

STEPHEN COOMBER BRANDING: THE FAST TRACK ROUTE TO MASTERING BRANDS AND BRANDING CAPSTONE, 2006

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What is a brand? What are the common characteristics of the most successful brands? What are the world's most valuable brands and the origins of modern branding? Is the process of creating a brand on the internet different from traditional branding and what are good real-world examples of successful brands?

Branding addresses not only these key issues but also many others, which frequently emerge in the minds of business students as well as marketing professionals. This book, a part of the Express Exec series, provides good learning material for people who need to master the latest business thinking and practice quickly.

The author has written for a variety of publications from *The Times* to *Internet Money Magazine*. He is also an author of *The Report into Corporate Values*, and *Heart & Soul*. He is co-author of *Architects of the Business Revolution* and has contributed to many other business books including *The FT Guide to Business Travel*, *The Management Century* and *The Ultimate Book of Business Brands*.

Branding is an absorbing and a reader friendly book written in a simple and coherent style. Stephen Coomber covers key areas such as developing a strong brand personality, brand differentiation, brand valuation and brand protecting etc.

The author discusses several case studies of the world's most successful businesses, including *Coca-cola*, *Intel*, *Toyota* and *Virgin*. He assesses the ideas of leading thinkers such as *David Aaker*, *Philip Kotler*, *John Quelch*, *Al Ries* and *Ted Levitt*.

Branding is designed to debunk the mystique associated with branding theory and identify key concepts and theoretical perspectives. It details the latest trends, shows how the great brands do achieve results; lists the best branding resources; and shows how to put it all into practice. As *David Ogilvy*, the

advertising guru, once said, “ any damn fool can put on a deal, but it takes genius, faith, and perseverance to create a brand”.

In Branding, Stephen Coomber like other contemporary writers has tried to walk around the six basic categories of branding theory and practice. These include:

1. Definitions of terms: The author claims that the most successful brands share seven common characteristics. These best-of-breed brands tend to be:

- . Universal
- . Psychological as well as physical
- . Able to re-invent themselves
- . Global
- . Informative
- . Handled with care, and
- . True to themselves.

2. Evolution of Brands: Coomber illustrates that the modern idea of a brand has its roots in ancient history, and shows how a simple symbol of the possession of a chattel has evolved into an intangible, immaterial, corporate asset worth in some cases billions of dollars. Understanding branding, with its rapid pace of change requires continuous professional learning, grasping of fundamentals, keeping up with the latest trends and continuing experimentation.

3. Dimensions of E-branding: As a new marketing channel the Internet presents a number of challenges for e-marketers who wish to use it as a medium to build or sustain brand equity. Issues related to e-branding which Stephen Coomber has addressed here include:

- . The invisibility of the online brand
- . The transparency of markets, and
- . Creating trust online.

4. Global branding: Although “one world, one brand”, has become a major marketing mantra, is the global brand concept a good idea? Coomber discusses the challenges of building and sustaining a global brand. He identifies the following advantages of global branding.

. **Research and Development:** This if organized on a global basis allows firms to extend their product range, respond more quickly to market needs and achieve efficiencies through mutual co-operation.

. **Purchasing:** Global purchasing allows companies to respond quickly to market changes and to flex their purchasing power more effectively.

. **Production:** This on a global basis can bring economies of scope and scale and cost reductions.

. **Marketing:** This on a global basis allows organizations to make more cost-effective use of global media and share knowledge and experience more effectively.

. **Distribution/Sales:** Global branding enables organizations to make their products readily and more quickly available anywhere in the world.

5. Branding in Practice: “Well-managed brands live on, only bad brand managers die.” (George Bull, *British executive & brand champion*). Coomber illustrates this view by presenting branding success stories of Intel, Toyota, Virgin and Coca-Cola. These firms have managed to create some of the greatest brands of all times. Coomber shows how this was done.

6. Creating and sustaining brands: Coomber provides some key insights into creating and sustaining a brand in today’s business environment, covering the following steps, which make branding work.

- . Own minds, not products.
- . Marketer should fall in love with his brand.
- . Make your brand a corporate touchstone.
- . Get continuous feedback
- . Protect your brand
- . Dare to be different.
- . Put a price on the brand
- . Know your place.
- . Find brand partners.
- . Nurture your brand.

In a nutshell, **Branding** says that brands are marketing shorthand that companies hope will lead customers to purchase their particular products. They are an intangible, abstract perception in the mind of the consumer. **Brands** are many things to many people.

Although Stephen Coomber has written this book in a very lucid style and tried to give readers a fresh perspective, theory is one thing and putting it into practice is another. Branding is a complex, vague and imprecise subject. It has gone through, and continues to go through, periodic reinterpretations and innovations.

In *Branding*, the author has defined terms such as brand extension and global branding but some vital aspects of these concepts like; Why companies need to extend the brand; what are the economic consequences of brand extension or the impact of the single European market on global branding efforts etc, have not been taken into consideration. Furthermore, private brands are gaining a large share of the shelves at a noticeably faster pace than previously. Vital issues such as, what should be the retailer’s branding strategies and what would be the parameters on the basis of which retailers will choose their branding strategies have also not been discussed by Coomber in this book.

To conclude, I must say that although some key contemporary issues such as those mentioned above have not been touched upon, overall *Branding* is a very coherent and effectively synthesizing effort by Stephen Coomber. Business students and professionals can learn quickly and easily the basics of branding through this book, and last but not least, **Branding is a “think book”** which deals with the essence and culture of branding using several illuminating examples of the branding strategies of the world’s leading multinationals.

Well-positioned brands with strong brand equity provide the basis upon which to build profitable customer relationships. Developing strategies on the lines suggested in **Branding** and learning from the vivid examples of top class MNCs would enable young brand managers in Pakistan to position their brands powerfully and manage them effectively.

