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The DNA of an innovation and the brand



Human beings can be identified by their DNA. Figuratively speaking, the brand of a product or service can also be identified by its DNA. What is more, correlations may even be established between a person's character traits and his/her perception and choice of certain products/services.

The design of a product or service already determines its genetic makeup, and, in turn, its future attributes, which are the deciding factor in determining market appeal. In making the basic choice of which materials to use for a product, it is not only the product's form and function that are affected, but ultimately the quality of the customer's sensory response as well. With food, it is obviously the palate that influences decision-making. The acoustics of a consumer product become audible when functioning parts are used; the optics become visible in the linear design and the way the shape catches the light; and the haptics become perceptible in the pleasing touch of surfaces. Even the smell of a material can affect the customer or produce a sometimes inexplicable aversion. Although the customer is often unable to explain it, he/she has developed a latent selection system within the brain, which is acutely sensitive in its responses and is the result of decades of disappointing or brilliant product experiences.

Contrary to better knowledge, the subconscious perception of product attributes, even in the household goods industry, is still given scant consideration. Consider, for example, rattling parts on thermos flasks, a yellow ABS brake that unconsciously creates a visual association with low-grade manufacturing, or vacuum cleaner handles, which, are ergonomically anything but 'easy on the hands'. However, composition of the DNA of products is not "only" about the targeted selection and combination of related material attributes, but also involves the quality of the processes involved in manufacturing and marketing, and, ultimately, the selection and combination of all marketing mix factors.

Beyond that, the foundations determining the sustainability of a product/service are already laid at a very early stage. A company's economic sustainability is secured through innovative benefit bundles, which can be patent-protected over a long-term basis. In this, the distinguishing benefit must obviously offer the customer a rational or irrational added value; otherwise the protection has become a worthless end in itself. Through sensible use of resources, foundations are laid from the outset for the integrative flow of value and waste disposal chains, as well as environmental sustainability. In this sense, the use of renewable raw materials is prevented from becoming an isolated feature. The social sustainability of an idea is frequently measured in terms of the company's assumption of local responsibility, as well as its manufacturing conditions in third world regions where services and products are purchased. Whether a product or service is sustainable has already been established in the early stages of development and is usually barely correctable afterwards. Therefore, sustainability features should be embedded in the genetic composition from the outset.

Identity and blood relationships can be established on the basis of genetic fingerprinting. Certain services are also correlated with certain regions, countries and companies. In the global marketplace, the "made in Germany" label stands for quality and reliability. This is significant for the export market and increasingly so for the domestic market, which recognises the social importance of safeguarding jobs. The early decision "to make in Germany or to buy elsewhere" is similarly due to the early DNA composition of a product and its brand. Manufacturing decisions in low-income countries have frequently neglected the above-mentioned, subconscious decision-making systems of customers, along with social responsibility issues, or have failed to consider these soon enough when implementing new products and services.

All too often, the perspective is one of price only. Price leadership may doubtless be a company's primary aim, but it should always be considered in relation to the service provided. This emphasis should also be consistent with the basic brand concept. It is not enough to claim to have the most attractive offer; this must be consistently demonstrated through the service provided on a daily basis. Since the beginning of its business formation, the ALDI brand, for example, has represented a good price-performance ratio. The DNA of a product or service reflects a company's ever-changing mission and philosophy.

Through observing products and services, it becomes apparent which brand they relate to. Even if several vehicle manufacturers have, for many years, been satisfying the above-mentioned customer sensibilities with expert tuning of exhaust and engine noise, or through the creation of new car smells, there is still the question of whether those vehicles without a logo are seen as brand leaders or followers, given that the boldness of an independent design is lacking. Independence is just as much a gene as is the innovative benefit of a product or service itself. An iPhone has a distinctive design, which is immediately associated with the apple® brand, regardless of whether the logo appears or not. Innovation also means being the first to offer the customer something which was hitherto unavailable to them in the new form and which satisfies a latent consumer need. Ultimately, the customer will be prepared to pay more for this. In this way, every DNA strand generates a "pay-back on investment" for future innovations.

In human beings, genes are responsible, amongst other things, for a long and contented life. Likewise with products and services, the early recognition of the DNA of an innovation is beneficial for the brand and also helps to ensure long-term company success.

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