

WHITE PAPER

Product Experience Can Propel Brand Value—Here's How

by **Ed Holme**



It's 5.30 a.m. and pitch black—just like every other work day of the year. I kiss my beautiful wife Katie and step into the silent darkness. It is eerily quiet out here on these 11 country acres, but with a click of my finger the landscape illuminates with brilliant beams, lighting my way. Two more quick clicks and my sentinel stirs with a friendly growl, purring as I approach. She unlocks the door, glowing inside as I slide into the cockpit. One last touch and she is fully awake, control panels gleaming, assuring me we're ready to go.

As we head down the driveway her white beams cast shadows into the woods, and crisp autumn leaves fracture under her 18" treads, alerting "whatever may be out there" that the shadows are where they belong. Then, a final flick of her tail as she grabs hold of the tarmac and leaps to life, devouring the unmarked road vanishing under her hood.

I love this car!

From the moment, just over a year ago, when my wife nudged me at the car dealership and exclaimed, "That black one, with the horse on it—that's sexy," my experience with my Mustang has exceeded my every expectation.

Wouldn't you like your customers to express this kind of love for your products? Can you imagine the position of value this brand now holds in my mind—"in my heart"—due almost entirely to my experience with the car? My Mustang!

So how did this happen? How was this high level of brand value achieved? It's pretty simple really. I had a perception of the brand, and then the brand over-delivered through my experience with the car, elevating the brand's value exponentially in my heart and mind.

But as simple as this is to say, it is not simple to accomplish. Let's face it, how many products have you used that resulted in additional perceived and actual brand value for you? Products that make you hold the brand in higher esteem than you did before you personally experienced them? Can you name more than 10? I don't think I can.

Let's look at two key principles that set the stage for achieving this revered position:

Principle #1—In order to create and deliver a product experience that propels brand value in the heart and mind of the user, product development must incorporate brand criteria in the design and development process.

Principle #2—For a brand to provide reliable criteria to the design and development of product experiences that will propel brand value, the brand must be built on a solid, well-conceived foundation, informed by user insights regarding need, importance, preference, and value.

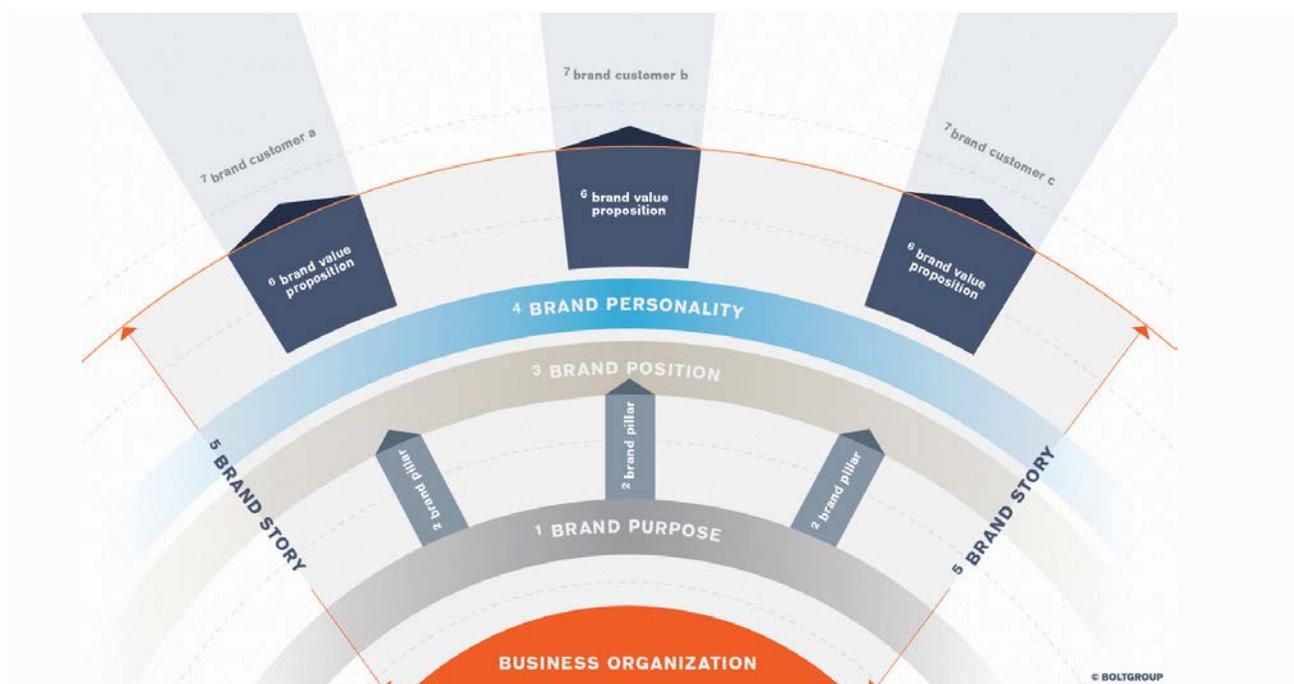
Where To Start? Your Brand.

Build your brand on a well-structured, well-conceived foundation. Large, sophisticated, brand-centric companies have a foundation carefully documented and use it religiously. However, many mid-size companies, especially in manufacturing, do not. They rely instead on history, leadership influence, anecdotes, and inadequately informed opinions. This is said, not to be harsh, but based on years of real world experience. Here's a start on placing your brand on the same sort of foundation as the market giants:

7 Key Elements of a Well-Conceived Brand Foundation

1) Brand Purpose

Why does your brand exist? Specifically, in respect to the positive difference it aims to make in people's lives. What does it seek to achieve day to day in your competitive marketplace? This *raison d'être* will not only help you paint the vision for your future, but will also help imbue your business and employees with an understanding of why they come to work each day—to strive for the brighter future your brand seeks to create for them and your customers.



2) Brand Pillars

What are the three or four distinctive elements that, when combined, make your brand unique and important? These are the compelling truths of your brand, describing the core beliefs, values, and culture that create the foundation of your brand. Note: These should be present in every touchpoint of your brand, with both internal and external audiences, and are key in creating brand-based criteria for product development teams.

3) Brand Position

There are many definitions of brand positioning. By answering this simple question, you will get very close to defining where your brand should stand in your competitive marketplace. "What is the unique place of value our brand wants to own in our customer's mind and heart?" (e.g., My Mustang.) Once you answer this, test it by asking whether your position is: Unique, Ownable, Desirable, Believable, Defensible, and Sustainable. If it is, then you're right on track. If it isn't, keep at it.

4) Brand Personality

Who is your brand? What is its tone of voice? What gender is it? Is it compassionate and approachable? Or is it an authoritative expert—factual and precise? Is it inspirational and challenging like Nike? Or is it happy and neighborly like Coca-Cola? Does it lead autocratically, or does it support sympathetically? How your brand expresses itself should be guided by this personality in everything from customer service to sales and marketing to accounts payable. It should be the filter used for all communications.

5) Brand Story

Where did your brand come from and why? This story should weave the above elements together in an engaging narrative that shares why the brand exists, portrayed through the brand's personality. It should be emotionally charged with the brand's purpose, and give meaning, believability, and relevance to the brand's position. Could you make an emotionally charged film about your brand? If not, why not?



A FASTER HORSE OFFICIAL TRAILER 1 (2015) - DOCUMENTARY
YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=RWPJTQOU84

Then, a final flick of her tail as she grabs hold of the tarmac and leaps to life, devouring the unmarked road vanishing under her hood.

6) Brand Value Propositions

What is your value and to whom does it matter? As described in a recent blog, *Brand Value is in the Eye of the Beholder*, your brand must have multiple value propositions to connect with your various customers.

7) Brand Customers

This is everyone from your employees to your vendors, from your direct customers to the ultimate end users of your products. All need to hear and feel the value of your brand. Yet each of these audiences has a different set of priorities and preferences. Your brand can be relevant to a multi-faceted audience by taking into account specific priorities and preferences, and using the value propositions built from your brand purpose and brand pillars. Just consider your brand's value proposition to a distributor, versus an end user, versus a vendor. Their needs are vastly different. So by defining the value of your brand through their eyes, you will create a closer, more meaningful connection between each of them and your brand.

[IMPORTANT: Your brand foundation must be based on a thorough understanding of the needs, desires, and preferences your customers consider important. And once drafted, it should be validated with them to confirm it will deliver high value upon implementation.]

Next—Translation To Product Design Criteria

So you now have a well-founded brand. The next step is to use it to provide criteria to your product design team.

Industrial Designers are trained in, and cultivate, a particular skill to translate thoughts and ideas into sensory experiences that can be designed and engineered into physical products. They can make something look and feel and sound "strong and durable." They can design a product experience that is "palpable and thrilling." They can make a car look "sexy" or "rugged."

I love this car!

So as you prepare for this translation of the words that describe your brand—the purpose, pillars, position, personality, story, and proposition—into usable criteria for your product development team, include industrial designers in the process. They will enhance your efforts.

This criteria should, whenever possible, be along multiple sensory lines. Are you building your brand on a pillar of COMFORT? Then explore all the senses that comfort touches. It is not just feel and touch. Sound can be comforting, as can smell. And a chair can “look” comfortable. Do you have a brand pillar of PRECISION? Imagine all the sensory criteria that could be considered. And keep in mind the physical and emotional experience that your product should deliver. How should a “precision” product work? What are the elements of that experience that will help you own PRECISION in the hearts and minds of your customers?

Now your product development team is equipped to go to work. One last imperative: make sure the brand advocate stays involved so that the end result—the product experience—is not only extraordinary, but also builds value in your brand.

[NOTE: For more discussion on the topic of brand in product design, see these articles: *Sound, Smell & Feel –It All Matters in Design*, *How to Build a Visual Brand Language*, and *Why Create A Visual Brand Language?*]

[NOTE: To learn how your brand should be affecting every aspect of your business in positive, valuable ways read this article: *Building A Brand Ecosystem*]



MEET ED

Since joining BOLTGROUP in 1994, Ed's experience in brand strategy, research, and sales and marketing has been instrumental in building high-value client relationships through the strategic alignment of their needs and goals with BOLTGROUP's expertise to maximize our impact on their business.