the persuasive power of social approval: 4 out of 5 *Parenting* mothers would recommend Dry Max. Traditional marketing tactics also helped dampen the impact of anti-brand social media activity. Corporate-friendly interviews were secured with local television stations, and a hard-hitting press release was circulated positioning Pampers as a victim of a social media conspiracy perpetuated by a small number of disgruntled cloth diaper and competitive product users. In the end, over 40% of U.S. mothers tried the new product. The Pampers example shows that companies can, and should, stand up for their brands in social media when the case for doing so is strong.

Unfortunately, there is sometimes no fighting back for big brands that stand as targets in the politicized world of Web 2.0. Consider the case of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), a nonprofit group of doctors and citizens dedicated to compassionate and effective medical practice, research, and health promotion. When the collective decided to run an anti-fast food advertising campaign for the prevention of heart disease, it chose to feature a dead man in a morgue, clutching a hamburger. The ad closes with the golden arches appearing over the dead man's feet and the words 'I was lovin' it'—an obvious play on McDonald's own slogan, 'I'm lovin' it.' Susan Levin, PCRM's director of nutrition education, says the group singled out McDonald's because the company epitomizes "fast food and the permeation of fast food in the country" (Jargon, 2010, p. B10); further, "a corporate response from one of the world's biggest brands would give the campaign greater legitimacy" (Wilson, 2010). An Australian ad, Break the Habit, took a more subtle approach in a public service announcement against obesity (Sauer, 2010). The ad begins with a mother opening a fast food bag while her toddler looks hungrily inside. The bag contains drug paraphernalia. The mother prepares a heroin needle, apparently to stick into her toddler's arm. As viewers watch in horror, the mother instead pushes a cheeseburger into her child's willing mouth. While the ad and its ominous tagline—'You wouldn't inject your children with junk, so why are you feeding it to them?'—do not specifically mention McDonald's or use its brand iconography, online comments note that the cheeseburger strongly resembles a Big Mac. On the Web, big brands like McDonald's are politicized precisely because they are dominant exemplars of their respective categories. Starbucks finds itself in the crosshairs of consumers protesting globalization, Coke bears the brunt of protests against childhood obesity, and Budweiser takes the heat for problems of underage drinking that beset our times.

2.4. The Age of Parody

Spoofing has become a popular pastime for people seeking entertainment on the Web; because of their cultural richness, brands provide perfect fodder for

this activity. While brand parodies have existed almost as long as brands themselves, historically these have been authored and distributed by organized experts such as the creative minds of *Mad Magazine*, *Saturday Night Live*, or the magazine *AdBusters*. The concomitant adoption of desktop publishing software and social media has democratized brand parody production. Any consumer can now easily use Adobe Photoshop to produce low-cost, high-quality take-offs of branded advertising. Today's 'screenagers' (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) have both the technical knowledge and the motivation to create parodies and engage with brands online. Utilizing YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter for distribution, consumers' sophisticated and artistic creations can reach millions of people at no cost within hours of being uploaded. Brand spoofs grant creators and sharers coveted status credentials; parodies have high viral currency and are often among the most shared items circulating around the Web (Harvest Communications, 2002).

When a brand stands as a target of parody, this can be an indication of much-coveted cultural resonance for the original advertising campaign. MasterCard's Priceless and Budweiser's Whassup campaigns serve as popular parody fodder precisely because of the memorable memes offered in these campaigns. Consumers aren't the only ones producing brand parodies. In an ironic twist, Heineken created its own version of 'Whassup' featuring yuppie guys asking each other 'What are you doing?'; the Obama campaign created a 'Whassup' parody that featured callers suffering from the Iraq war, Hurricane Katrina, the falling stock market, lack of health care, and the loss of jobs. Since these parodies do not directly satirize the brand, they inadvertently increase brand and advertising awareness, producing effects that are positive if not simply benign.

Smart marketers recognize the power of parody memes in advertising, and many design campaigns aimed at cracking this code. Cadbury's Gorilla (featuring a drum-playing gorilla) and Eyebrows (featuring two children making their eyebrows dance along to an upbeat tempo) spots are among the most parodied ads on the Social Web. Snuggie, the 'blanket with sleeves,' provides a best-case example of leveraging consumers' tendencies toward spoof and parody to the competitive advantage of the brand. Snuggie created a series of infomercials and online videos intentionally designed to provide consumers with fodder for take-offs. Explained CEO Scott Boilen, "We were definitely in on the joke," (Newman, 2009, p. B6). These executions generated thousands of consumer-created online parodies, the most popular of which has been viewed 14 million

times. Snuggie parodies jumped from online media to traditional media as Oprah Winfrey, Jay Leno, and Bill Maher all donned Snuggies on their shows. Consumers organized Snuggie pub crawls and fashion shows; what had begun as playful silliness grew into a full-blown cultural phenomenon supporting the brand (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009).

Blendtec is another example of a brand that grew by embracing the role of ironic presentation and not taking itself too seriously on the Web. An ongoing series of 'Will it Blend?' videos demonstrated the power of the kitchen blender by pureeing Apple iPhones, diamonds, glow sticks, and golf balls. Within the first year of the series' debut, Blendtec sales were up 43% (Lorber, 2007), proving that silliness sells.

Some brands are inherently richer when it comes to parody potential, and many fail to anticipate their natural capacities in this regard. When Heinz designed a contest to crowd-source its new advertising campaign, it was shocked to receive so many entries among the 1,020 submitted that either poked fun at the brand or used it in ways that management deemed inappropriate (Story, 2007). Though the brand team rejected 370 videos and refused to include them among featured submissions, most of those found their way onto YouTube, where they became cult favorites overnight. This same story describes General Motors' consumer-generated advertising contest for the Chevy Tahoe brand, the world's first formal solicitation of consumers' brand-building ideas. Tahoe managers were surprised and horrified when submissions linked the Tahoe to global warming, the war in Iraq, deforestation, and other environmental woes (Weiner, 2006). Drew Neisser, president and chief executive of Renegade Marketing, wondered: "Were they really expecting the consumer to make nice and create very pleasant movies? Have they looked at YouTube? This was a textbook no-no. . .an ill-advised experiment. . .a drive-by shooting waiting to happen on the brand" (Bosman, 2006).

For some consumers, brand parodies have become a blood sport, and this darker aspect has managers running scared. Hyper-critical consumers can leverage social media to turn the playful Age of Parody into an Age of Humiliation for targeted brands. Particularly damaging is when consumers use parody to cut to the heart of a brand's core positioning and values. Apple's Get a Mac campaign, which inspired thousands of parodies—including a version featuring characters from South Park that was downloaded 16 million times, and a rap music video version that was downloaded 4.3 million times—stands as a case in point. While some take-offs were just plain silly, others used satire

to turn the campaign around and highlight Mac's flaws. Nintendo also cringed when consumers parodied the company's Wii Fit launch video by ridiculing claimed fitness benefits and eroding the core value proposition for the brand. With a reach of 6.5 million, the parody video was seen by more consumers than the company's original sponsored ads.

When companies misbehave, consumers catalyze parodies to express their displeasure. Following the BP oil spill, consumer parodies flooded social media. BP's initials were transformed into Boycott Petroleum, Big sPill, Bubba Pump, and B$. The company tagline was morphed into the disparaging, 'We're bringing oil to America's shores.' BP's green sunburst logo was painted black and wept oil onto an oil-soaked bird. Perhaps the most detrimental parody came via Twitter. The BPGlobalPR Twitter account, a parody feed or 'spoof site' (Pitt et al., 2002), attracted over 180,000 followers—12 times more than BP's corporate Twitter account. The feed featured satirical tweets in the 'voice' of CEO Tony Hayward: "Black sand beaches are very trendy in some places. We upgraded u, Gulf of Mexico"; "Yeah, we're throwing paper towels on this mess. Who cares? There are plenty of trees left in the gulf"; "If you want to help clean up, drive your cars fast and often. Let's melt those glaciers and dilute this mess!" These feeds were eagerly awaited by followers and re-tweeted across the social media universe (Wheaton, 2010).

Brands like BP and General Motors get into trouble when they fail to recognize how politicized brands are (Holt, 2002). Consumer-generated advertising contests give brands not only authenticity credentials, but also platforms from which political discourse can be spoken and shared. The world's largest and most iconic brands are in consumers' sights: Starbucks, McDonald's, Nike, Marlboro, Camel, and Absolut are among the Web's most parodied brands according to Harvest Communications (2002). When a brand serves as a product category exemplar, it attracts the unwanted and negative attention of political activists on the Web.

3. Brand management in the open source world

As the aforementioned illustrations suggest, these are difficult times for brand managers. While the challenges have become clearer, the solutions certainly have not. Many aspects of traditional brand management—as a philosophy and practice—seem disconnected, if not irrelevant, in a space owned by the social collective, where exposure, criticism, and ridicule often rule. Next, we identify and amplify three dramatic shifts that Web 2.0 has affected on brand marketing. Some themes serve as coping strategies for the unreceptive environment of open source branding, while others pose game-changing ideas that confront these realities head-on. Obviously, certain adjustments will be easier to execute than others, but all remain critical if we are to prevent the beginning of the end of the assets we affectionately call 'our brands.'

3.1. From brand building to brand protection

If there is a focus in traditional brand management, it is on asset cultivation: the development and leverage of marketing programs that build brand equity and shareholder value for the firm. Success criteria are unequivocal. Strong brands have dominant market shares; they own the category and dominate competition; their voices are loud and strong. Managers know they have 'made it' when the *Top Global Brands* lists of Landor or Interbrand quantify the financial equity accumulated in big, multi-billion dollar brands.

Web 2.0 forces a shift in the optics of the lens gauging brand equity; brands like McDonald's, Marlboro, and Pfizer have seen the flip side of the mandate to build bigger, more powerful brands. As these brands have grown to category leadership, they have attracted not just the love of loyal customers, but the ire of the public at large. In the increasingly politicized world of branding, big brands serve as magnetic targets. Size has become a liability on the Internet: the bigger the brand, the harder it falls.

In a world governed by social empowerment, hyper-criticism, and instant transparency, management's traditional focus on brand building becomes supplanted by an ever-present need to protect brands from attack and demise. Branding, once distinctly a value-creating discipline focused on returns and revenue generation, has evolved amid the capabilities of the new landscape. Web 2.0 brand management may now more appropriately be considered as risk management, a discipline focused on risk assessment and risk control.

Though we do not yet understand what brand management looks like when goals of share growth and dominance are replaced by concerns for brand protection, the discipline of public relations offers some insights and clues. Reputation is the currency in which Web 2.0 brands deal regularly, and PR is the discipline best aligned with reputation management goals. But, the artificial silos separating marketing and PR functions do little to encourage the integration and cross-fertilization that can service brand

protection goals. It is a problem that starts at the foundation, with university programs that train brand managers in separate communications and business schools.

A brand plan focused on risk management would look quite different from the traditional marketing plan. Rather than laying out product, pricing, place, and promotion strategies, the new plan would focus on the identification and evaluation of risk factors that threaten brand equity, much like the risk sections of an S-1 filing or the company's 10-K. What are the forces that could expose fissures in the brand's positioning? What actions would render the brand meaningless, either from outside or within the firm? How likely are these risks to come to fruition? How serious are the consequences that could ensue? A plan for response in the face of exposed risk factors is critical. What will managers do when risks manifest and cause ripple effects? How will they respond when consumers ask for decision reversals or concessions to be made? Who is responsible for damage control and public interface? Is the company prepared and ready for the arrival of the black swan?

Brand managers are, for the most part, ill-prepared for this risk-centered role. While finance professionals are used to managing based on risk assessments, most brand managers have little understanding of systematic or idiosyncratic risks concepts, or the ways chosen strategies exacerbate and control those risks. Which brand platform is best in its risk profile? How does brand architecture balance or compound risk exposure? Risk is simply not on brand management radar; reward systems do not hold brand managers accountable for risk control.

3.2. From strategic planning to executional excellence

Marketing has traditionally been considered a highly-disciplined strategic activity. Plans start with careful analysis: marketers painstakingly gather primary and secondary research, and review the 4 Cs—competition, customer, company, and collaborators analyses—to develop brand goals. Objectives are quantified and set at highly-specified levels (e.g., gain 50% awareness of the advertising message among consumers who intend to buy a new vehicle within the next 12 months). It is not uncommon for planning to span a considerable timeframe and involve multiple layers of budgetary approval within the firm. Traditional marketing is a structured and controlled strategic practice guided by advanced communication, media, and promotion plans.

As our best-case examples illustrate, the realities of social media interfere with this careful approach to brand marketing. The new brandscape not only encourages but demands flexibility, opportunism, and adaptation on the part of brands. Web 2.0 brand strategies are more likely discovered than they are constructed, governed by serendipity versus pre-planning, uncertainty versus certainty, and a reactive versus a proactive stance. With brand control in the hands of those outside the organization, brand campaigns advance more by coincidence and faith in intuition than by the security of collected data wrapped inside a tight strategic plan. Brands on the Social Web win through excellence in execution more than the power of cogent planning. The success formula is simple: you need engaging content, and a blueprint that helps that content go viral and be shared.

Given the criticality of branded content, it is ironic to note how its development is less centrally orchestrated and scrutinized in many contemporary management systems. Branding 1.0 was supported by trained communications professionals; an entire advertising and public relations industry developed to provide carefully-crafted content, high production value, and skill in placing messages inside media environments and streams. Current social media practices can contrast sharply against this backdrop of expertise and proven competency. Social media centers—or SMCs—are staffed with Generation-Y Internet users, so-called 'digital natives' who can empathize with bloggers and posters, but have no formal training in developing engaging content for the brand. Social media agencies can favor expertise in technology over the copy writing and art direction that make for engaging brand communications. CEO bloggers have interesting things to say, surely, and tweeting customer service representatives intervene effectively to resolve complaints. But it is questionable as to whether these touchpoints optimize content with engaging messages that are 'on brand.'

Crafting authentic stories, hyping celebrity, flying under the radar, placing content for pick-up, building buzz, encouraging virality: in the landscape of Web 2.0, executional excellence is driven as much or more by the principles of public relations as it is by traditional marketing ideas. All too common are cases in which brand marketing executions fail to be informed by PR principles, or the other way around. Witness *The Wall Street Journal* quote from a McDonald's corporate spokesperson regarding the 300 Facebook groups devoted to its McRib sandwich: "There is no connection between McDonald's or any of its McRib lovers" (Jargon & Kesmodel, 2010, p. A1). This unfortunately-classic press response may protect the brand from legal entanglements, but it does nothing to build community for this open source brand.

Social media raises the stakes for engaging brand content, strategy concerns aside. This brings us to our third shift in brand management philosophy, where brand differentiation is supplanted by cultural resonance as the overarching criteria for strong brands.

3.3. From differentiation to resonance

Traditional branding turns on the notion of differentiation: a brand must claim meanings that consumers want and competitors do not deliver, for this unique selling proposition forms the basis of a strong brand (Reeves, 1961). But in an environment that is unreceptive, if not hostile, competitor-focused differentiation gives way to culture-defined relevance that allows brands to be invited into people's lives (Fournier, Solomon, & Englis, 2008). Best-practice companies in our examples gained resonance by embedding themselves naturally in Web 2.0 conversations; they sought seamless integration of branded messages into Web-based ebbs and flows. But, the higher goal of branding in this new environment is to create resonant cultural conversations, not simply coat-tail on them. Managers that create branded artifacts, social rituals, and cultural icons issue invitations to their own 'parties' rather than waiting patiently for consumer hosts to invite the brand in.

Volkswagen is well-versed in creating cultural artifacts that move out of branded communications and into the cultural stream. The classic Da Da Da advertising campaign provides a memorable example; the VW Punch Bug ritual is the brand's latest cultural craze. Budweiser's Whassup advertisement provided new fodder for resonant cultural conversations, as did the Been There, Done That campaign for Mountain Dew. Smirnoff Icing, the nation's newest viral drinking game, provides an interesting contemporary example (Goodman, 2010). The premise is simple: hand a friend a Smirnoff Ice malt beverage at any time and the recipient has to drink it all at once on one knee—unless the recipient is carrying a bottle of Smirnoff Ice himself, in which case the 'attacker' has to drink both bottles. 'Icing' photos from weddings, graduations, and parties are posted daily on Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, and fed directly to the website BrosIcingBros.com. Icing rules are posted on websites like BroBible.com, while the 'You Got Iced' blog documents icings nationwide. Since May, the game has exploded into a full-blown ritual among college students and young professionals; actors Ashton Kutcher and Dustin Diamond, rapper Coolio, and rock bands The National, Frightened Rabbit, and Deer Tick are in this fold. No matter that Smirnoff denies any involvement, or that Web postings wonder if the fad is an elaborate viral marketing campaign; consumers have taken hold of the phenomenon and

brand culture has been created just the same. The Icing ritual has raised brand awareness and grown usage among the young male audience, a hard thing to pull off if you're a targeted woman's drink. Smirnoff parent company Diageo is not unfamiliar to the game of creating culture: in 2006, one of the company's campaigns—a preppy rap video for Smirnoff Raw Tea—embedded itself in consumer culture, attracting hundreds of knock-offs and more than 5 million hits.

Old Spice's Emmy and Grand Prix award-winning The Man You Could Smell Like campaign provides a high-level example of creating a company-owned cultural icon that brings the brand squarely into people's lives. The original ad features ex-football pro Isaiah Mustafa reciting a quick monologue about how 'anything is possible' if a man uses Old Spice. Mustafa's towel-clad character plays directly into the cheeky I'm-not-taking-myself-too-seriously attitude of the Internet; the Old Spice Guy is over-the-top and sharply scripted, "a smug, cool-cat smooth dude persona" according to New York Daily News (Dziemianowicz, 2010). The icon was launched with a trio of commercials, each more outrageous and ridiculous than the next. Building off non-sequitors like 'Do you know I am riding this horse backwards?' and admonitions to 'Look at your man, now back to me, now look at your man, now back to me,' the commercials became a hit on video sharing websites, generating over 50 million views. Riding on momentum, Old Spice followed up with a series of 187 short comedic YouTube videos that featured Mustafa responding to social media comments about the man and the brand. To develop content, the agency seeded various social networks with an invitation to ask questions of Mustafa's character; those with interesting questions or high-social capital were responded to directly and by name. The YouTube shorts included personal messages to Digg founder Kevin Rose and celebrities Perez Hilton, Demi Moore, Ellen Degeneres ('Grand Princess Queen of all who are pleasant, syndicated, and prone to spontaneous dance movements') and Alyssa Milano. Hundreds of spoofs followed, including one with towel-clad Milano issuing a counter-charge to Mustafa's offer for a 'long-term commitment relationship' in the form of a $100,000 donation to the National Wildlife Fund. Blendtec got in on the joke and blended Old Spice to see what would result; the Apple-IBM personalities were recast in Mustafa's 'look at me, now look at your man.' The Responses campaign received 5.9 million views in its first 24 hours, eclipsing the record-holding Barack Obama victory speech at 4.8 million and Susan Boyle at 3.0 million views (Baute, 2010). Procter & Gamble was described as exhibiting "incredible bravery for

allowing the team to write marketing content with little supervision and in real time'' (Kirkpatrick, 2010). The campaign created Web culture through live advertising improv: an interactive, interdisciplinary engagement of digital managers, writers, art directors, brand managers, and audience members creating personal conversations in real time (Baute, 2010).

There is an interesting consequence of strategies that attempt to drive cultural conversations: an implication we call 'short-term brands.' That which is culturally-resonant today will, by definition, be obsolete tomorrow. Resonant brands live in the slipstreams of culture; they will always ebb and flow. This stark reality contrasts sharply with dominant branding philosophy. Companies charge marketers with creating long-term brand assets that are cultivated via consistent brand positionings and reinforced single-mindedly over time (Aaker, 1996). Our brand systems do not readily accommodate the fleeting brand mindset. Brand equity is a hard-won corporate asset; our intuition is to protect and hold onto our brands. What would the practice of marketing look like if we acknowledged the brand portfolio as ever-changing, where the criterion for deletion was cultural resonance of the brand?

4. Concluding thoughts

Technology breakthroughs always affect foundational changes in brand management. Transportation focused marketing on distribution. Television established targeting and segmentation. Computers enabled addressable relationships, one-to-one. The Social Web is similarly reconstituting branding, and dramatic change is afoot. We've moved from a world where the brand set the agenda, to a world where consumers decide if—and when—brands are invited in. Our mindsets are shifting from long-term asset cultivation to fueling short-term cultural phenomena; brand building as a focal priority has given way to risk management as a defense. Our brand assets are mercurial; they are slipping from our grasp. When so much is changing, can we still claim we are practicing brand management? Or, is it time for a new paradigm to take hold?

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