

A New Brand Science

Applying Scientific Metaphors in the Design of Identity

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Abstract

Corporate Identity Design is a largely misunderstood element of business, limiting the roles and influence it can have on shaping not only external opinion and success, but also internal morale and profitability. The process of designing a brand, look and feel is often erroneously fast forwarded past the initial introspective, navel gazing stage to the later steps of logo and layout - hijacking the possibility for truly affecting growth and meaningful change within both the external perceptions and the internal perceptions of the organization, its core values and vision.

Applying the conceptual principals of new science – quantum physics, fractals, systems and chaos theories we become clearer in the reasons why this step of the creative design process is so important, in fact the fundamental foundation of the final design. In plumbing the psychological depths of an organization as an initial step in the identity design process, we honor the necessity of making meaning as a way to chart a course through what often feels like a meaningless world.

This paper will make connections between the worlds of design, business and science – showing how each informs the others, laying the foundation for a holistic approach to business, creativity and success.

Introduction

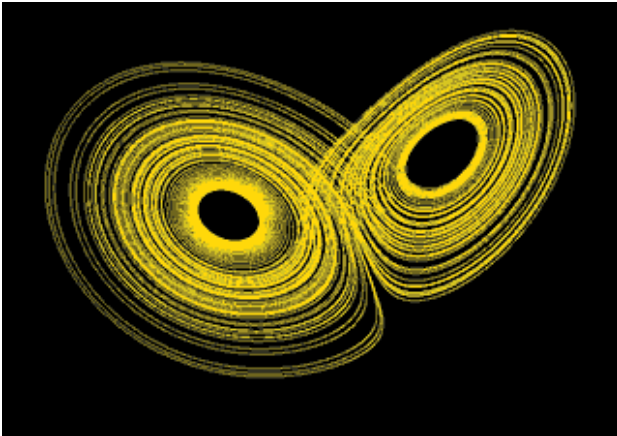
A brand is something very hard to put your finger on. Simply thinking in terms of a logo mark and website barely scratches the surface of the value and power a brand wields. It is, as we call it in the Corporate Identity industry, an Intangible Asset, which is why numbers driven people have such a hard time getting their heads around the concept. It's very difficult to measure on a balance sheet.

In this paper I will explain a little about what makes a brand so powerful. Looking at how creating a brand or personal identity is about creatively reaching goals, I will show examples of 2 successful businesses working at different scales in the food industry. By using metaphors from the worlds of chaos, fractals and quantum physics, we can better understand how these two enterprises have reached the powerful scale they have and see where these methods can be applied to our own personal brand identities and to the world we live in.

What is a Brand?

A brand is more than just a pretty image or logo; it's a feeling that unites people through its intrinsic values. Like a strange attractor in the world of Chaos theory - a brand is a consciously designed set of parameters, based on essential values and shared meaning. It is not an end, however, but a process constantly revealing itself over time. It doesn't have to be a product or service; people too can be considered brands – the Pope for instance, or Madonna. Not just companies, rock stars, and religious leaders can be brands. Every average mortal has an identity, an image and spirit they project to the world about who they are.

A common mistake people make is in believing that a logo is a brand. Logos are an important part of any organization's identity—their recognizable nature carries powerful associative value that can sway a consumer's decision one way or the other. In a sea of the unfamiliar – we gravitate towards the recognizable. One must be careful though not to cut the brand's power so short, as it is much more than just a pretty logo slapped on the side of a box that creates an identity. Instead the brand is an entire set of values and philosophy that spins outward from its conception - forming a red line of consistency through all aspects associated with the thing it represents. Every detail contains an aspect of this thread, from the design approach if the website, to



A brand is like a strange attractor - both are complex structures based on simple rules that reveal themselves over time

the customer service rep on the phone, to the strategic visions of the board of directors. Though the brand itself is intangible and difficult to quantify, each facet of an organization's behavior reflects the brand's values—each extension becomes a contact-point where messages are transmitted.

More than just a design template, a brand can be vision of how one wants to be perceived in the world and the actions that are required to realize that goal. By this I do not mean simply projecting positive images of success, power, wealth and status, unless those are your essential core values. I mean looking at what value you can contribute to the world, through your business, your character and your essence. A brand is a vision of your goals in the process of becoming. Two key questions when building a brand are:

- Who do you choose to be?
- What will you do with those achievements when you reach them?

A brand also has the potential of becoming a touchstone at times of strategic inflection¹, when at a critical juncture an important decision must be made about which way to turn. It can act like the North Star to guide your ship through the night. Businesses and individuals alike encounter these dark moments of the soul – and depending on what qualities are lurking there, resulting actions will spring from this base. Therefore a Brand can elicit either trust or cynicism, based on everything from the easy navigation on a website to the rumors about the CEO's private life.

Holding Creative Tension

What happens when the place that you want you want to be to be whether as an individual or an organization is way off from the reality of your current situation?

Back in art school my friends and I would play a game when we encountered a difficult life situation with no apparent right answer. Honoring the supreme badass wisdom of Frank Sinatra we would ask ourselves, “What would Frank do?” – and upon determining the answer (and depending on feasibility) we would do what we imagined Frank would have done. We were, as Peter Senge would call it, “holding creative tension” between who we were in that moment and who we aspired to be. So, as I explain to my clients, the trick for is to decide who you want to be at an essential values kind of level, and begin acting as if you are already there. In behaving like this it allows the opportunity for conscious choice and meaning to be applied to what seem like the unrelated, chaotic events of life. Holding this tension creates a conscious pattern of meaning, a strange attractor based on identity that reveals its structure over time.

It is this vision of a future self that has to be held in creative tension with your current position today. It is a creative juggling act of honoring your current place and your vision of the future together – and asking questions about the kinds of behaviors you would exhibit once the goal has been achieved. Then, with those answers in hand, the trick is to begin implementing them now – as if you have already reached your goal. Vision is the creative force in this process, the catalyst. Robert Fritz says, “Its not what the vision is, its what the vision does.” Truly creative people use the gap between vision and current reality to generate energy for change. 2. Holding creative tension between the present and the future you make adjustments as you go. Once you get to a certain distance out from that starting point you look back can see just how much of an effect this simple creative exercise can have on your trajectory. Its as if a whole world unfolds from the first kernel of intention, weaving a web of intricate complexity.



Evolution of the Starbucks logo



Starbucks – The Whole is in Every Part

When I was growing up in Seattle I remember my mom taking me to this little shop at the Pike Place market where they sold freshly roasted coffee. I would walk through the door into this warmly lit haven of rich aromas and be instantly transported to a world of friendly coffee connoisseurship. Between the sounds of the coffee grinding and the glass canisters that lined the bar filled with dark glistening beans, every sense was tantalized. Even as a little kid I was sensitive to brands and the coffee store’s logo always stuck in my mind as noteworthy, if a little ugly. You see, it was brown and had a naked double-tailed mermaid for a mascot. During my last year of art school in Chicago I noticed a similar logo pop up on a street corner one day – slightly more refined and now green – it appeared they were expanding. This logo has since become globally ubiquitous – belonging to none other than the caffeine behemoth, Starbucks.

Over the years the company has grown from its first shop in Seattle’s Pike Place market to become a market leader in the coffee industry, serving 15 million customers a week in over 4,000 stores around the world. Aside from providing a consistently cheerful cup of coffee, whether you happen to be in Baltimore or Berlin, Starbucks has created a reason for the employees to be cheerful. With a generous benefits package and a stock purchase plan, every employee has the opportunity to become a partner – a co-owner in the business – reducing turn over and costs for their extensive edu/training program. Starbucks has also contributed to the communities in which it operates through literacy programs and other local organizations that are meaningful to the employees. In order to guide

this aspect more intentionally, Starbucks provides its Mission Statement on its website – where among its key principals include these points:

- Provide a great work environment and treat each other with respect
- Embrace diversity as an essential component in the way we do business
- Contribute positively to our communities and environment

They also have a separate Environmental Mission Statement, which includes these among its key objectives:

- Developing innovative and flexible solutions to bring about change
- Instilling environmental responsibility as a corporate value
- Encouraging our partners (employees) to share in our mission

As the company leader of this billion-dollar business, Howard Schultz explains that his primary goals have been to “serve a great cup of coffee and build a company with soul”. In doing this he has recognized how important the brand is to the success of the business, carefully crafting a globally recognizable image built on consistent values. Explaining that “brands are fragile”, Schultz has shied away from advertising. As his VP of Creative, Robert Wong explains, “Howard is actually an anti-advertising guy. He believes that the store is the billboard and that the distribution and frequency and reach are the immersive brand experiences. He focuses all the branding



Starbucks' global commitment to community

on the five senses, on the warm cup, the art on the wall, the music, the grinding of the beans and the calling of the drinks". 3.

The fully immersive brand experience requires what Scott Bedbury, another veteran Starbucks V.P., calls Brand Cohesion. "It needs to be guided, designed, engineered"—so that a consistent brand voice is reflected everywhere, at every contact point. At Starbucks many properties of the brand are non-local, like a haze of input experienced through the senses. This concept is found quantum mechanics, where we learn that information is dispersed evenly, not compartmentalized. In this way we can think of the successful brand as being holographic. Through extending into the realm of the senses, the Starbucks brand also exploits other holographic qualities – namely the fact that our brain interprets the world through frequencies picked up by our senses. The more pleasing the sensation, the more likely one will come back for more.

Let me explain what I mean by holographic. When you cut a hologram in half, each piece contains the whole image. No matter how small the pieces you cut from a hologram, each piece will always contain all the information recorded in the whole. A hologram is made by interference patterns captured on a piece of film. A single laser light is split into two separate beams. The first beam is bounced off the object to be photographed. Then the second beam is allowed to collide with the

reflected light of the first. When this happens they create an interference pattern, which is then recorded, using Fourier mathematics, onto the film. 4.

Stumbling across this information in a mid-'60's article from Scientific American, the neuroscientist Karl Pribram, who had been researching how memory is stored in the brain, experienced an epiphany. He had been struggling with the fact that the mice he had trained to perform a variety of tasks could retain the memory of how to operate those tasks despite having large portions of their brain removed. If memory was stored in different areas of the brain, which was the accepted belief at the time, how could the mice still function and remember things when operating on only a small portion of their brain? This analogy of the Hologram helped him reach a breakthrough in understanding the possibilities. Through further study of the human visual cortex, which operated much the same way as brains of lab mice, Pribram came to the concept of non-locality – where the information was spread out evenly across the whole brain like a cloud or field. If the brain was processing images by employing some kind of internal hologram, even a very small piece of the brain/hologram could contain the whole image.

Eventually it was determined that the visual cortex was responding to frequencies of various wave forms and that the brain was using Fourier mathematics—the same mathematics holography employed – to convert visual images into the Fourier language of wave forms. 5. Other sensory receivers, including the ear and skin have been determined to be frequency analyzers as well. Links have also been made between the sense of taste and frequency.

In light of these discoveries the fact that Starbucks has been so successful at instilling their brand image through the adept stimulation of our 5 senses comes as no surprise. From the very beginning the Starbucks story has been told through sensory experiences not tag-line dogma, with emotional consistency and clarity at every contact point. The brand's red line has unfolded from the first coffee beans they roasted, and has been an integral factor throughout their development. Though the Starbucks brand extends beyond the realm of the senses, at every point of connection it reveals itself to be

consistent to its origin. From Frappuccinos to the health insurance benefits they offer for domestic partners of employees, Starbucks makes good on their promise of being a company with soul, serving people a great cup of coffee.

The Observer Affects the Observed

I was talking to a friend of mine the other day about apples. He's a scientific philosopher and looks at the world from a very different perspective than I do. Still, we are able to meet somewhere between our different viewpoints and shine lights into otherwise darkened corners of each other's limited fields of view. I had mentioned to him that apples are great metaphor for the holographic universe concept, because of the star that lives inside each one. He was a little disturbed by the analogy, having never seen the star I was talking about. Explaining it was all a matter of how you slice it I took an apple from the fruit bowl and cut it crossways, revealing the star pattern from the seeds inside. He was astonished, never having thought to slice the apple this way. Pointing out that seeds and the star were like the micro and the macro of the universe he came to understand my point. All of a sudden it struck me, though, that slicing the apple was also a great metaphor for quantum observation.

In Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle – we learn that that one can never separate the observer from what they are observing. When performing scientific experiments in the quantum mechanical world there is no definitive prediction that can be made with 100% certainty about the behavior of quanta, instead only a set of probabilities.

An electron, for example, can take the form of either a wave or a particle—but the only time they ever manifest as particles is when we are observing them. Experimental findings have shown that when an electron isn't being looked at it is always a wave. The physicist Nick Herbert explains it like imagining that behind his back the world is always “A radically ambiguous and ceaselessly flowing quantum soup.” 6.

Another example of the observer's affect is demonstrated in particle analysis. In order to measure the position and velocity of a particle you must shine a light (a photon) on



Can you hold the universe in an apple? It depends on how you slice it.

it and then detect its reflection. The mere act of shining light on the particle will affect the test at a subatomic scale. The higher the frequency of the light photon, the more energy it has and the more it will affect the momentum of the particle. The location can be determined, but not the velocity. The lower the frequency of the photon, the lower the uncertainty of momentum but the higher the uncertainty of the position.

Though this applies on the sub-atomic scale, it is not something we can tangibly recognize happening on a macro scale. When you look at the bus driving past in the street, you can't affect its velocity or its position by simply looking at it, but you can “read” these aspects from your perspective. You can also run out in the street in front of the bus with your arms waving and see if that stops it. The interpretation of a man riding the bus who is late for work will be different than the interpretation of the woman sitting next to him trying to read a billboard they are passing. In this instance the bus is simultaneously going too slowly, and too fast. The key is individual perspective – affected by attitude and a complex web of interrelated factors.

Bearing all of this in mind, it makes common sense to approach life with this little Heisenberg maxim as a guiding principal. We each affect what we observe, influencing things beyond our imagination in subtle, butterfly-effect like ways through our attitude, behavior,

language and structures of meaning. Applying this concept to the challenge of creating a meaningful identity, whether personal or organizational, we understand that how we fill a brand with meaning will go to affect how others read and respond to that brand – affecting their opinions, behaviors and the overall system of success or failure for the organization. Ultimately though, Heisenberg shows us that the branded individual or organization has the potential to be much more than just a well designed logo and series of connection points – but a carefully considered bundle of meaning that can be used as tool for social change.

Alice Waters - Natural Self-Similarity

Traveling in France several years ago I happened across a charming farmers market in Nice that was overflowing with gloriously fresh produce of every color and description. Scanning over the tables piled high with carrots, aubergine and other vegetables I found a particular item that intrigued me. It seemed to be some sort of cauliflower-broccoli hybrid but had the distinct quality of being comprised of beautifully self-similar spirals. From tip to end the spirals fanned out in perfect succession, lining up in an ongoing repetition of an inherent pattern. I had never seen one of these in the Safeway produce aisle back in the states before and was surprised to learn of its existence. Whatever the vegetable was called, it was an exquisite example of nature's fractal artistry.

Before the New York Times dubbed her the “Mother of American Cooking”, Alice Waters had a similar experience to my own in the farmers markets of France. Not long before graduating from The University of California with a degree in French cultural studies she had discovered a world of unusually exquisite organic produce while traveling there. As she explained to the New York Times “this was my first connection with the farmers’ markets and real food. I loved what I ate and I wanted that kind of food here.” She found through her experiences that “the best tasting food came from the people who were taking care of the land and nourishing it. These were the organic farmers”.



Nature's fractal artistry found in a French farmer's market

Inspired by the simply prepared, healthy food she had found in Europe, after college Waters began cooking dinner parties for friends. Eventually the dinners grew into the Provencal style bistro Chez Panisse, named after the heroine of a book by French author Marcel Pagnol. Over the years the Berkeley CA based restaurant has become a destination for gourmands, celebrities and presidents alike, searching for delicious natural food prepared with elegant restraint. Working with local ranchers and farmers she has encouraged them to grow healthy foods, pushing for organic wherever she can. As her business has grown she has even resorted to hiring a “forager” for her restaurants, hunting down suppliers who provide healthy and preferably organic ingredients.

Nothing Waters does in her business breaks from her vision of effecting social change on a grand scale. David Goines, a friend of Waters since '66 and the designer/illustrator of two of her cookbooks explains, “Alice's vision is extremely clear. She's not concerned with the restaurant. She's concerned with good food. If you were to light a fire and burn the restaurant down, she'd keep going. She's on a mission.” As she explained in an



:CHEZ: PANISSE:

Alice Waters and a her brand extensions

interview with the New Yorker “The sensual pleasure of eating beautiful food from the garden brings with it the moral satisfaction of doing the right thing for the planet and for yourself.” 7.

But Waters has not stopped at just three restaurants and a stack of cookbooks promoting natural foods. In addition she has developed a program called the Edible Schoolyard with the neighboring Martin Luther King Middle School, turning a desolate asphalt lot into a lush edible garden and resource for students to learn about growing and preparing foods naturally. From this project she has also been inspired to develop the Chez Panisse Foundation – intended to provide grants to non-profit organizations promoting sustainable agriculture. To date the foundation has provided over a quarter of a million dollars in donations to like-minded endeavors.

Looking at the diversity in the projects that Alice Waters has undertaken, there appears to be little in common between running a restaurant and setting up a foundation. But beneath the specific details of the different disciplines, there is a definitive red line running through all of her enterprises, based on a clearly defined set of core values.

No matter whether she is planning a menu or writing letters to congress on behalf of organic farming, teaching school children about edible flowers or negotiating orders



with a local grower – there is a self-similarity in all of Waters’ activities. A pattern flows through her actions, revealing itself anew with each extension she makes. Like the fractals I discovered in the cauliflower, where the inherent pattern remained similar at every level of magnification, her pattern remains the same whether picking carrots or choosing worthy grant recipients. As Margaret Wheatley explains, “All fractal patterns are created as individuals exercise both freedom and responsibility to a few simple rules. Complex structures emerge over time from simple elements and rules, and autonomous interactions.” 8.

A few basic rules (Brand Values) inform how Waters responds to the numinous variables and challenges she bumps up against in the ongoing fight for her cause. From her first encounters with organic produce in France she has established a simple ideology that has grown into a complex web of interrelated outcroppings—all based around the idea of eating healthy natural food that reconnects people with the earth and their essential selves. Armed with little more than a determination to stay true to her values, Waters has built a brand for herself without advertising or marketing. She has never attached her name to a line of packaged foods or franchised her restaurant. Her growth as a business, a person and a brand has been simply organic. Naturally.

Conclusion

So, we have looked at how building a brand takes more than just a good logo design. It requires a bit of navel gazing in order to determine an essential framework of core values. These brand values work like a strange attractor, helping manage the creative tension between your present situation and the vision of whom you choose to be, whether as an individual or a brand.

Starbucks has showed us that great brands are fully immersive experiences. Whether working with in local communities for meaningful change or by tantalizing the senses, a brand can harness the holographic power of the quantum world. Alice Waters, with her uncompromising mission to teach people the value of natural foods, shows how clear brand values inform our actions – revealing a self-similar, fractal pattern in each seemingly unrelated endeavor she undertakes. Heisenberg’s uncertainty principal reminds us that our observation affects what we are observing. Our attitudes and viewpoints shape the world we live in – tending more to rely on our concepts of reality than on our observations. 9. Like finding the star inside the apple, your experience of the world depends on how you slice it. This revelation puts the power back into the hands of the individual – begging the question, what kind of world do you choose to live in? If we all co-create the world through our observation of it, its in our power to effect positive change with just a little thoughtful leverage. By holding creative tension between where we are now and where we choose to be, whether as a brand or as an individual, we can work our way to a brighter future.

End Notes

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