22 Immutable Laws of Branding

Keep your station branded clearly

January 1, 1999

Adapted by Nova Marketing's Mark Ramsey from the book by Al Ries and Laura Ries

---

Introduction

What is the single, most important objective of the marketing process? What is the glue that holds the broad range of marketing functions together?

We believe it's the process of branding.

Marketing is building a brand in the mind of the prospect. If you can build a powerful brand, you will have a powerful marketing program. If you can't, then all the advertising, fancy packaging, sales promotion and public relations in the world won't help you achieve your objective.

Marketing is what a company is in business to do. Marketing is a company's ultimate objective. That's why everyone that works in a corporation should be concerned with marketing and specifically the laws of branding.

What is Branding?

From a business point of view, branding in the marketplace is very similar to branding on the ranch.

A branding program should be designed to differentiate your product from all the other cattle on the range. Even if all the other cattle on the range look pretty much alike.

A successful branding program is based on the concept of singularity. It creates in the mind of the prospect the perception that there is no product on the market quite like your product.

Can a successful brand appeal to everybody? No. The same concept of singularity make certain that no one brand can possibly have a universal appeal.

Yet, broadening the base, widening the appeal and extending the line are all popular trends in marketing. The same forces that try to increase a company's market share are also the forces that undermine the power of the brand.

How to direct and control those forces, both inside and outside of the corporation, is one of the major themes of this book.

Chapter 1: The Law of Expansion

The power of a brand is inversely proportional to its scope.

Think Chevrolet. What immediately comes to mind?

Having trouble? It's understandable.

Chevrolet is a large, small, cheap, expensive car . . . or truck.

When you put your brand name on everything, that name loses its power. Chevrolet used to be the best-selling automobile brand in America. No longer. Today Ford is the leader.

Chevrolet has ten separate car models. Ford has eight. That's one reason Ford outsells Chevrolet. The power of a brand is inversely proportional to its scope.

Why does Chevrolet market all those models? Because they want to sell more cars. And in the short term, they do. But in the long-term they undermine their brand name in the mind of the consumer.

Short term vs. long term. Do you broaden the line in order to increase sales in the short term? Or do you keep a narrow line in order to build the brand in the mind and increase sales in the future?

The emphasis in most companies is on the short term. Line extension, megabranding, variable pricing and a host of other sophisticated marketing techniques are being used to milk brands rather than build them. While milking may bring in easy money in the short term, in the long term it wears down the brand until it no longer stands for anything.

If you want to build a powerful brand in the mind of consumers, you need to contract your brand not expand it. Expanding your brand will diminish your power and weaken your image in the mind of the consumer.

Chapter 2: The Law of Contraction

A brand becomes stronger when you narrow its focus.

Every small town in America has a coffee shop. In larger cities and towns you can find coffee shops on every other block.

So what can you find to eat in a coffee shop? Everything. Breakfast, lunch, dinner. Pancakes, muffins, hot dogs, hamburgers, sandwiches, pie, ice cream, and, of course, coffee.

What did Howard Schultz do? In an incredible burst of business creativity, he opened a coffee shop that specialized in, of all things, coffee. In other words, he narrowed the focus.

Today Schultz's brainchild, Starbucks, is a rapidly growing chain that does hundreds of millions of dollars worth of business annually. His company, Starbucks Corp., is worth more than a billion dollars on the stockmarket. And Schultz's share of that stock is worth $65 million.

Good things happen when you contract rather than expand your business. Most of the retail powerhouses today followed the same pattern.

- Narrow the focus.
- Stock in depth.
- Buy cheap.
- Sell cheap.
- Dominate the category.Narrow the focus.
- Stock in depth.
- Buy cheap.
- Sell cheap.
- Dominate the category.

When you dominate a category, you become extremely powerful. Microsoft has 90 percent of the worldwide market for desktop computer operating systems. Intel has 80 percent of the worldwide market for microprocessors. Coca-Cola has 70 percent of the worldwide market for cola. And in order to dominate a category, you must narrow your brand's focus.

The emphasis in most companies is on the short term. Line extension, megabranding, variable pricing and a host of other sophisticated marketing techniques are being used to milk brands rather than build them. While milking may bring in easy money in the short term, in the long term it wears down the brand until it no longer stands for anything.

If you want to build a powerful brand in the mind of consumers, you need to contract your brand not expand it. Expanding your brand will diminish your power and weaken your image in the mind of the consumer.

Chapter 3: The Law of Publicity

The birth of a brand is usually accomplished with publicity, not advertising.

In the past, it may have been true that a beefy advertising budget was the key ingredient in the brand-building process. But what worked in the past doesn't necessarily work today. We live in an over-communicated society, where each of us gets hit with hundreds of commercial messages daily.

Today brands are born, not made. A new brand must be capable of generating favorable publicity in the media or it won't have a chance in the marketplace.

And just how do you generate publicity? The best way is by being first. In other words, by being the first brand in a new category.

- Charles Schwab, the first discount stock brokerage firm.
- CNN, the first cable news network.
- Rollerblade, the first in-line skate.
- Samuel Adams, the first microbrewed beer.

All of these brands (and many, many more) were first in a new category and, in the process, generated enormous amounts of publicity.

What works in marketing today is publicity, not advertising. This is especially true in the high-tech field. All of the big global marketing powerhouses Microsoft, Intel, Dell, Compaq, Gateway 2000, Oracle, Cisco, SAP, and Sun Microsystems were first created in the pages of The Wall Street Journal, Business Week, Forbes and Fortune. By publicity, not by advertising.

Most companies develop their marketing strategies as if advertising were their primary communications vehicle. They're wrong. Strategy should be developed first from a publicity point of view.

Chapter 4: The Law of Advertising

Once born, brands need advertising to stay healthy.

Your advertising budget is like a country's defense budget. Those massive advertising dollars don't buy you anything; They just keep you from losing market share to competition.

Publicity is a powerful tool, but sooner or later a brand outlives its publicity potential. As the publicity dies out, brands will someday have to shift to massive advertising to defend their positions. First publicity, then advertising is the general rule.

Leaders should not look on their advertising budgets as investments that will pay dividends. Instead leaders should look on their advertising budgets as insurance that will protect them against losses caused by competitive attacks.

What should a brand leader advertise? Brand leadership, of course. Leadership is the single, most-important motivating factor in marketing.

- Visa, the No. 1 credit card in the world.
- Barilla, Italy's No. 1 pasta.
- Goodyear, No. 1 in tires.

Advertising is a powerful tool, not to build leadership of a fledgling brand, but to maintain leadership once it is obtained. Companies that want to protect their well-established brands should not hesitate to use massive advertising programs to smother the competition.

Advertising may not pay for itself, but it will make your competitor pay through the nose for the privilege of competing with you. Many won't be able to afford it; those who can won't bother. Instead they'll be content to feast on the crumbs around your huge piece of the pie.

Chapter 5: The Law of the Word

A brand should strive to own a word in the mind of the consumer.

If you want to build a brand, you must focus your branding efforts on owning a word in the prospect's mind. A word that nobody else owns.

Volvo owns the word "safety" in the mind of the automobile buyer. And, as a result, over the past decade Volvo has become the largest selling European luxury car in America.

Forget about the laundry list of wonderful attributes your product has. You can't possibly associate them all with your brand name in a human mind. The key to getting into the consumer's mind is sacrifice. You have to reduce the essence of your brand to a single thought or attribute. An attribute that nobody else already owns in your category.

Go back in history. By far the most successful brands are those that kept a narrow focus and then expanded the category as opposed to those brands that tried to expand their names into other categories.

What was the market for safe cars before Volvo? Miniscule.

If "what is the size of the market?" is the first question your company asks itself, then you are taking the wrong road to success.

Ask not what percentage of an existing market your brand can achieve, ask how large a market your brand can create and expand by narrowing the focus and owning a word in the mind.

Chapter 6: The Law of Credentials

The crucial ingredient to the success of any brand is its claim to authenticity.

Credentials are the collateral that you put up to guarantee the performance of your brand. When you have the right credentials, your prospect is likely to believe almost everything you say about your brand.

Leadership is the most direct way to establish the credentials of a brand. Coca-Cola, Hertz, Heinz, Visa, and Kodak all have credentials because they are widely perceived to be the leading brands in their categories. When you don't have the leading brand, your best strategy is to create a new category in which you can claim leadership.

Many companies run branding programs almost devoid of credentials. If you leaf through a stack of print ads or watch a series of television commercials, you'll find an endless parade of almost meaningless benefits: Tastes great, saves money, whitens teeth, easy assembly, bigger, smaller, lighter, faster, cheaper. While many of the benefits may be of intense interest to prospective customers, they each lack credibility so they are generally ignored. "That what they all say."

When the benefits, however, are structured around some aspect of a brand's credentials, they carry much more weight.

You see credentials at work in everyday life. How many times have you walked away from a new restaurant because it was almost empty? Most people prefer to wait for a table at a restaurant that is crowded, rather than eat in an empty one. If this place was really good (goes the thinking) there would be a line out the door.

That's the power of credentials.

Chapter 7: The Law of Quality

Quality is important to have, but brands are not built by quality alone.

Years of observation have led us to this conclusion. There is almost no correlation between success in the marketplace and success in comparative testing of brands. Whether it be taste tests, accuracy tests, reliability tests, durability tests or any other independent, objective third-party testing of brands.

Quality or rather the perception of quality resides in the mind of the buyer. If you want to build a powerful brand, you have to build a powerful perception of quality in the mind.

As it happens, the best way to build a quality perception in the mind is by following the laws of building a brand.

Take the law of contraction. What happens when you narrow the focus? You become a specialist rather than a generalist. And the specialist is always perceived to know more, in other words to have "higher quality" than a generalist.

An important aspect of brand building is having a better name. All other factors being equal, the brand with the better name will come out on top.

Another factor in building a high-quality perception is having a high price. Rolex, Haagen-Dazs, Mercedes-Benz, Montblanc, Dom Perignon, and Absolut, are all brands that benefit from their high price.

There's nothing wrong with quality. We always advise our clients to build as much quality into their brands as they can afford. But don't count on quality alone to build your brand.

Chapter 8: The Law of the Category

A leading brand should promote the category not the brand.

The most efficient, most productive, most useful aspect of branding is creating a new category. In other words, narrowing the focus to nothing and starting something new.

That's the way to become the first in a new category and ultimately the leading brand in a rapidly growing new segment of the market.

Customers don't really care about new brands, they care about new categories. They don't care about Callaway; they care about whether or not an oversized driver will cut strokes off their golf scores. They don't care about Prince; they care about whether or not an oversized racquet will improve their tennis game.

By first pre-empting the category (as Prince did with the oversized tennis racquet and Callaway did with the oversized driver) and then aggressively promoting the category, you create both a powerful brand and a rapidly escalating market. Callaway Golf outsells the next three brands combined.

What happens when competition appears, as it inevitably does? Most category leaders just can't wait to shift into a brand-building mode. That's a mistake. Leaders should continue to promote the category, to increase the size of the pie, rather than their slice of the pie.

Instead of fighting competitive brands, a leader should fight competitive categories.

Leading brands should promote the category, not the brand.

Chapter 9: The Law of the Name

In the long run a brand is nothing more than a name.

The most important branding decision you will ever make is what to name your product or service. Because in the long run a brand is nothing more than a name.

In the short term, a brand needs a unique idea or concept to survive. It needs to be first in a new category. It needs to own a word in the mind.

But in the long term, the unique idea or concept disappears. All that is left is the difference between your brand name and the brand name of your competitors.

Brands are not just something to think about at marketing meetings. Brands are the essence of the company itself. A company's very existence depends on building brands in the mind.

Chapter 10: The Law of Extensions

The easiest way to destroy a brand is to put its name on everything.

More than 90 percent of all new products introduced in the U.S. grocery and drug trade are line extensions. Which is the major reason that stores are choked with brands. (There are 1,300 shampoos, 200 cereals, 250 soft drinks.)

When your customers are not exactly rushing out to buy your product, why would you need more brands to satisfy those customers? Logic suggests you would need fewer brands.

But that's customer logic. Manufacturer logic is different. If volume is going nowhere, the manufacturer concludes they need more brands to maintain or increase sales. When a category is increasing in sales, there are opportunities for new brands, but manufacturer logic suggests they're not needed. "We are already doing great, we don't need any more brands."

As a result, the marketplace is filled with line extensions in areas where they are not needed and is starved for new brands in areas where they are needed. Figure that one out.

One reason 90 percent of all new brands are line extensions is that management measures results with the wrong end of the ruler. They only measure the success of the extension. They never measure the erosion of the core brand.

Let sleeping brands lie. Before you launch your next line extension, ask yourself what customers of your current brand will think when they see the line extension?

If the market is moving out from under you, stay where you are and launch a second brand. If it's not, stay where you are and continue building your brand.

Chapter 11: The Law of Fellowship

In order to build the category, a brand should welcome other brands.

Not only should a dominant brand tolerate competitors, it should welcome them. The best thing that happened to Coca-Cola was Pepsi-Cola.

Choice stimulates demand. The competition between Coke and Pepsi makes customers more cola conscious. Per-capita consumption goes up. Remember, customers have choices, even when there is no competition. They can choose to drink beer, water, ginger ale or orange juice instead of a cola. Competition increases the noise level and tends to increase sales in the category.

Customers respond to competition because choice is seen as a major benefit. If there is no choice, customers are suspicious. Maybe the category has some flaws? Maybe the price is too high? Who wants to buy a brand if you don't have another brand to compare it with?

For each category, two major brands seem to be ideal. Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola in cola, for example. Listerine and Scope in mouthwash. Kodak and Fuji in photographic film. Nintendo and PlayStation in video games. Duracell and Energizer in appliance batteries.

You can also see the law of fellowship at work in the retail arena. Where one store many not make it, several stores will. Instead of being spread out in every section of a city, used-car dealers are often clustered along "automotive row." Where one dealer might have had trouble surviving, a handful of dealers are prospering. That's the power of fellowship.

Your brand should welcome healthy competition. They often bring more customers into the category. And remember no brand can ever own the entire market (unless of course they are a government sanctioned monopoly.)

Chapter 12: The Law of the Generic

One of the fastest routes to failure is giving a brand a generic name.

The problem with a generic brand name is its inability to differentiate the brand from the competition.

The high-tech field is loaded with generic names that are unlikely to generate much in the way of brand identity. Security Software Systems, Power and Data Technology, Server Technology. Compare those names to Microsoft, Compaq, and Intel and you can see the power of a meaningful brand name.

Nobody is saying that you should always invent a new name for an established brand, although that's often a good strategy for a product or service that is truly revolutionary and unlikely to be copied for some time. Kodak and Xerox are the usual suspects.

What you should generally try to find is a regular word taken out of context and used to connote the primary attribute of your brand.

Blockbuster Video is a powerful brand name. General Video is not. Hollywood brags about its "blockbusters," so Blockbuster Video borrowed the term to suggest they rent the best movies.

Sometimes you can carve out a brand name by cutting a generic in half. This often has the further advantage of creating a short, distinctive, easy to remember brand name. Intelligent Chip Company is a lousy brand name, but Intel Corp is terrific.

"Intelligent Chip inside" is a lousy advertising slogan. All computers have intelligent chips inside, but only the top of the line have "Intel inside."

Chapter 13: The Law of the Company

Brands are brands. Companies are companies. There is a difference.

A company is the organization that manufactures the brand. It is not the brand itself. Microsoft isn't Word, Procter & Gamble isn't Tide. Microsoft produces many products, one of which is Word. Procter & Gamble produces many products one of which is Tide.

While this makes sense, it's not usually the best branding strategy. Unless there are compelling reasons to do otherwise, the best branding strategy should be the company name as the brand name. The WD-40 Company produces the WD-40 brand. The Zippo Corporation produces the Zippo brand. The Coca-Cola Company produces the Coca-Cola brand. Neat, simple, straight-forward, easy to understand.

The brand isn't just the name the manufacturer puts on the package. It's the product itself. To a customer, Coca-Cola is first and foremost, a dark, sweet, reddish-brown liquid. The brand name is the word customers use to describe that liquid. What's inside the bottle is the most important aspect of the branding process. Coca-Cola has branded the liquid itself.

It's not a cola made by the Coca-Cola Company. The cola itself is Coca-Cola, the real thing. This distinction is at the heart of an effective branding strategy.

The brand itself should be the focus of your attention. If you have to use the company name, use it. But do so in a decidedly secondary way.

Chapter 14: The Law of Subbrands

What branding builds, subbranding can destroy.

Subbranding is an inside-out branding strategy that tries to push the core brand into new directions. It captures management's attention because of what it promises, not necessarily because of what it delivers.

Subbranding has taken its share of criticism, so the marketing establishment is rethinking the concept. Leading-edge practitioners today are more likely to call the concept the masterbrand or megabrand strategy. It's especially prevalent in the automotive field.

"Ford is not our brand. Our brands are: Aspire, Contour, Crown Victoria, Escort, Mustang, Probe, Taurus and Thunderbird ." What's a Ford then? "A Ford is a megabrand."

You can't apply your own branding system to a market that sees things differently. What the manufacturer sees as a brand, the customer see as a model. What the manufacturer sees as a megabrand, the customer sees as a brand. (Customers don't understand the megabrand concept at all.)

The essence of a brand is some singular idea, or attribute or market segment you can own in the mind. Subbranding is a concept that takes the brand in exactly the opposite direction. Subbranding destroys what branding builds.

Branding concepts that are not driven by the marketplace are going to go nowhere. Subbranding, masterbranding, and megabranding are not customer-driven concepts.

Think simple. Think like a customer and your brand will become more successful.

Chapter 15: The Law of Siblings

There is a time and a place to launch a second brand.

The key to a family approach is to make each sibling a unique individual brand with his or her own identity. Resist the urge to give the brands a family look or a family identity. You want to make each brand as different and distinct as possible.

Most managers are too internally focused to see the power of a separate identity. They want to "take advantage of the equity" their brand already owns in the mind in order to successfully launch the new brand."

In particular, corporate management should keep the following principles in mind when selecting a sibling strategy for their stable of brands.

1. Focus on a common product area.
2. Select a single attribute to segment. Price is the most common, but other attributes include distribution, age, calories, sex, flavors.
3. Set up rigid distinctions between brands.
4. Create different, not similar brand names. You don't want to create a family of brands, you want to create a family of different brands.
5. Launch a new sibling only when you can create a new category. New brands should not be launched just to fill a hole in the line or to compete directly with an existing competitor.
6. Keep control of the sibling family at the highest level.

A family of sibling brands is not a strategy for every corporation. But where it is appropriate, a sibling strategy can be used to dominate a category over the long term.

Chapter 16: The Law of Shape

A brand's logotype should be designed to fit the eyes. Both eyes.

A logotype is a combination of a trademark which is the visual symbol of the brand and the name of the brand set in distinctive type.

Since the eyes of your customers are mounted side by side, the ideal shape for a logotype is horizontal. Roughly two units wide and one unit high.

A two-by-one horizontal shape will provide the maximum impact for your logotype. This is true wherever the logotype is used: On buildings, brochures, letterheads, advertisements or calling cards.

Of equal importance to shape is legibility. Logotype designers often go way overboard in picking a typeface to express the attribute of a brand rather than in its ability to be clearly read.

The other component of the logotype, the trademark, or visual symbol, is also over-rated. The meaning lies in the word, or words, not in the visual symbol.

It's the Nike name that gives meaning to the Swoosh symbol. The Swoosh symbol doesn't give much meaning to the Nike brand. After a symbol has been associated with a name for a long period of time, the symbol can represent the name, through a kind of "rebus" effect. But it's still the name that carries the brand's power.

Chapter 17: The Law of Color

A brand should use a color that is the opposite of its major competitor.

Another way to make a brand distinctive is with color. But keep in mind that all colors are not created equal in the eye of the beholder.

Red is the color of energy and excitement. Red is an in-your-face color. Blue is the opposite. Blue is peaceful and tranquil. Blue is a laid-back color.

In the world of brands, red is a retail color used to attract attention. Blue is a corporate color used to communicate stability. For example, Coke-Cola red and IBM blue.

The other primary colors are in-between. Orange is more like red than blue. Green is more like blue than red.

Yellow is a neutral color. But it is also the brightest color. (Its brightness is the reason yellow is often used as to communicate "caution," as in yellow lights.)

Leaders have first choice. Normally the best color to select is the one that is most symbolic of the category. John Deere is the leading brand of farm tractor. Does it surprise you that John Deere picked green, the color of grass, trees and agriculture, as the brand's signature color?

Color consistency over the long-term can help a brand burn its way into the mind. Look at what red has done for Coke, yellow for Caterpillar, brown for United Parcel Service and blue for IBM. What Big Blue did for IBM, a big color can do for your brand.

Chapter 18: The Law of Borders

There are no barriers to global branding. A brand should know no borders.

The best way to grow your business is to build a global brand.

For years the magic word on many brands has been "imported." Food, beer, wine, liquor, clothing, automobiles, appliances, and many other products have benefited from an imported label. As if crossing a border suddenly increased the value of the brand.

Actually crossing a border often does add value to a brand. Since value lies in the mind of the consumer, the perception of where the brand came from can add or subtract value. Does anyone doubt the value of:

- Watches from Switzerland.
- Wines from France.
- Automobiles from Germany.
- Electronic products from Japan.
- Clothing from Italy.

Would watches from Albania, wine from Poland, cars from Turkey, electronic products from Russia, or clothing from Portugal have the same perceptions? Obviously not.

Every country has its own unique perceptions. When a brand is in sync with a country's perceptions, that brand has the possibility of becoming a global brand.

In spite of duties, tariffs, import quotas, inspections, regulations, red tape, and petty harassments, the world is becoming one big global market. And your brand had better get on the global bandwagon or you risk losing out altogether.

Chapter 19: The Law of Consistency

A brand is not built overnight. Success is measured in decades, not years.

Markets may change, but brands shouldn't. Ever. They may be bent slightly or given a new slant, but their essential characteristics (once those characteristics are firmly planted in the mind) should never be changed.

You have a choice. Follow the fad and destroy the brand. Or hang in there and hope the merry-go-round swings your way again. In our experience, hanging in there is your best approach.

Brand building is boring work. What works best is absolute consistency over an extended period of time. Volvo has been selling safety for 35 years. BMW has been the ultimate driving machine for 25 years.

When people do boring work, they get bored. So every once in awhile, someone at a company like Volvo gets a bright idea. "Why should we limit ourselves to dull, boring, safe sedans? Why don't we branch out into exciting sports cars?"

So on the drawing boards at Volvo are sports cars and even a convertible. What will a ragtop do for the Volvo brand? Nothing, except dilute the safety message.

You should limit your brand. That's the essence of a brand. It has to stand for something both simple and narrow in the mind. This limitation is the essential part of the brand-building process.

Limitation combined with consistency (over decades, not years) is what builds a brand.

Rome wasn't built in a day. Neither was Romano parmesan cheese.

Chapter 20: The Law of Change

Brands can be changed, but only infrequently and only very carefully.

Having harped on the idea of consistency and focus, why would we bring up the concept of change?

Because nothing in life, nothing in branding, is ever absolute. There are always exceptions to every rule. And the law of change is the biggest exception.

Where does the change occur? Companies are often focused on what they need to do internally in order to facilitate the change of a brand.

But changing a brand does not occur inside a company. It occurs inside the mind of the consumer. If you want to change your brand, keep your sights on your target, the consumer's mind.

There are three situations where changing your brand is feasible.

- Your brand is weak or non-existent in the mind.
- You want to move your brand down the food chain.
- Your brand is in a slow-moving field and the change is going to take place over an extended period of time.

If you are in the mind, and if you have an unique and distinct perception, then change your brand at your own risk. It's going to be a long, difficult, expensive, and perhaps impossible process. Don't say we didn't warn you.

Chapter 21: The Law of Mortality

No brand will live forever. Euthanasia is often the best solution.

Opportunities for new brands are constantly being created by the invention of new categories. The rise of the personal computer created opportunities for Compaq, Dell, Gateway 2000, Packard Bell, and other brands.

But the rise of the personal computer also put pressure on minicomputer brands like Digital, Data General and Wang.

It's like life itself. A new generation appears on the scene and goes off in exciting new directions. Careers are born and blossom. Meanwhile the old generation withers and dies.

Don't fight it. For brands, like people, there is a time to live and a time to die. There is a time to invest in a brand and there is a time to harvest a brand. And ultimately there is a time to put the brand to sleep.

Spend your money on the next generation. Save the money spent to prolong an old brand's life and invest it in a new brand with a future.

Chapter 22: The Law of Singularity

The most important aspect of a brand is its single-mindedness.

What's a brand? A proper word that can be used in place of a common word.

- Instead of an imported beer, you can ask for a Heineken.
- Instead of an expensive Swiss watch, you can ask for a Rolex.
- Instead of a safe car, you can ask for a Volvo.
- Instead of a driving machine, you can ask for a BMW.

What's a brand? A singular idea or concept that you own inside the mind of the prospect.

Loss of singularity is the single biggest threat to your brand and should be avoided at all costs.