



## *Knowledge - White Knight in the Brand Protection Game?*



By: David Rymer

Much to its own surprise, Knowledge Management (KM) has a role in protecting brands. Now as we all know, marketers are obsessive control freaks with an apparently inexhaustible fascination with visual identity standards, and logos. KM by contrast is a people and relationship centric discipline.

Normally, putting these two disciplines in one room would be guaranteed to generate much hissing and spitting! So why do Marketing and KM needs to work together?

Well, for the last twenty-five years of the 20th Century, brands strode the world stage. Nike, Apple, Coca-Cola, Amazon.com, Versace, McDonalds surfed a wave of surging share prices. Global equity markets bored with physical bricks and mortar fell madly in love with

intangible assets and intellectual property. Brand was king!

Then dstore, oneTel, Ansett, Arthur Andersen, HIH, and Enron showed just how fragile brands can be. Expensive investments in brand franchises evaporated under the harsh glared of profit warnings, criminal prosecutions and asset write offs.

Was this, as The Coca-Cola Company's former Chief Marketing Officer Sergio Zyman hypothesised "the end of marketing as we know it?" Or is it simply a "structural adjustment" in response to years of inflated profit forecasts and self-serving spin? And does it matter much anyway?

As it turns out, it matters a lot! Now more than ever, brands provide a competitive advantage ignored by

accountants at their peril. Turbulence stimulates a flight to quality brands we know and trust.

So how does Knowledge Management link with brand marketing? Well, as it happens Marketing and KM share a common connection in supporting the integrity of the brand's positioning. Brand architectures are built around a deep and intimate knowledge of client or consumer preferences, motivations and need states.

Moreover, Marketing and Knowledge Management have similar preoccupations including: a customer centric focus, responsibility for shaping attitudes and driving desired behaviours, the need to successfully pitch ideas together with the challenge of translating concepts into branded products and services.

Similarly both Marketing and Knowledge Management draw upon many of the same professional skills such as strategic selling, influencing and negotiating skills.

Organisations are harnessing Knowledge Management to protect their brands in two fundamental ways; by leveraging knowledge at an organisational level (in order to deliver a disciplined, and

consistent client service experience).

Typically this relies on a "supply" oriented knowledge model built around a codified approach to explicit knowledge.

This approach has the virtue of unlocking basic productivity gains, reduces complexity and eliminates duplication - the dreaded "reinventing the wheel" syndrome. It is often favoured by change resistant organisations looking to consolidate a market position.

A path less travelled but growing in importance is when organisations draw on knowledge to fundamentally reinvent themselves. They deliberately target transformational change outcomes and are sufficiently self-confident to build the organisation from the work group up. This culture places emphasis leadership over management. Hence, out go rule based regimes in exchange for commonly agreed objectives, collective and individual accountability, shared skills, experiences and team based expertise.

These are organisations quietly looking to be "great" rather than settling for "good" -facilitated through a "demand" based knowledge model. Priority is given to liberating the difficult to document

"tacit" knowledge behind the "know-how" grunt in order to change the way work groups operate.

Knowledge is always happier being facilitated than managed. Knowledge is a ceaseless process of creation, conversation, transfer, modification and destruction. Its nature doesn't always lend itself to being structured. More frequently, it is ephemeral, wild, feral - even viral.

Regardless of the business ambitions, knowledge management is proving critical for the successful facilitation of learning based organisations and the ongoing "productisation" of knowledge by leveraging intellectual property - the basis of any durable brand. Knowledge is also fast emerging as a foundation competency for protecting and extending established brand franchises.

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