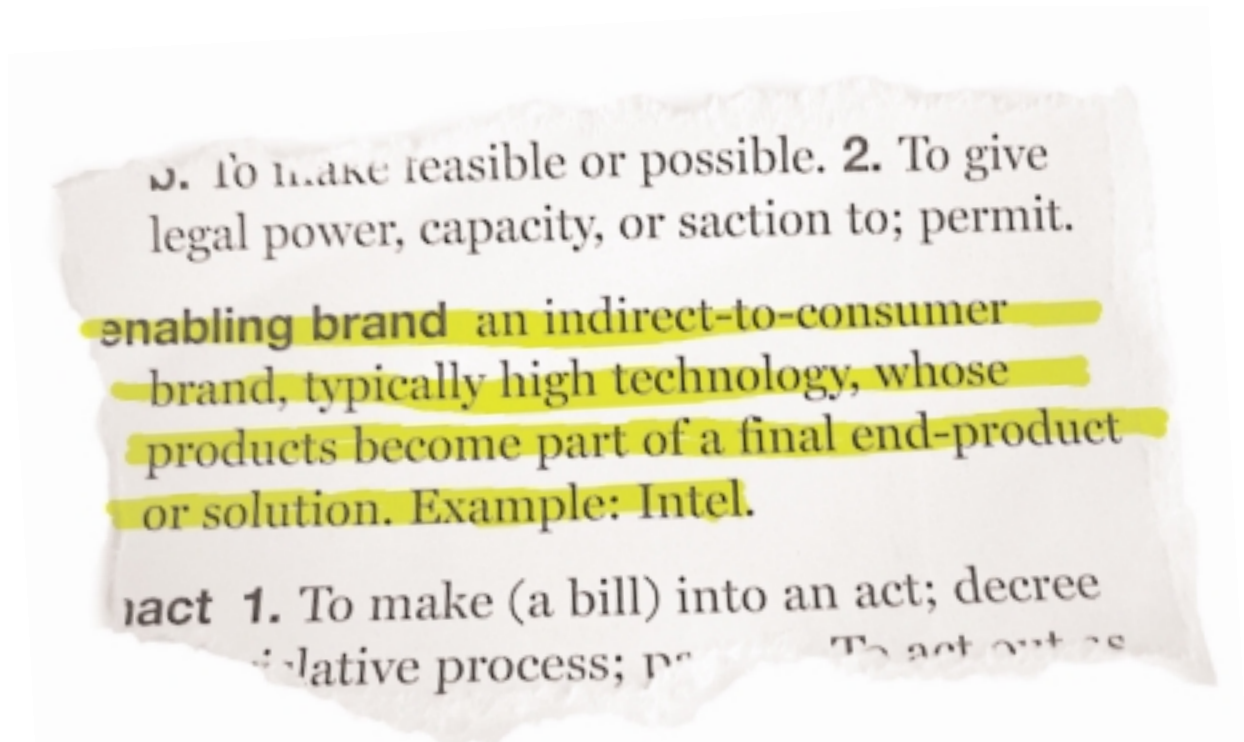


UPFRONT THE COMPETITIVE MARKETING SERIES

Enabling Brands; or, Not Everyone Can Be Coke

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Philip Johnson Associates, April 2002

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Enabling. These days the word conjures up images of dysfunctional families arguing over addictions. If you enable someone, you somehow give them permission to engage in self-destructive behavior.

An enabling brand is something else altogether. Business-to-Consumer brands, which include consumer technology brands, have a direct link to the end-user, and deliver a complete experience. You order a Coke, drink a Coke, and have the Coke brand experience. You also have a brand experience of Intel when you turn on your PC, but it's

indirect, embedded in the overall performance. You could call enabling brands Indirect-to-Consumer.

HP is an example of a direct and an enabling brand. When you hold a Jornada PDA in your hand

Top 3 Practices for Enabling Brands:

1. **Give credit to customers. You sharpen their expertise, but you don't own it.**
2. **Forge a link between your enabling brand and the ultimate benefit to which it contributes.**
3. **Don't just build your business — build your whole category.**

or pick up a printout from an HP printer, you have a direct brand experience. On the other hand, you experience HP as an enabling brand when a consumer electronics company performance-tests their products on HP equipment. As the consumer, you can't directly discern that HP has had anything to do with final product. However, you will

notice a difference in quality because the manufacturer has improved their products with HP innovation.

Yet the notion of enabling brands shouldn't mean living in the background, because the category has a respectable history. One of the most famous,

based on consistency of message and continued media spend, is BASF, with their All Time Top 10 theme line, “We don’t make the products....we make them better.”

At PJA, our work with enabling brands yields a few top-level principles that any enabling brand can follow:

Enabling brands give credit to customers.

Smart enabling brands work by empowering the end-user rather than encroaching on their expertise. This is true whether you sell a platform that automates manually-intensive steps in DNA preparation or a suite of bioinformatics software that slashes the timeline for target discovery.

In a global research project PJA conducted with HP Medical Products Group (now Philips), we discovered that HP wasn’t considered a compassionate brand — its customers, ER physicians, and nurses were the compassionate ones. HP’s role

was to enable its customers to focus more on being compassionate and less time fiddling with technology.

Enabling brands forge a clear and believable link between technology and end-user value.

Enabling brands that operate in complex value chains may not allow for direct correlation to the customers' business objectives. However, they can serve a critical role in translating the value of cutting-edge technology to end users, few of whom will be experts in the field. They give users the two or three 'cocktail party points' that communicate the how and why of their benefit. Computer data storage on its own isn't sexy; knowing that the right storage ultimately can boost your revenues 10 percent is.

In positioning PJA has crafted for the semiconductor test company LTX, we clarified this technology/end-user link with a simple point: absent LTX testers, cutting-edge electronics might not perform to their potential. For the non-technical end-user, this “Intel Inside” level of confidence is all they need to remember.

The best enabling brands are also aspirational. By reminding users of their ultimate professional goals — market share, cures for disease, standout products — enabling brands can capture some of the same emotional resonance that consumer brands do.

Enabling brands build categories.

Strong enabling brands can educate a broad range of customers and become a credible industry voice, overcoming the lack of knowledge and fear that characterize emerging markets.

As objective voices not wedded to one company, enabling brands also can deconstruct a purchasing decision by showing an overall interest in the growth of the category. This is true for large potential customers as well as analysts.

In positioning Celera Genomics in 1999, PJA not only promoted the company, but laid out the industry issues for academic, pharma, and biotechnology clients and showed how the entire category was evolving thanks to definitive genomic and proteomic information.

EMC, a longtime PJA client, first positioned storage as a strategic asset. Although other companies in the IT value chain benefited from this strategy, it was enabling brand EMC that experienced a 32,000 percent uptick in stock value from 1990 to 2000.

When they are built strategically and consistently, enabling brands can deliver powerful benefits. Here are just a few:

- You can articulate a vision for the entire category and influence the end customer and end market.
- You can help customers differentiate between fads and technologies that will deliver true competitive advantage.
- You can help customers choose you in the guise of making a smart business decision; for example about an issue like outsourcing.
- You can bring an optimistic but realistic point of view to an emerging technology based on your insider's knowledge of its potential and the superior performance you help your customers (and their employees) realize.
- You can position yourself with a company that is not purely IT-driven to make a smart technology decision.

Of course, there are pitfalls that every enabling brand should look out for:

Don't be the same thing to all customers.

Unless you can tell a vertically-focused story and deliver on it with your customers, you can quickly fall from industry standard to standard issue. And the minute you become a standard component rather than a tailored solution (or better yet, a unique customer experience), you can be superceded. The lesson: focus on the unique value your solutions bring to each customer's unique set of circumstances, and market against that value.

Promoting a relationship with a partner who has strong vertical experience is another effective way to tell the story of customization on top of a standard technology.

Don't tout one customer's success too loudly.

An enabling brand spreads its benefits to every customer. If you trumpet one company's success too long or too loudly, you appear partisan and parochial, and future customers will stay away. Not to mention that your customer list will appear threadbare and in serious need of expansion.

Don't look like everyone else.

Clarity is creativity, especially in markets where a lot of enabling brands emulate everyone else, and do it badly. Just because you enable rather than directly link to an end benefit shouldn't prevent you from cutting a creative figure with the customers who build you into an end solution.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, any enabling brand should approach its identity and marketing not just as another step in a process or value chain, but as an essential ingredient in the success of the market. With this overall approach, your brand can attain the best of two worlds: being both an automatic choice and one your customers make with enthusiasm.

Executive Summary

At a moment when the success of many consumer brands is built on the pillars of enabling technology brands, a great opportunity exists for these ‘background’ companies to stand up and be noticed. The key to success is proving the value you deliver at every point of an integrated marketing plan.

< Hugh Kennedy

Partner Account Planning Hugh's charter is to link what's on the minds of our clients' decision-makers to the way we develop the creative product. He also works to maintain the intellectual rigor of PJA's work in all major accounts. During ten years at PJA, Hugh has served as Editorial Director and Creative Director. He has also worked as an art dealer and published two novels.

< Mike O'Toole

Partner Client Services Mike has developed the methodology for account planning and management, and oversees PJA's operations in both Cambridge and San Francisco. Outside of work, Mike spends most of his time with his wife Kelly and four children. Mike holds an MBA from Yale University.

 **About PJA**

Since 1988, PJA (agencypja.com) has specialized in marketing and advertising programs that help technology and life sciences companies become essential in the minds of their prospects, customers, and industries.

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