

The 3 Traits for Brands to Survive the Future

Part 3: Life-changing Virginity

By Mohamed Bahefwan

If you haven't heard of the 'Virgin' brand, then you would be happy to know they offer galactic flights that can fly you back to whatever planet you came from! A multi-industry juggernaut of a brand, which drives £15B in yearly revenue. From books to airlines, Virgin sells it! When Virgin's founder and chairman, Richard Branson, was asked about the brand's secret, he simply answered:

"The key is to set realistic customer expectations, and then not to just meet them, but to exceed them — preferably in unexpected and helpful ways".

As simple as it sounds, Branson's formula remains catalytic to promulgate Virgin as one of the most exciting brands in history. 'Unexpected and helpful' ways insinuates the two focal ingredients that future brands need to extrapolate on. 'Unexpected', as in life-changing surprises that electrify our existence to be more efficient, fascinating, and stimulating. 'Helpful', as in resolving our problems as simple as humanly possible.

Human nature hates change, but loves overcoming it. And as much as human intellect is accustomed to complexity; it remains appreciative to the beauty of simplicity. When we experience something for the first time, it has an appeal borne of its newness that will, over a short time, dissipate. We wouldn't be the extraordinary, creative, progressive species we are today, if we were not intrinsically attracted to discovering new experiences over the horizon.

Being part of generation X, I witnessed the birth and death of technologies over a 20-year span. As much as 20 years feels like a long time today, those times were breathtakingly wild for my generation. Letters gyrated to emails, gas ovens gave way to microwaves, and obese TVs flattened to more sexy curvy looking models. Even though technology moved fast, the rate is even more hypersonically faster the past 5 years. Generation alpha (i.e. generation born after 2010) will be much more accustomed to technological exhilarations than we will ever be. As futurist and demographer Mark McCindle describes them:

"Alpha kids will grow up with iPads in hand, never live without a smartphone, and have the ability to transfer a thought online in seconds. These massive technological changes, among others, make Generation Alpha the most transformative generation ever. They don't think about these technologies as tools, they integrate them singularly into their lives."

Although corporations today are highly proficient in managing consumers' short attention spans, future consumers will have even shorter 'excitement' spans.

Remember that crisp feeling the first time you used an electronic toothbrush? That simple piece of technology that changed our mornings forever. Recall that delight of pressing that celebrated Windows 'Start' button. That reflexive 'Wow!' the first time you zoomed into your grandparent's home with GoogleEarth ! The list just goes on and on! We didn't need training. We didn't need any technical guiding. It just *simply* happened. The world woke up one morning, opened its eyes to a magical moment of technological serendipity, and all of a sudden our lives jolted to a new trance of excited living. That's what consumers love today, and that's what consumers will hunger for in the future.

In contrast, that's where Google Glass flopped! It was definitely meant to be life changing with its new revolutionary concept. However, it was plain old clumsy! Clumsy to wear, clumsy to use, and most of all clumsy looking! It did not conjure to that human genome of simplicity! On the flip side, although Blu-Ray technology was extremely easy to use, the technology did not trigger that exciting rush that was entirely gulped by DVDs before it. Both these products drastically disappointed due to neglecting one of the two fundamental pillars of brand longevity: *life-changing exhilaration, and impulsive simplicity*.

Hence, the onus is on brand corporations to harvest incremental disruptive products that continuously tame that ever-shortening Gen alpha excitement spans. Yet, these novel products still need to desegregate into our lives with a very high degree of smooth integration. In short, a future brand needs to kick our lives in the head, way before we even realize that it actually did!