

Your Brand Is Not Always What It Appears To Be

November 2011 newsletter

Perceptions of car brands are generally so consistent that we use them in qualitative research as a projective exercise. For example, if consumers say that a certain product is personified by a Mercedes, we can attribute the qualities of that brand (comfort, safety, prestige) to that product.

But brand perceptions vary widely, depending on the culture, and the most remarkable divergences can be found in China. Because it has been importing Western automobiles for only three decades, 80 percent of all car purchases in China are still being made by first-time buyers - who are attracted primarily to the image of the car.

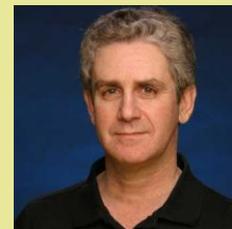
Because these brand images differ widely from American perceptions, it is instructive to understand how these differences arose and how fluid brand perceptions can be.

- **Buick** is thought of as a luxury brand in China because several early adopters were revered leaders. GM has been so successful in leveraging this history that they sell three times as many Buicks in China than they do in the U.S.
- **Audi** is also a much bigger brand in China and one-fifth of its sales are made to high-level government bureaucrats. While this tends to enhance its prestige, it also comes with a hint of corruption (a piece of advice: always yield to an Audi in China).

This is a monthly newsletter from Prell Organization.

Prell Organization is a marketing research firm that uses qualitative and quantitative methods to help our clients and their agencies see their brands more clearly.

Brand Clarity is a process by which consumers reveal the essence of a brand to make sure that the products and services being offered are closely aligned to their needs.



- **BMW** has an unfortunate history of being involved in high-speed accidents, making it the preferred automobile for thrill-seekers, but not very appropriate for the wealthy or government officials who prefer to keep a lower profile.
- **Mercedes**, although still very pricey, is considered to be the automobile of choice for older or retired Chinese. It is an odd twist of fate that has allowed Buick and Mercedes to switch brand identities.

These examples show that it is possible to reinvent your brand, but also that your brand can be altered by events outside of your control. That is why it is critically important to monitor what your brand stands for in the eyes of your customers.

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