Course Description

Brands are red hot and understanding branding is, too. Just what are brands and why do people desire personal brands? And what exactly is a brand, say, versus a product?

Brands can be magical, prosaic, living or dead. Brands can be Apple, France, or Hillary Clinton. And while companies manicure them, it’s up to us, the audience, to determine if they are successful.

Brands can be great time-savers: A visit to McDonald’s is pretty much the same all around the world. (The same taste, offerings and, uh, quality.) Brands help us avoid making the same decisions over and over by building bridges of trust. They provide information, advice, smiles, and community. They live, breathe, grow, and sometimes (deservedly) die.

Brands use a variety of rational and emotional tools to connect with us. Even the brand owners sometimes don’t really know what the glue is that cements—or cracks— the relationships with their audiences.

This course will analyze what makes brands tick: how they’re created, the ingredients, the evolution—how time, technology, distribution, competitors, and consumers force them to change.

We will examine how branding has impacted politics and presidents. We will also examine the dark side of brands’ magnetism. We will even examine how religions act as brands.

The course will also examine our personal brands because through our reputations—or brands—our family, friends, enemies, teachers and bosses evaluate us. How are we perceived? How do we create, change, and live up to our brands?

Branding is a course that provides insight into our everyday lives. Consider it a marketing course for the rest of us.
Grading:
Written papers: 65%
Oral presentations: 20%
Homework: 15%
Classroom participation: While everyone is encouraged to participate regularly, not everyone is comfortable doing so. Therefore, this component is used only to raise grades, not lower them.

Required texts
Typical weekly reading is 100-150 pages.

The Hidden Persuaders  Vance Packard
The Brand Gap  Marty Neumeier
20 Ads that Shook the World - James Twitchell
God is Not Great - Christopher Hitchens
Contagious – Why Things Catch On  Jonah Berger
The Selling of the President 1968  Joe McGinniss

ASSIGNMENTS

Class work:
Weekly attendance and participation is a MUST if you want to learn a lot of useful stuff, contribute to other students’ learning, and receive a respectable grade. All students report absences in advance except in cases of emergency.

Homework:
Periodic demonstrations you’re doing all the required reading and thinking. Homework assignments appear under each week’s topic of discussion.

Written Work:
Each assignment is a combination of analysis and creativity. Analysis requires research (beyond Wikipedia!), judgment, and common sense. Creativity involves ideation and imagination that are also rooted in problem-solving. Professor believes good writing is a product of good thinking. Previous students’ papers are provided as a guideline of excellence.

• A Critical Dissection of a Brand  [4-6p]
• An Autopsy of a Failing/Dead Brand  [4-6p]
• Brand “isms”: Systems of Belief [4-6p]
• “Brand You”—Create a brand as an extension of your self, including packaging, product, distribution, pricing, marketing campaign, and magic. [6-8p]

Oral Presentations
• Periodic topics from assigned reading
• “Brand You”

Syllabus and Schedule

Weeks 1 & 2: What are Brands, anyway?

What constitutes a brand; what is the relationship of a brand to a business; how are brands measured. What is the difference between a brand and a product? Why brands are an aspect of a business, bringing value. Legacy brands; Anti-brands; The Tropicana fiasco.
A brand can be represented and communicated in a myriad of ways: literally, any touch point consumers have with a product, package, logo, image, website, store display, ad, word-of-mouth.

Homework: Reading: The Brand Gap

Week 3: Why do we Buy what we Buy…Think what we think…Do what we Do.

An examination of the influencers of our buying habits and decisions across a variety of categories; focusing on what “happens” inside our brains when exposed to stimuli; the impact of all five senses; retail anthropology: Do the way products are merchandised, displayed, and promoted inside stores reinforce our brand-buying decisions or alter them? The Wal-Mart factor (what brands are available at what price); how men and women are treated differently; We will answer the question, “Where is The North Face?”

Homework: Reading: 20 Ads That Shook the World

Weeks 4 & 5 How Does Advertising Work?

Advertising is complex and expensive. (Nearly everyone can guess what a :30-second spot on the Super Bowl costs.) How is advertising held accountable: Do
we actually buy more products from ads we like, or do we just admire the ads? What is creative? The basic tools advertisers use: Targeting. Segmentation. Research. Media. Right brain & Left brain: the rational and emotional components of attitude formation and how smart brands try to appeal to both.

**Homework:** Reading: *20 Ads That Shook the World*
Due in Class: A Critical Dissection of a Brand

**Week 6: Social Media: Who’s in Charge?**
How consumers get_wrangled by companies and friends, not always knowingly, to “sell” their products. How Brands and advertising agencies are harnessing consumers to do their jobs, at practically no cost. (“Your ad could be on the Super Bowl!”) How fads are launched, prosper, and disappear. Who are the cool people? (And how do I become one?) What makes brands sticky?

**Homework:** Reading: *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*

**Week 7: Brands: Good or Evil? Moral or Amoral? Does it matter?**
Brands are a product of capitalism and free enterprise. Are consumers defenseless and intoxicated at the mall? Social critic Vance Packard wrote sixty years ago about the power of marketing or so it seemed.

**Homework:** Reading: *The Hidden Persuaders*
Due in Class: Autopsy of a Failed Brand

**Week 8 & 9: Isms.**
As in communism; Buddhism; atheism. How religions and systems of government behave like brands. Is God a brand? And if so, does God need a new advertising agency?

**Homework:** Reading: *God is Not Great*

**Week 10: Brand Politics: Consultants and Image Making**
Imagine: politicians once lacked pollsters, dressers, spinners, and weavers. Campaigns were once just railroad speeches and later, TV debates, before YouTube recorded and disseminated every uttered word. Joe McGinniss’s chronicle of the ’68 election that put Richard Nixon in the White House is even more relevant 45 years later.
Homework: Reading: The Selling of the President 1968

Week 10: Brand Microscope: Absolut vodka

How the Absolut advertising campaign impacted not just spirits advertising but nearly all image-driven brands.

Homework: Reading: TBD
Due in class: Ism paper

Week 11: TBD

(Depending on availability of guest speakers professor has lined up)

Week 12: Brand You: How to Market Yourself
What is meant by “your” brand? Can you have what the Olson twins have? Can a talent or interest be transformed into a business?

Homework: Reading: Why Hire Jennifer?

Week 13 & 14: “Brand You” oral presentations

Homework: Due in Class: “Brand You”

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