



2011 Breakaway Brands Are Classic, Contemporary, Authentic

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You might think that Facebook and Reese's have little in common. The former is a modern, digital, network-based data powerhouse and the latter is a decades-old, peanut-butter-and-chocolate confectionary staple—likely Hershey's biggest stake in many kids' trick-or-treat bags.

But both brands made Landor's Breakaway Brands of 2011 list because they mixed classic and contemporary values while "using basic branding principles to stay relevant and differentiated," according to the study. The study, conducted by New York-based global brand consultancy Landor Associates, measured growth in brand strength from 2007 to 2010 for 2,500 brands in Young & Rubicam's BrandAsset Valuator U.S. database, an ongoing brand strength and perception study that polls consumers quarterly, covers approximately 50,000 brands in 40 countries and has been running for nearly two decades. The top 10 brands on the 2011 Breakaway Brands list were, in order, Facebook, Skype, YouTube, Netflix, Samsung, Apple, iTunes, Amazon.com, Reese's and National Guard.

The brands on the list also communicate two popular values in today's tough economic climate: comfort and nostalgia. "What's interesting about this apparent paradox of old and new is that in some ways the new brands have become landmarks, comfort brands in and of themselves. Facebook is no longer a newbie; it's a leader in its category. Just as you might eat Reese's as a comfort activity, you'd log on to Facebook as part of your daily routine. It's a comforting activity to be connected, and the same is true for people consuming media via Netflix or communicating via Skype," says Mich Bergesen, global director of financial services at Landor Associates.

Communicating comfort can help brands really connect with consumers, says Stef Gans, CEO of EffectiveBrands, a New York-based global branding consultancy. "When times are tough, people are looking for brands they know and the comforts they can bring not only functionally, but also emotionally."

The list is dominated by brands from the Internet and technology world such as Skype, YouTube and Facebook that the millennial generation (consumers ages 15 to 34) are particularly tuned into, but experts say so-called "modern" brands resonate across age groups because they also target boomers and GenXers effectively.

"There is an aspirational target audience for the brand, then there's the real target audience for the brand. I think of Facebook and Skype and YouTube as being millennial brands, but ... lots of people who are baby boomers and GenXers are users of those brands and part of the appeal for those people is that they're contemporary brands targeted at millennials," says Rob Scalea, CEO of North America at The Brand Union, a New York-based global brand agency.

Two other common themes for Landor's Breakaway Brands are simplicity and authenticity, which all marketers should keep in mind, experts say. "[It] sounds like Marketing 101, but in truth, if there's one [thing] they all have in common, they are authentically what they present themselves

to be. I can immediately picture what Facebook stands for, what Netflix stands for, what Apple stands for,” Bergesen says.

A big part of authenticity is connecting your business strategy to your branding strategy, Scalea says. “These are all brands for which the business strategy is in lockstep with what the brand values themselves are. No matter how hard you want to present yourself as being cool and hip, if you don’t have the right products or you’re not meeting the needs of your customers, then the brand is not going to be sustainable no matter how creative you try to get.”

Eduardo Braniff, CEO of Imagination/The Americas, a London-based global integrated communications agency, says the National Guard—which doubled its ad spend starting in 2007 to combat recruiting challenges, admitting in its marketing campaign that it would never be as “sexy” as the Air Force—did this particularly well. “I am most drawn to National Guard for explicitly stating their intent. Whether because they are single-channel or because they are extraordinarily focused on their brand consistency [like] Apple, these brands have a clear message, [like] Reese’s, and a clear experience, [like] Apple and Facebook,” he says. “Drop the ‘noise’ and tell me what you do. Period.”

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