

A few tips on...

**WINNING
SHARE OF MIND
WITH YOUR TONE
OF VOICE**



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Fate does not hang on a wrong or right choice; fortune depends on the tone of your voice

It's not what you say, it's the way that you say it.

...so sang Neil Hannon, the inspirational singer-songwriter, in 'Songs of Love' (the theme to the cult Irish comedy series, Father Ted). He could have been writing a mantra for the modern brander. As we will see, innocent, Umpqua and Geek Squad are all brands whose fortunes have hung on the tone of their voice.

The importance of branding

We're all familiar with the importance of brands to businesses. We know that customers and consumers repeatedly buy and try products and services from brands they trust and with which they identify. That's true whether it's an IT Director purchasing an enterprise-wide system from Cisco, or a 10 year-old buying his favourite chocolate bar from Cadbury.

Most of us have an awareness of the psychological effects of brand building on people's behaviour. We also know the importance of differentiated and attractive brand identities (logos, colours, imagery) and communications campaigns (advertising, PR and increasingly social and digital media).

There are lots of brands who get the basics of branding right...

A clear positioning - (we know what RyanAir stands for, even if we don't like it) - a consistent, differentiated and protected brand identity (eg Burger King is different to McDonald's all over the world).

Relentless campaigning that uses memorable imagery and messages to lodge the brand name in our minds (those 'compare the market' meerkats, for example).

But truly BOLD brands go far beyond just the basics...

They commit whole-heartedly to a specific personality which they then bring to life through visual and verbal symbols, metaphors, imagery and language across the whole of the brand experience (not just marketing communications).

They push that personality to the absolute limit, being brave enough to take it as far as it can possibly go creatively but wise enough not to spray it around like a dog marking territory.

They tear up the rule-book of strict brand guidelines that traditional 'logo cops' follow.

They use their branding as a way of encouraging a conversation and an engaging relationship with their customers and their employees (current and prospective!).

...but above all, what really sets their approach to branding apart is that they believe in and utilise the full power of '**tone of voice**', using visual and verbal language, not to inject an artificial personality, but as an integral part of an authentic customer experience.

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Brands that speak volumes to their customers

innocent drinks is the brand that has come to define the 'tone of voice' movement. Its witty, cheeky, charmingly naive language has helped differentiate its brand. As Richard Reed, co-founder and 'Chief Squeezer' at innocent, points out:

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We used the language of the kitchen, not the language of the manufacturing facility

This approach has encouraged consumers to develop a relationship with these healthy drinks that some of us might find less than healthy. Some of innocent's consumers knit little woolly hats to decorate their smoothie bottles at Christmas – well they wouldn't want the poor little things to get cold!

Maintaining their innocence

In their latest example of branded tone of voice, innocent's new smoothies have a campaign running; it has a slogan saying 'buy one get one bee'. It makes you smile, like most of innocent's language. It uses marketing jargon with a self-conscious irony. But it is also an expression of their purpose. Bees are good for nature, they help good things grow. But the bee population has been declining. So supporting a cause to breed more bees that can be released into the wild is a good thing.

The main thing about innocent's use of language though is that it is consistently encouraged inside the company. People use cheeky humour, silly puns, made-up stories, as ways of keeping the brand personality alive and authentic. At their former headquarters in West London, they had a sign above the entrance door, for 'visitors' and a sign above the window next to the entrance door for 'burglars'.

Nowadays, many of us who work helping to build brand identity for companies will be asked to "do us an innocent, we want a tone of voice like that." That's a bad brief of course. What they mean is not to be cheeky, but to be brave with a tone of voice that is as authentic to them as innocent have been with theirs.



WINNING SHARE OF MIND WITH YOUR TONE OF VOICE

Brands that speak volumes to their people A strong brand identity can help you recruit the right people



Geek Squad, like innocent, realised the power of imagery, of symbols and verbal play to differentiate the customer experience and to encourage, even enforce a desired culture. Every aspect of the company's presentation has been considered as an opportunity to use language differently.

Geek Squad technicians are Special Agents, in-store staff are Counter Agents, and staff that are in-store and make at-home visits are Double Agents. It's fun, it's quirky, and it helps to self-select people. If you're not comfortable dressing like Ed Harris in *Apollo 13* or Michael Douglas in *Falling Down*, then you won't like working at the Geek Squad.

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BOLD – How to be Brave in Business and Win, *Uncommon Practice* and *See Feel Think Do* with Shaun Smith, *Brand it like Beckham* and *Don't Mess With The Logo!* Andy is co-founder of **The Caffeine Partnership** which helps businesses, their brands and people develop and grow.

Umpqua Bank also uses language as a way of recruiting the right 'on-brand' people. If you work for Umpqua Bank, no matter who you are, when you pick up the phone you say:

*"Thank you for calling
the world's greatest bank."*

If you are an A-type financial mega-mind who can't see the point in that, then you won't get a job there.

Foster your own tone

And that is a key lesson for branding nowadays: don't compromise your words or you'll compromise your culture and you'll disappoint your customers. Avoid humourless, meaningless jargon. Invest your tone of voice with an authentic personality. But make sure it is authentic. If you are a serious law-firm, it's OK to be serious. Just don't be unintelligible.

So learn a new language – the language of your brand

As we've said, most brands have got the basics right: they know they have to have a name people remember (or invent some catchy phrase to make them remember an unmemorable name as in the case of 'compare the meerkat').

They know you have to 'own' a colour and have to be consistent. But boldbrands go much further than that. They use tone of voice as a weapon of differentiation – one that isn't just deployed for marketing purposes on the 'frontline' of customer communications but is in everything and everywhere. It takes guts to do that. But the results are increased brand recognition, greater customer loyalty and a low-cost, high-impact form of marketing.

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