



Best Practices Report

Liquid Brand Summit 2007



The Liquid Brand Summit 2007

The Liquid Brand Summit took place on May 15, 2007 at the Four Seasons Hotel in Palo Alto. The event was organized by Liquid Agency to discuss trends in brand marketing for technology companies and identify some of the best practices in use today.

Over 100 high level marketers participated in nine round table discussions about topics relevant to building brands in Silicon Valley. The round table discussions were moderated by respected brand and marketing executives (session leaders) from the top brands in technology. After the discussions, each of the session leaders identified the most important best practice that emerged from their session.

Finally, the top findings from the day were presented by the session leaders at a panel discussion moderated by Jon Fortt, senior editor from Business 2.0

This document serves as a record of the best practices uncovered at the Liquid Brand Summit. We hope that you will find it to be a helpful and valuable resource.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us.

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The Sessions and Session Leaders

Following is a list of the round table sessions that took place at the Liquid Brand Summit 2007 and the corresponding Session Leaders that moderated the discussions.

Session 1: **Building Branded Online Communities**

Session Leader: Catherine Smith, Second Life

Description:

The idea of building a “community” is one of the hottest topics for brands today, as it is considered a key component for creation of brand loyalty which helps retain customers and create brand advocates. What are the ways that brands are building brand communities? How do you create an experience where people connect with other people and feel a part of your brand? How do you encourage feedback and what happens when you hear things you may not like? What types of community building tools are available and how do they work?

Catherine Smith Bio:



As Director of Marketing for Linden Lab, Catherine Smith is responsible for the communications and promotional activities for the virtual world Second Life. With daily responsibilities that might rival those of the press secretary of a rapidly developing nation, Smith surveys the virtual landscape to identify those residents who are developing the economic, social and creative aspects of Second Life to promote their stories and develop ways to attract others to join the Second Life community. Prior to joining Linden Lab in 2003, Smith was the Director of Marketing for foolsFURY, an avant garde theater company based in San Francisco. In addition to foolsFURY and Linden Lab, Smith has held senior marketing positions at Uplister (playlist sharing community) and at ActionAce (ecommerce) and Cartoon Network where she was the Space Ghost Coast-to-Coast Brand Manager and online marketing devotee. She moved to San Francisco in 1996 to help start Turner New Media whose first project, oddly enough, was a 3D Virtual World featuring Cartoon Network characters.

Session 2 Reinventing Silicon Valley Pioneers

Session Leader: Mike Sanchez, Cisco

Description:

The very nature of technology is to change the way that people communicate, work, and play. Over the last few years we've seen many new trends completely change the tech landscape, creating an issue of relevance for some of the most influential brands in Silicon Valley and beyond. Companies like Cisco, Intel, HP, Kodak have launched major initiatives to reinvent themselves in the face of this new landscape. What does it take to stay relevant in the technology world today? How are the Valley's pioneers reinventing themselves to stay on top for the next 20 years?

Mike Sanchez Bio:



Mike has more than 20 years experience in marketing communications in high-technology, working with companies such as Adobe Systems, Silicon Graphics and Quantum Corporation. He has managed teams focused on advertising, public relations, channel and sales support, promotions and merchandising, tradeshow and internal communications, as well as graphic and multimedia design. As Brand Strategy Manager, Mike's work focuses on the creation, integration and management of the corporate brand. Current projects include the annual report, the corporate overview, brand education and training, brand alignment and consumer branding. Mike received a Bachelor's degree in advertising, with graduate studies in Mass Communications at San Jose State University.

Session 3 Global Marketing / Local Messaging

Session Leader: Peter Isaacson, Adobe

Description:

Let's face it, we live in a global economy, where cultural boundaries are shifting and markets are constantly changing. Today, one size does not fit all when it comes to creating a global brand. Unfortunately many marketers have learned this the hard way. What does it take to truly understand the different ways global audiences consume and react to marketing? How do brands maintain a consistent image while addressing culturally different audiences? What is the best way to address global issues and retain local relevance?

Peter Isaacson Bio:



Peter Isaacson is the Vice President of Worldwide Field Marketing for Adobe Systems. Managing a team of over 175 marketing professionals that include personnel from Japan,

Europe, North America, Australia and Asia, he is responsible for driving all customer outreach activities for Adobe worldwide. Prior to his role as Vice President, Isaacson was the Sr. Director for Worldwide Brand Marketing for Adobe. His responsibilities spanned brand positioning, advertising, relationship marketing and web marketing. Prior to Adobe, Isaacson held a Vice President position with Ammirati Puris Lintas, managing advertising and brand positioning accounts for clients such as Compaq in the enterprise, desktop, networking, portable and consumer segments, and Chesebrough Pond's for its Brut and Mentadent products. Isaacson also spent more than four years with Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising, handling strategic accounts for Proctor & Gamble on such products as Spic & Span, Camay, Ivory Bar, Tide, Liquid Ivory, Comet, and Top Job. Isaacson holds a B.S. Degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder. He enjoys travel and a variety of sports, including basketball, mountain biking, and golf.

Session 4

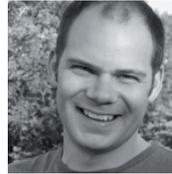
Consumer Generated Content: Can Brands Let Go of Control?

Session Leader: Colin Decker, Yahoo!

Description:

From online branded content to actual consumer-created advertisements, the once exclusive role of “storyteller” is no longer solely in the hands of brands and their agencies. The arrival of the “creator generation” and the explosion in consumer generated content, is simultaneously exciting and frightening to brands, and raises many questions about how to embrace this new cultural phenomenon in ways that benefit brands. How do we empower consumers while protecting the brand? How does branded online video connect with traditional media to create more impact and reach broader audiences? What have we learned so far about the efficacy of consumer-created messages and their impact on brands? What is an “ad message” in the new landscape?

Colin Decker Bio:



Colin Decker has an extensive repertoire in Film, Television and Online Media. He is an award-winning digital media executive with documentary films, commercials, and major web properties to his credit. Having recently made a career switch, Colin is Director of Strategy Yahoo! Video. Prior to this position, Colin had been at Current TV to revolutionize online and broadcast media by inviting average citizens to create the programming. There, he worked to develop a first-to-market user-participation model comprised of expansive online and on-air offerings. As Creative Director, he supervised all aspects of advertiser integration and UGC helping brands engage an audience in meaningful, unprecedented ways. At the center of his oversight is VCAM (Viewer-Created Advertising), a breakthrough in consumer engagement that has garnered coverage from The New York Times, USA Today and ABC World News Tonight. Colin is also an educator and passionate evangelist for experimental media. He has lectured extensively on the topics of new media and user-generated content and has held teaching appointments at Boston University and Harvard. His speaking engagements have included Yahoo!, Promax/BDA, Harvard University, The Clio Awards, Goodby Silverstein & Partners, the Firefox Flix UGC Ad Contest, The San Francisco UGC Ad Show and the Virginia Commonwealth University Adcenter. He holds an BA in Fine Art from Bowdoin College and an MFA in Film from Boston University.

Session 5

Brands, Blogs and Social Media: Strategies for Entering the Global Conversation

Session Leader: Derek Gordon, Technorati

Description:

Throughout the 20th Century, marketers perfected the art and science of mass communications, which often consisted of a “spray and pray” approach to reaching audiences. The explosion of blogging and other forms of social media on the Web is changing the paradigm. Today, everyday citizens control the means by which to create and publish content, and to attract and retain an audience. Today, brands increasingly feel they’re losing control of both message and medium, and are being sidelined by the emerging paradigm. How can brands make the shift from mass communication to a one-on-one conversation with all those they seek to serve? We’ll talk about strategies for, and the risks and benefits of, joining the emerging global conversation inherent in blogging and other forms of social media on the Web.

Derek Gordon Bio:



As Vice President of Marketing, Derek “DJ” Gordon is responsible for marketing, communications and product marketing/development strategies at Technorati, the first and leading portal the Live Web and universe of social media. With nearly 20 years experience in the field of marketing, DJ has worked with The Thomson Corporation, VaxGen, DigitalThink and the San Francisco AIDS Foundation prior to joining the Technorati team.

Session 6

The Year of the CMO

Session Leader: Kurt Apen, eBay

Description:

As the idea of “brand” becomes more and more relevant to companies of all sizes, the role of the CMO is growing in stature and influence. Today, CMOs are considered important players at the highest levels of the C-suite, with some of them finally being considered in line for CEO positions. What are the factors that are creating this change? How do senior brand and marketing executives elevate their role within corporate structures?

Kurt Apen Bio:



Kurt Apen is director of Marketing Strategy and Planning for eBay North America. Specifically, Apen is responsible for overseeing the U.S. marketing strategy for eBay.com, eBay Motors, eBay Express, and Half.com. Over the last two years in this position, Apen has played a leading role in the development of several integrated marketing campaigns for eBay, including the 2005 launch of the “IT” campaign and the 2006 launch campaign for eBay Express. Apen joined eBay in February 2001 as the first eBay Motors marketing hire. In addition to helping build the eBay Motors team, he was responsible for developing and executing marketing plans that helped grow the eBay Motors business extensively. Apen spent four years helping move eBay Motors from an outside entrant to the web’s most visited automotive web site according to Nielsen//NetRatings. Before joining eBay, Apen worked in business development at Greenlight.com, an Internet start-up focused on new car sales. Prior to Greenlight, he created and led the e-commerce and internet marketing team for SAAB in the U.S. Apen started his career with Andersen Consulting’s Strategic Services practice, where he focused on marketing and sales strategy and process. He has an MBA from Harvard Business School and a BS in Economics from the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School. Apen resides in San Jose with his wife and two kids.

Session 7

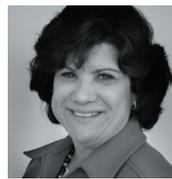
Brand Integration: What Happens When Brands Come Together?

Session Leader: Laurie Probst, Symantec

Description:

In today's business environment mergers, acquisitions and consolidation are more and more common place. From a branding perspective, this presents some major challenges. What's the best way to present the new brand to customers, employees, partners and investors? How do brands reconcile their different personalities, approaches and offerings? How do they arrive at one brand...or should they?

Laurie Probst Bio:



Laurie Probst is the Senior Director of Global Enterprise Marketing Communications for Symantec. She is responsible for leading the strategy and development of the integrated marketing communications plans and development of materials. She manages a team of 20 marketing communications professionals who work in all areas of communications from Global Advertising, End User and Channel Materials, interactive and online marketing, and Direct Mail. Prior to joining Symantec, Probst held the position of Vice President of Marketing for Cable and Wireless in the US where she managed Product Marketing, Marketing Operations, Public Relations and Analysts Relations. Previous to C&W she was VP of Marketing Communications for Exodus Communications where she led the brand and message development and marketing communications. Probst holds a B.A. Degree from San Jose State University, and is a member of the Ad Council representing Symantec.

Session 8

Successful Management of Master Brand Vs. Sub Brands

Session Leader: Bill Schreiner, AOL

Description:

Many successful single brand entities end up in portfolio companies (Flickr, YouTube, Skype, etc.), but some end up standing on their own and become the portfolio brands of the future. Single brand entities appear to have the advantage with respect to driving innovation and gaining customer engagement, but with ad revenue business models the darling of the market right now, acquisition appears to be the inevitable destiny for those start ups. Are multi-brand companies like eBay, Yahoo, AOL at an inherent advantage or disadvantage in an emerging categories such as internet video, mobile experiences? Should single brand companies solve the ad revenue issue from the beginning or delay until they have built an audience? Should multi brand companies innovate only in the areas of distribution and aggregation, and not waste resources on developing new experiences?

Bill Schreiner Bio:



Bill Schreiner is Vice President of UnCut Video, AOL's user generated online video content offering. In this role, Bill led the development and launch of UnCut Video as it became a key offering in the AOL Video portal. Bill joined AOL in 1996 as a member of the Greenhouse, AOL's original content development group. In his first four years at the company, he led the charge to develop Love@AOL into one of the largest romance and personals sites on the web. With the acquisition of MapQuest in 2000, Bill became Vice President of Product and Programming for MapQuest. During his eighteen months stewardship, MapQuest was completely overhauled, integrated into the AOL Service, and saw its traffic double. In April 2001, Bill launched AOL Tickets, the first one-stop ticketing destination to combine the inventory from all major ticketing vendors for live events. During this time, Bill also served as head of Product Strategy for AOL Entertainment. In 2003, Bill transitioned to the head of Community programming and oversaw programming operations for social networking, blogs, chat, message boards, groups and AIM programming. Before joining AOL, Bill had a career in the entertainment industry with numerous credits in both television and film. He was an early adopter of new technologies, which he put to use as creative director of the renowned Los Angeles improv group, "The Groundlings." The Groundlings were the launch pad for many of comedy's biggest stars including: Phil Hartman, Lisa Kudrow, Kathy Griffin, Julia Sweeney, Will Ferrell and others. Bill holds degrees from Tufts University, UCLA, and is a graduate of the AFI Directing Program.

Session 9 Brand Erosion

Session Leader: Greg Ott, Ask.com

Description:

Corporations spend tens, sometimes hundreds of millions of dollars building their brands and creating markets online. In today's digital world, in the blink of an eye, a few disgruntled or disillusioned consumers can undermine the brand's reputation, creating distrust, and putting the brand in a negative light with the channel and customers. Can smart marketers and brand managers control their brands and avoid brand erosion? In the two way dialog of the internet, what can be done to manage consumer comments and "brand bashing?" How important is it to move quickly to address these consumers? What can be done to protect the trust that brands invest so much to build, in an age when brands are more vulnerable than ever?

Greg Ott Bio:



Greg Ott is the Vice President of Global Marketing for Ask.com, an InterActive Corp. Company. Greg is responsible for all online and offline marketing, advertising and brand strategy initiatives, including the recent re-branding and re-launch from Ask Jeeves to Ask.com. Prior to joining Ask.com in 2004, he served as VP of Marketing at Xoom Corporation, an online-to-offline international money transferring service. Ott has also served as VP/General Manager at RealNames, a Web addressing and navigation platform built to improve on the existing Domain Name System using internet keywords. Ott began his career with Procter & Gamble as brand manager for Noxzema, Clearasil Bar Soaps, and Bounty paper towels. Ott received his BS in Mechanical Engineering from Stanford University.



The Liquid Brand Summit 2007

Best Practices

We have organized the Best Practices into three groupings, each of which is made up of three related topics:

Group A: The Brand and the CXO Suite

- Reinventing Silicon Valley Pioneers
- The Year of the CMO
- Brand Integration: What Happens When Brands Come Together?

Group B: Brand Management Challenges

- Global Marketing / Local Messaging
- Successful Management of Master Brand Vs. Sub Brands
- Brand Erosion

Group C: Brands in the New Landscape

- Building Branded Online Communities
- Consumer Generated Content: Can Brands Let Go of Control?
- Brands, Blogs and Social Media: Strategies for Entering the Global Conversation



Group A

The Brand and the CXO Suite

Each of the session leaders identified the most valuable and relevant best practice from the round table discussions they facilitated in the morning and afternoon. We've labeled this the Top Best Practice. The Top Best Practice for each session is followed by a list of the other best practices that emerged during the session round tables.

The sessions in Group A include:

- Reinventing Silicon Valley Pioneers
- The Year of the CMO
- Brand Integration: What Happens When Brands Come Together?

These sessions were grouped together because the topics all relate to issues that brand marketers face at the highest level of their organizations, such as staying relevant to new audiences and changing marketplaces; establishing strategies that enable CMOs to succeed; and successfully managing the integration of multiple brands and differing corporate cultures.

Group A: The Brand and the CXO Suite

Reinventing Silicon Valley Pioneers

Top Best Practice:

Staying relevant requires brands to embrace change and make it a priority at every level of the organization, starting with a commitment from the top.

Every established brand runs the risk of falling behind if it does not embrace change. Successful brands are fluid and adapt to changing marketplace dynamics. Brands that have not been able to stay relevant, need to change from the inside out. This process starts with true commitment from the executive suite, continues with a clear story for the brand that is lived by everyone in the company, and culminates in the development of products and services that deliver on the brand promise, and are focused on the customer experience. If the brand requires a transformative change in order to stay relevant, it is a good idea to re-evaluate a brand's identity and refresh its visual style. However, the launch of a new identity should represent more fundamental and strategic changes for the brand... and not be a simple, surface level identity refresh. When it symbolizes fundamental changes in a brand's approach, the new identity can help focus the consumer's attention on the important organizational and directional changes behind the new logo.

Additional Best Practices:

- The brand needs to tell a story in order to connect with its audiences, and the story may need to change to keep up with the times.
- Remember to focus on the benefits to consumers today, and not just on technological and engineering advances.
- Create intimate, engaging and memorable brand experiences that enable people to build emotional connections with the brand.
- Get the leaders behind the brand and make them brand evangelists across every level of the organization.
- Conduct periodic Brand Workshops where you gather together your brand champions and stewards for in-person learning (allowing them to form a community).
- Create virtual teams - partner with local ad agencies and create brand advocates on the local level.



Group A: The Brand and the CXO Suite

The Year of the CMO

Top Best Practice:

CMOs need to encourage patience while also focusing on small wins to gain credibility and confidence.

As the newcomers to the C-Suite CMOs are under a great deal of scrutiny and pressure to perform. The average tenure of a CMO is less than two years. This is barely enough time to identify the issues, develop new strategies, recruit new personnel, and implement new initiatives. Real and meaningful change takes time, and it happens incrementally. The result of the discussions centered around the idea that CMOs need to focus on quick wins to build organizational credibility and momentum. Additionally, they need to coach the management team to be patient because sustainable change simply does not happen overnight. If they are successful in developing a clear plan, setting expectations, and achieving small wins along the way...they have a chance to shift the momentum for brands.

Additional Best Practices:

- You must have “C-level” metrics accepted and supported with adequate budget to achieve and measure them. Many CMOs sign up for metrics that they don’t have the resources or skill set to track and report.
- Use C-Suite language. Relate brand and marketing issues to the business strategy. Develop accountability metrics similar to the CFO and CTO to gain credibility and the running room to push the brand agenda.
- Assess the organizational structure and level set expectations. The CMO role is highly politicized in most companies, as it sits at the intersection of several different groups. Understanding how a company truly works and decisions get made is critical.
- Engage the executive team early in the strategic brand development process allowing them to help co-create and co-own the initiative. This creates buy-in and helps mitigate misalignment down the road.
- Own the ‘long term’ voice of the customer. Create processes to gather customer insights outside of transactional business situations. This helps shape the voice of the customer within the organization and helps drive business and marketing strategy.
- Amplify wins and communicate concerns. Apply best practice marketing tactics to promoting marketing’s wins internally with the executive level and across the company. Develop credibility by acknowledging and dealing proactively with issues and failures.

Group A: The Brand and the CXO Suite

Brand Integration: What Happens When Brands Come Together?

When managing the integration of multiple brands, brand managers should remember to stay focused on the customer and the right direction for the brand will naturally evolve.

Because of the growing trend towards large scale mergers and acquisitions, companies need to address how to manage the integration of diverse corporate cultures, diverging product roadmaps, and incompatible brand values. Not taking these issues seriously can be destructive to morale and productivity...and ultimately, it can negatively influence perceptions and stock price. These were some of the topics that were discussed during this session, and the idea that was identified as the most important “best practice” was that brands need to focus on the customer. All too often, during a merger or acquisition, brand managers become so engrossed with making sure that the internal cultures are aligned, that their focus becomes too internally driven. Although it is important to consider the internal audiences, brands are encouraged to focus on the customer, their needs, and concerns...and use this as the platform to create a roadmap for the brand integration programs. Stay relevant to customers, and the best approach will naturally emerge.

Additional Best Practices:

- Be intimately aware of your customers’ behaviors, perceptions and expectations of your brands; let customer relevance drive brand integration decisions.
- Each brand in an integrated portfolio must occupy its own space. Keep it clear to the consumer/users.
- Deliver a timeframe for the process. Give employees a sense of when things will happen or when the company will make decisions. If you don’t know, say so.
- In large mergers, use cross-functional dual-company integration teams: While it may be more painful in the beginning, it will result in a smoother integration in the long run.
- Convert the integration team to brand evangelists.
- Use business strategy to inform brand architecture and brand strategy.
- Cultural alignment takes time but early effort should be made to identify what the new culture will be. Executive staff involvement and buy in is critical.



Group B

Brand Management Challenges

Each of the session leaders identified the most valuable and relevant best practice from the round table discussions they facilitated in the morning and afternoon. We've labeled this the Top Best Practice. The Top Best Practice for each session is followed by a list of the other best practices that emerged during the session round tables.

The sessions in Group B include:

- Global Marketing / Local Messaging
- Successful Management of Master Brand Vs. Sub Brands
- Brand Erosion

These sessions were grouped together because the topics all relate to brand management challenges, such as the need to address global marketplaces; manage complex brand architectures; and maintain brand equity during a time when the consumer has more influence than ever.

Group B: Brand Management Challenges Global Marketing / Local Messaging

Top Best Practice:

In order for brands to maintain a consistent image while addressing culturally different audiences they should identify and train “Global Brand Champions” throughout the organization and across cultures.

By making sure that these Global Brand Champions intuitively understand the brand values, brand promise, and brand language, brands will be able to fluidly adapt their messages and communication strategies to address the needs of regional markets. Also, it is important to empower the Global Brand Champions with the ability to make decisions at the regional level in order to ensure that the brand addresses cultural issues, capitalizes on local media, and leverages local distribution channels.

Additional Best Practices:

- Listen to the input from local representatives about cultural assessment and allow for flexibility in order to make sure messages are aligned with local requirements.
- Keep templates/guidelines/image libraries as simple as possible and provide online access and training for proper usage.
- Establish clear guidelines for what can be changed and what can't be touched.
- Work with HR to provide brand training for new employees.
- Hold in person brand workshops with Global Brand Champions.
- Partner with local agencies to establish brand advocates on the local level.



Group B: Brand Management Challenges

Successful Management of Master Brand Vs. Sub Brands

Top Best Practice:

If the independent sub-brand is based on a different model or reaches a different audience, it is best to keep it independent than rolling it into the master brand.

More and more the result of mergers and acquisitions requires brands to re-evaluate the brand architecture and re-evaluate the relationship between master brand and sub-brands. The overall consensus, after discussing this topic at length, is that independent sub-brands should only be established or maintained in either of the two following scenarios:

- The independent sub-brand is based on a different business model than the parent brand
- The independent sub-brand reaches a market segment that the parent brand cannot reach.

If either of these conditions exist, then brand managers should support the existing sub-brand or think about creating an independent sub-brand.

Note: It is important to distinguish between independent sub-brands and brand extensions. Independent sub-brands are not necessarily connected to the master-brand and are promoted independently. An independent sub-brand may never be connected to the master brand in terms of vision, promise or personality. Instead, Brand extensions are closely connected to the master brand, and share many of the same characteristics (promise, personality, identity, etc.) of the master brand, including a naming architecture.

Additional Best Practices:

- When developing a multi-brand strategy, get buy-in from individual business units and from the C-suite. Get them to commit early in process to the idea of a multi brand strategy.
- Know that research is critically important, but it does not provide all the “answers” because it cannot capture the intangible or unpredictable aspects of branding.
- Understand the key values of the parent brand, to determine the strategy for the sub-brands. This often requires outside perspective (customers, consumers, research, and agency).
- Be sure the parent brand encompasses all the values of the sub-brands, and vice-versa. Be careful to avoid association if the values are not closely aligned.
- Don’t create unnecessary levels of sub-brands.
- Know your long-term business goals for the brand before integrating into brand portfolio.



Group B: Brand Management Challenges

Brand Erosion

Top Best Practice:

Brands must learn to empower the consumer and turn them into brand enthusiasts.

Brand enthusiasm is the antidote to brand erosion. In a world where the consumer is taking control over the conversation, the best way for brands to manage their equity is to facilitate the discussion and allow the consumers to express their feelings. Ultimately, the more brands learn to listen, the more they will be able to understand what needs to be done in order to limit brand erosion. Brands should develop means to monitor the dialogue with and between consumers, evaluate the learnings, be transparent, and have a thicker skin.

Additional Best Practices:

- The power of consumers to affect brand perception is new and growing; marketers need to find the elegant balance of empowering users to lead the conversation and managing their brand equity.
- Evaluate and get permission on whether you engage with consumers. Have escalation policies in place. Know who can respond and what can they say? Act quickly.
- Know how to pick your battles. Marketers can not get caught up in every negative comment. Correct misperception with the truth but don't try to over manage.
- Be transparent – if it's a problem, acknowledge it; deal with the truth head on, be straightforward, respond authentically.
- A powerful consumer voice can be your most powerful marketing. Encourage regular consumers to dismiss errant claims, unleash your passionate users.



Group C

Brands in the New Landscape

Each of the session leaders identified the most valuable and relevant best practice from the round table discussions they facilitated in the morning and afternoon. We've labeled this the Top Best Practice. The Top Best Practice for each session is followed by a list of the other best practices that emerged during the session round tables.

The sessions in Group C include:

- Building Branded Online Communities
- Consumer Generated Content: Can Brands Let Go of Control?
- Brands, Blogs and Social Media: Strategies for Entering the Global Conversation.

These sessions were grouped together because the topics all relate to leveraging the latest trends in marketing and brand building, such as building loyal communities online; managing content created by consumers; and leveraging the growing trend towards social media and "conversation marketing".



Group C: Brands in the New Landscape

Building Branded Online Communities

Top Best Practice:

Brands should not try to control their audiences, instead they should be transparent and open to criticism.

To create effective communities that truly help build brand loyalty, brands need to evolve their communication models. Brands should change from top down organizations – where communications are imposed on the audiences by a corporate structure – to bottom-up organizations where communications are emerging from the customers themselves. Brands should not try to “control” their audiences, instead they should facilitate open conversations about the brand, its strengths and its weaknesses. By being transparent (and not trying to project an “artificial image”), brands will become more “authentic”, and consequently achieve stronger connections with their consumers. Developing this new approach to brand building will require brands to embrace online vehicles which include blogs, social media and social networking sites.

Additional Best Practices:

- Set explicit rules and apply them consistently within the community.
- Constantly update content. Keep it fresh and give people a reason to return.
- Establish a two way dialogue with your community. Allow users to take on responsibilities, create content, and rate content.
- Give people credit for their input, but protect confidentiality. Facilitate and moderate the conversation, but refrain from editing.
- Identify your evangelists. Incent and/or empower them to spread the word.
- You can't control what is being said about your brand. Allow valid negativity to come through. Be transparent and respond to the feedback. Remember it's a gauge, not necessarily fact.
- Trust your audience to see through the negative comments and arrive at a truth. Remember, the opposite of love is not hate, its indifference. If people respond strongly it can be a good thing.

Group C: Brands in the New Landscape

Consumer Generated Content: Can Brands Let Go of Control?

Top Best Practice:

Brands should allow Consumers Generated Content to happen without trying to regulate it or control it.

For many companies, Consumer Generated Content (CGC) is changing the landscape and the language of branding, giving the voice of brand building to consumers. Brands that are affected by CGC need to recognize and accept this shift in power, and let go of control. In order for brands to take advantage of this growing and powerful trend, they need to allow for it to happen organically, without succumbing to the temptation to regulate it, censor it, influence it, or control it. Much like Luke Skywalker did in Star Wars, brands need to “Use the force”: CGC happens, so acknowledge it, listen to it, and channel it. Instead of being defensive, brands would be better served by being transparent. In the end, the truth will prevail. Brands would be smart to encourage dialogue with consumers and allow their voice to rise above that of the corporate organization. This means involving consumers to participate actively in brand building by creating opportunities for engagement, such as blogs, online communities, and consumer generated marketing initiatives.

Additional Best Practices:

- Learn to listen: You don’t have to answer to everything, let the community do some of the talking, especially to the slammers. Don’t be defensive.
- Model and showcase best behavior: Engage the community in relevant, meaningful and open dialogue.
- Invite the community to participate by creating opportunities for engagement, ranging from feedback mechanisms, to brand building exercises, and even product development.
- Be authentic, honest and most importantly – transparent.
- CGC will touch most brands, so it’s important marketers decide how they will engage with it. Don’t wait until it happens.
- Community can be the real endorsement that turns lookers into buyers. Community references are more highly regarded than advertising.

Group C: Brands in the New Landscape

Brands, Blogs and Social Media: Strategies for Entering the Global Conversation

Top Best Practice:

Brands must facilitate the conversation by establishing multiple entry points, while also setting goals, curating, moderating and communicating openly through blogs.

Several best practices emerged from this session, but the one considered most important focuses on the idea that in order to develop strong and sustainable online communities, brands need to create highly visible and easily accessible points of entry which host external voices, while contributing an authentic voice for the brand as well. The process for the successful deployment of social media involves four essential steps:

- 1. Set objectives.** Successful communities need to have a purpose. Brands are encouraged to outline a clear set of goals and objectives prior to starting to launch blogs, etc.
- 2. Curate.** Social media is most successful when it connects people to multiple viewpoints and information about topics of interest. Brands should include links that expand the reach and depth of the interactions.
- 3. Moderate.** Although an honest and authentic dialogue is crucial to building community, brands are encouraged to establish a set of guidelines for the conversation. This will help to set standards of acceptability regarding content.
- 4. Communicate.** Honesty. Authenticity. Openness. These are hallmarks of successful communications and enduring relationships. Similarly, these are the qualities that facilitate sustainable communities.

Additional Best Practices:

- The blog is the new website: Blogs should be given more visibility on websites and become an integral part of the online dialogue with consumers. For example: Blogs should appear on product pages and provide a forum for feedback about specific products.
- Social media requires social grace: When entering a community, remember to acknowledge other members by linking to their blogs or commenting on their postings. It's like going to a party and making sure you acknowledge the other guests.



The Liquid Brand Summit 2007

Conclusions

The sessions covered a variety of branding topics, but some central themes emerged which signal an environment in flux for brands today.

Consumers are now in control.

It has been a generally accepted standard that in order for brands to be successful, Brand Managers needed to carefully control the brand's image and the public's perceptions. Marketing departments and Public Relations firms have been busy crafting and disseminating carefully controlled messages. And, since the brands controlled the media, this worked well.

However, today the landscape has changed...dramatically. With the advent of social media (online communities, blogs, and consumer generated content) consumers are taking control. Brands are no longer dominating the conversation, and consumers are able to share ideas, opinions and stories about brands. Consequently, consumers have taken over the role of brand building, evangelizing, rating and tearing down brands every day.

Brand Managers have turned into Brand Hosts, facilitating a conversation about their brands. Those who are succeeding in this world have learned to listen. They've come to trust their community. They've stopped propagandizing and have started communicating honestly, directly and transparently. It's amazing what can happen when brands actually listen to their loyal consumers!



Relevancy must always be a focus.

It may seem obvious to say that brands must remain relevant, but session findings tell us that the importance of relevancy continues to be something we seem to forget. In merger situations, we get distracted by internal politics and turf wars when an understanding of customer perception and expectation can lead us to the right decisions. For some of the Valley's pioneers, staying relevant means understanding new business models, entering new markets, and staying connected to consumers. Today's consumers are smarter, better informed, and more demanding than ever before - and in order for brands to retain (and grow) market share, they must embrace change and make it a corporate priority, starting with the c-suite.

Commitment starts at the top.

The importance of having the C-suite actively involved in brand strategy and brand building continues to be a critical component of successful brands. Technology companies have typically been slow to recognize marketing's role and contributions, and have only in the last few years even had CMO's. These CMO's face huge challenges educating the rest of the C-suite, setting realistic expectations for brands and convincing their peers that branding is a process not an event.

The ability to adapt is key to survival.

At Liquid we understand that good brands remain fluid, flexible and agile – adjusting to new markets, increased competition and evolving customers. Flexibility is an attribute exhibited by many master branded companies who are finding it increasingly difficult to operate their monolithic brands. They've evolved their brand strategies and brand architectures to fit their growing portfolios and new markets. Flexibility lies in the ability to seamlessly adapt to changing marketplace dynamics, highly competitive situations and diverse geographical and cultural landscapes.



Liquid Agency

As one of the most respected brand marketing agencies in Silicon Valley, Liquid Agency is committed to helping its clients increase awareness, differentiation and preference for their brands. We offer a full range of strategic and creative services, including: Brand Strategy, Brand Identity, Digital Branding (websites and digital marketing), Packaging, Advertising, Retail Merchandising, and Event Marketing. We have successfully delivered a great variety of branding assignments for some of technology's most recognized brands – helping them launch new products and new companies.

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