

Change the Conversation

Grow Your Business through Branding and Packaging

By Will Burke

Today's consumers are shopping with greater insight and with greater expectations. They are clearly informed and confident about their choices. And in today's economic environment, they are especially careful about the brands they choose. Brands can no longer rely on name or status alone.

So, how does a brand retain or increase sales in this buying climate? The answer is to engage your consumer by telling your own authentic, meaningful, and memorable brand story—drawing upon the power of storytelling to inform and guide your branding and packaging strategy. Once engaged, the consumers become the best advocate for your brand.

What's your story?

The truly successful brand story comes from knowing what story to tell and how to tell it. At Brand Engine we use the mantra "change the conversation" to remind ourselves of our purpose as brand strategist and designers. Changing the conversation is about reexamining the brand, its core strengths, and its story line. It is about listening to what is being said about the brand and ensuring that those are the words, emotions, and stories we intended. If not, it's time to reassess.

Shifting direction is the first way to change the conversation, because there is a fine line between appealing to the tastes of



Market analysis indicated that a meaningful brand story could redefine this category.



Tapping the emotions of the consumer, Brand Engine developed a brand story and package design that focused on enjoying moments by a fire.

your core audience and defining those tastes for them. On the one hand, you want to be responsive to your target audience. You want to know their likes and dislikes and what they value. On the other hand, you need to remain true to your brand. You need to communicate your brand values and personality consistently and authentically.

Let's begin by checking in with your brand strategy. Think about the core qualities of your business—what you are passionate about, what you are best at, and why you started your business. Identify what you do, whom you do it for, and why you and others find it compelling. With this knowledge, you will know what kind of conversation you need to have with your consumer. You will also know how to change the conversation as the needs of your consumers change.

Do you know your customer?

You are probably saying to yourself: "I know my product inside and out. I know who I'm targeting and why my brand matters to them." Duraflame thought they did, too. When the company decided to reposition its brand, their initial strategy was to highlight the new eco-friendly formulation and enhanced product performance of their fire logs.

Looking deeper, we discovered that when consumers considered fire logs, their conversations were about warm intimate moments by the fire and ease of use—in other words, the experience. Based on these insights, to reach consumers at an emotional rather than functional level, our brand story and package design focus on the experience of enjoying a fire. We also stayed true to the brand's position as the premiere fire log by main-

DESIGNER'S CORNER

taining Duraflame's color palette and memorable logotype. By changing the conversation, Duraflame saw significant growth in sales, in addition to increased shelf space.

As Duraflame realized, consumers are shopping with their emotions and their logic. They seek brands that fit their lifestyle, appeal to their passions, and solve their problems. By focusing on consumer psychographics, your brand can connect in a way that your competitors cannot.

Plum Organics, a frozen organic baby food line, is an example of how a new business used an authentic and meaningful brand story to change the conversation in their category and become the leader. Plum Organics knew that "healthy" and "great tasting" were important product features. We found that the bigger, more compelling brand story centered on the "joy" and emotional bonding of family mealtime. The package design changed the conversation in the baby food category by introducing a clean, uncluttered look into a category full of busy and cutesy packages. A spoon brimming with food and a happy, bubbly baby communicate satisfaction—both the taste

and experience of eating. In less than two years, Plum Organics became a category leader, securing distribution in over 700



Clarifying Wildwood Organics' brand story and package design generated broader consumer appeal while remaining true to the brand's mission, vision, and values.

locations. Building on its success, Plum has extended its brand into a line of kids' frozen organic meals.

As Plum Organics has shown, the most effective conversation you can have with your consumer is the one that creates a narrative about your brand's mission, vision, and values. Too often brands try to be everything for everyone. Trying to appeal to every consumer's needs or wants actually makes brands more generic, leaving your consumers confused about what you really represent.

How defined can you be?

Wildwood Organics is a good example of how a brand can generate broader audience appeal by expressing a clear message to its defined audience. The Wildwood brand, known for its



Brand Engine designed Plum Organics Kids' frozen meal line, a natural extension of their frozen baby food brand.

premium organic vegetarian foods, was aimed at the health-conscious crowd, but its packaging design instead told a more esoteric story.

We were able to draw a wider audience to Wildwood by developing a brand story and package design that highlighted the company's social and environmental commitment to natural foods while still communicating premium quality. By presenting the brand's story and values clearly, Wildwood became the No. 1 selling tofu in the U.S., with a 52% market share. They can also boast the No. 1 selling single-serve veggie burger and water pack tofu on the West Coast.

Telling authentic brand stories is the key to growing your business in these challenging times. Conveying the brand story through language and visual design creates a meaningful connection with the consumer, which in turn drives sales, builds loyalty, and increases brand value. When a brand is embraced at the emotional level, its power extends to the consumer's sphere of influence.

With so much advertising and media saturation these days, more and more people are looking to their network of friends and family to advise them on what products and services to buy. An enthusiastic and loyal customer will encourage more new customers than any impersonal advertising methods can. It's all about the conversation—the one you have with the consumer and the one they have with everyone else. ■



Will Burke is CEO and creative director of Brand Engine, a strategic branding and packaging design firm in Sausalito, CA. Will has been focusing on consumer brands in the food and beverage category for over 20 years, and his main area of expertise is changing the conversation with the consumer to drive sustainable results. Will can be reached via info@brandengine.com.