

has something of a sales pitch about it, but it does provide an interesting demonstration of how the sonic branding concepts described earlier in the book are put into practice in a commercial environment. While somewhat slim to be termed a 'bible', this excellent book will probably come to be

regarded as an essential primer for those interested in exploring and exploiting the fascinating possibilities offered by sonic branding.

KEITH DINNIE
Book Review Editor

'Global Brand Strategy: Unlocking Brand Potential Across Countries, Cultures and Markets'

by Sicco van Gelder

Kogan Page Ltd, London, UK; 2003; ISBN 0 7494 4023 6; 272pp; hardback; £25

This book has a wealth of good insightful things to say about the phenomenon of globalisation, and specifically the ways in which brands need to fashion flexible strategies to address the challenges of culturally diverse markets. Sicco van Gelder writes with an authority derived from his work as head of Netherlands-based global branding consultancy Brand Meta, and as co-founder of the self-explanatory Placebrands consultancy. His observations on unlocking brand potential across countries, cultures and markets flow from research and consultancy conducted on behalf of companies such as ABN AMRO Bank, De Beers, ING Bank, Johnson & Johnson, Heineken, Hallmark Cards and Sony Music.

In the preface, van Gelder states that his book rests on the premise that each brand has its own specific potential for standardisation across and adaptation to culturally and structurally diverse markets. His approach defines global brands as brands that are available across multiple geographical areas, without setting any lower limit or any continental requirements — some of these brands may be present in dozens of countries across all continents, whereas others may be found only in a more regional setting. What ties these brands together is the challenge they all face in maintaining their brand identity while adapting it to the consumer demands of diverse markets. In order to rise to this challenge, van Gelder proposes a generalisable framework,

which he terms 'the Global Brand Proposition Model'.

Like most models, at first glance this one looks complex and forbidding. But van Gelder devotes the whole of the book to a thorough and painstaking elaboration of the concepts and linkages inherent in the Global Brand Proposition Model so that the reader is suitably enlightened by page 250, where the book shudders to a halt. In fact, one criticism that could be made of the book, and it may seem a perverse objection to make, is that there is such a mass of explanation and clarification of concepts that it can all become quite overwhelming for the reader; too much to take in. The author's style is analytical rather than narrative, which is demanding of the casual reader, although useful and actionable for the global brand manager and other practitioners who will need to put into practice the brand strategies covered in the book.

The Global Brand Proposition Model comprises two main elements: internal analysis and external analysis. These two analyses are sub-divided into three sections. For the internal analysis these sections are: the organisation (business strategy, internal legacy and internal conventions); brand expression (brand positioning, brand identity and brand personality); and marketing (marketing mix and marketing implementation). The external analysis, on the other hand, focuses upon conventions (category conventions, needs conventions and cultural conventions); brand perception (brand domain, brand reputation and brand affinity); and brand recognition (brand discrimination and brand connections). The more innovative and original thinking on van Gelder's part is to be

found in the external analysis section of the model, where he applies lessons drawn from his experience of living and working in various different cultures around the world. Through this book his contribution to global brand strategy is a considerable one, marrying as he does an in-depth knowledge of how brands work to a keen awareness of cultural particularities.

When discussing such cultural particularities, van Gelder uses the word 'convention' to describe unwritten rules that govern people's perceptions and decisions about a brand. Such conventions can be solid or flexible. Five issues are taken into account when judging the solidity of a convention from van Gelder's perspective. First, 'ubiquity', which relates to how widely something is practised by competitors or consumers. Secondly, 'uniformity', the degree to which every competitor or consumer behaves in exactly the same way or thinks in exactly the same way about a particular matter. Thirdly, 'stability', in terms of whether the convention has changed much over time and whether it has begun to show changes recently. Fourthly, 'significance', concerning the particular relevance that the convention has to competitors or consumers. Finally, the fifth issue, 'depth', relating to how rooted the convention is in the fabric of the society, and how valuable competitors and consumers feel it is to them. Numerous examples are given to illustrate these aspects of what van Gelder terms 'conventions', and he makes a compelling case for his world view.

One of the main thrusts of this book is its implication that adaptation is preferable to monolithic standardisa-

tion. In Chapter 10, 'Harmonizing a global brand', van Gelder challenges the facile yet widely held view that brands must be rigidly consistent and universal: 'Standardization as strategy, which holds that consumers want to experience the same brands in exactly the same manner no matter where they are on the globe ... is based on a doubly mistaken premise: first, that consumers around the world are becoming unavoidably more and more similar, and second, that when consumers travel to foreign countries they expect to find the exact same brands there as at home.' One may well live in a world dominated by brands, but van Gelder is right to highlight the fact that finding exactly the same brands in foreign countries as one does at home is probably not the be-all and end-all of travel.

The author's approach to global branding is both creative and methodical, drawing upon a distinctly humanis-

tic view of how brands work and their place in the much maligned globalisation process. While acknowledging the transgressions that have taken place in the name of brands, he points out that to blame branding for these wrongdoings is to overestimate the role of the branding discipline in most corporations. He asks, rhetorically, 'How many branding experts do you find on the boards of Fortune 500 companies?'. His concluding observation is that a truly new global brand is a rare thing, but that accelerating technological, economic, motivational and legal changes are likely to make the development of such brands more likely in future. This book should prove to be an invaluable reference for anyone involved in the development of such global brands.

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