



## Three steps to global brand success - EffectiveBrands at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity

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## **Practical tips for global brand success - EffectiveBrands at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity**

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While the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity is primarily known in the marketing world for its ad awards, the week-long event also attracts a significant non-agency contingent: this year, clients, media owners, PR firms and consultancies all hosted events and presentations at the Palais.

One of the most prominent of these firms was EffectiveBrands, which ran a well-attended workshop on global brand building. The international consultancy's USP is that it employs a network of experts who originally come from the client side. The team can therefore offer advice to other global brand owners that is firmly grounded in their own experience.

### **Global vs local**

Research conducted by the consultancy and presented in Cannes shows a trend towards centralisation among large advertisers. (Data is taken from EffectiveBrands' proprietary Leading Global Brands study, which began almost a decade ago and now includes insight from over 250 brands.) According to the research, the promotion of global brands, rather than local brands, is becoming increasingly important to clients; brand strategy is also becoming ever more centrally-led, with local offices having less of a say.

## Global Brands are becoming more important



Source: Proprietary LGB™ Study across 250 global brands across industries

Yet there is a sense among advertisers that global brands remain under-utilised, and that there needs to be greater flexibility and speed in rolling out successful initiatives in different territories.

## But few are leveraging opportunity



Source: Proprietary LGB™ Study across 250 global brands across industries

In other words, the complexities of selling global brands in a local way - of using local expertise but planning executions centrally - are far from resolved, even among the world's largest advertisers.

One of EffectiveBrands' most prominent advisers is Simon Clift, the former CMO of Unilever. Interviewed in Cannes, Clift was quick to highlight the necessity of striking the correct balance between local and global.

"If I look at the campaigns that I have been associated with, they nearly all are based on some sort of universal positioning that can be tailored for greater resonance in different markets," he said. "But every category, every brand and every project needs

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to find a position between completely global and completely local. There is no right answer for every case."

Planning and executing global campaigns is a tough ask for larger advertisers with many local offices in different territories. Rivalries between these offices can damage a global brand. Clift pointed out that a powerful voice for localism within such an organisation could well be speaking for their own self-interest - wishing for the freedom to do their own thing in their own country.

The structure of a business can also mitigate against effective multinational brand-building. "I worked for a major US multinational that looked from the outside like a global company," Clift explained. "But they were set up completely locally - meaning that a brilliant bit of creative launched in one nation was left unused in other markets. And that's a blatant waste of shareholder's money."

EffectiveBrands founder Marc De Swaan Arons added: "Basically, there's an underlying distrust of global marketers that run a big global brand towards one global, purposeful, positioning. When a country pushes back and says 'that tactic won't work here,' there's a slight worry that this pushback is more about 'I would like to take the brand somewhere else', than 'that tactic is not right'."

### **Building a successful global brand**

So, how can these pitfalls be avoided by multinational marketers?

In a brief, but cogent, presentation to the EffectiveBrands workshop, Clift offered a guide to what are, for him, the three "core characteristics" of a successful global brand: establishing a "universal truth" about a brand, then a "purposeful positioning", then providing a "total experience" for customers.



Naturally, he had examples from his time at Unilever, the world's second-largest advertiser to back up his points.

### ***Universal truth***

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"Whether you like it or not global brands are seen by consumers as having an important role," Clift told delegates. This is not to suggest that every brand should tap into truths that are uplifting and palatable to all. For example, Clift pointed out that campaigns for AXE, a Unilever brand, tap into the simple truth that "young men want to get laid".

But universal truths should not be presented in the same way in each market. "However rooted your brand is in a universal truth, that does not mean you need to execute it in the same way everywhere," Clift said.

"My top tip is that you need to find as universal a truth as possible and then execute it as locally as necessary."

Not taking account of local sensitivities can easily backfire on marketers. For example, an AXE ad featuring film star Jennifer Aniston lovingly ironing the hero's shirt got laughs in the UK - where the scene was viewed, as intended, as part of the hero's erotic fantasy - but did not work as well in Italy, where young men often have their shirts ironed by their sister before a night out on the town.

### ***Purposeful positioning***

Global brands often find success if they are positioned as "having some impact on improving people's lives," Clift said.

"It's hard to see Unilever's brands - washing-up liquids, surface cleaners and shampoos - laddering up to having a higher purpose. But these brands can fundamentally improve people's lives in small but important ways."

The pioneering example of purposeful positioning of this kind is The Body Shop's long-term association with anti animal testing campaigns, beginning in the 1970s. Focusing on this issue inspired "messianic" brand advocacy for the company. A more recent example is Starbucks, which has successfully sold consumption of its core product - artisanal coffee - as a positive lifestyle choice. Starbucks' decision to pay its employees a living wage, rather than the minimum wage, further distinguished the firm from its fast food rivals and reinforced the brand's positive positioning.

From Unilever's brand portfolio, there is the long-running Campaign for Real Beauty from Dove, which aimed to broaden the definition of beauty and encourage self-acceptance among its female target audience.

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Dove



The effects of this campaign were internal as well as external. "It unleashed not just enormous loyalty but commitment from Dove employees," Clift said. "I had junior brand managers the world over say to me that they came to work feeling that they were doing something good and valuable."

This feeling helps to "unleash creativity" in brands. Needless to say, the possibilities of leveraging employee enthusiasm into subsequent communications with customers are "enormous", Clift added.

### ***Total experience***

The last characteristic of a global brand is offering a total brand experience in an area in which they have built trust among consumers.

Nike is not just a shoe company but a "total service company that helps you succeed," Clift said. For example, the company offers runners an information service for jogging routes in cities around the world, and associates itself with charities such as cycling champion Lance Armstrong's Livestrong.

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## Nike Total Experience



AXE also provides an example from the Unilever portfolio. The brand has rolled out a series of apps, microsites and online games that are all aimed at broadening user engagement with the brand.

This leverages the media consumption trend away from TV and towards online and mobile platforms, which is particularly strong among AXE's target audience of young men.

### In summary

- **Global advertisers are increasingly promoting global brands via multinational campaigns. Yet difficulties remain with rolling out successful strategies over multiple territories.**
- **Getting the balance between global and local is crucial for large advertisers: they need to find as universal a truth as possible and then execute it as locally as necessary.**
- **The other two steps necessary for building a successful global brand are to establish a purposeful positioning, and to offer a total brand experience to customers.**

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### About the Author



Joseph Clift is a web producer for Warc.

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