



## The Five Versions of Branding

### Description

*What is branding? How did it come to exist? And why is it so omnipresent in our world today?*

The way brands work and the role they play in our world have come a long way since the emergence of branding centuries ago. This evolution, though complex, can actually be simplified into five rather distinct stages – or versions of branding as described by Robert Jones in his book, *Branding: A Very Short Introduction*.

As brands continue to evolve and find new ways to communicate with their consumers, let us first begin by exploring the journey of how branding has culminated into what it is today. Through that, will we then be able to have a better understanding of where it might be heading next.

## Marking Ownership

The very first version of branding arose initially due to the need to **mark ownership**. In fact, the word “brand” originates from the ancient Norse word *brandr* – which means “to burn”.

Back then, people saw branding predominantly as a method to mark or symbolise ownership over one’s property. For example, livestock such as cattle were branded with unique stamps to indicate which farmer they belonged to. This acted as a simple yet direct way for people to delineate that a specific property belonged to them. Other forms of marking ownership also included painted marks, written signatures, watermarks, hallmarks, and stamps.

While such forms of branding remain primarily prevalent in the agriculture sector today, we do see instances of it elsewhere, such as artists signing off their artworks.

## Guaranteeing Quality

Moving on, the next version of branding that came into play was to **guarantee quality**.

With the dawn of the industrial revolution in the 18th century, this gave rise to the age of mass production – where huge numbers of products were entering the market in a short span of time. This marked a huge turning point for the industry and consumers found themselves presented with an abundance of new and affordable goods. However, on the flipside, it also made it increasingly easy for shoddily made products or adulterated food items to find their way into the market.

Hence, companies found it necessary to brand their products with a mark of assurance in order to signify to consumers that this was a product that they could trust. This effectively helped products stand out, while also enabling them to command higher prices.

It was also at this point where the notion of branding started to shift and take on a new significance. By the 1820s, more and more focus was placed on brand names and the reputation they hold.

To date, brands continue to use marks of assurance as a promise to their customers. For example, luxury brands include authenticity cards upon purchase of their products to guarantee that they are genuine and meet the quality standards upheld by the brand. These serve as a promise to customers, giving them the confidence that money is not being spent on counterfeits or substandard goods.

## Promising Pleasure

The next version of branding that emerged was to **promise pleasure**. With the advent of mass media in the early 20th century, companies now had the ability to reach out directly to their

consumers. This gave companies the opportunity to elevate their brands and associate their products with powerful emotions. Beyond just guaranteeing quality, branding became a way for companies to promise pleasure by appealing to their consumers' senses, identity, and personality.

One of the earliest pioneers in this type of branding was George Cadbury. He successfully associated Cadbury's products with a big idea – purity. Through the tactical use of advertising through mass media, Cadbury was able to effectively position its products prominently in the minds of consumers. The distinctive visual style of the brand's packaging and advertisements associated its product with the idea of pure, high quality cocoa that conveyed a sense of indulgence. This made for a powerfully persuasive method of communication that created meaning while making us as consumers feel good about a product – and in turn buy it.

## Inviting Belonging

As the industry continued to grow, companies came to the realisation that branding did not need to be restricted to individual products and could instead span the entire company. This is when the next version of branding – to **invite belonging** started to gain traction.

Companies began instilling a sense of belonging in all their stakeholders. By doing so, it not only encouraged customers to buy their products, but remain loyal to the brand. This version of branding took one step beyond promising pleasure and highlighted how a brand integrates into one's identity.

One such brand who displays this version of branding would be AirBnB. From users, hosts, and employees, a sense of community and belonging is built around a set of shared values. Defined by the organisation's clear purpose and vision, AirBnB's entire visual design and brand identity nurtures a thriving community that understands each stakeholder on their own terms. Successfully rallying together an ardent group of individuals organised around the lifestyle and ethos reflected by the brand.

## Enabling Action

Lastly, the fifth version of branding is to **enable action**. With the introduction of modern technologies, consumers now have the means to play a more active role in their consumption of information. Communication between consumers and brands has also become more two-way; enabling both parties to interact and engage directly with one another. This has sparked the emergence of entirely new businesses which are transforming industry after industry – even without particularly promising pleasure or inviting belonging. Instead, they offer people a platform or service to do new things.

One such brand that has done this is Google. The search engine emphasises on how it enables

users to do new things, focusing more on its business and offerings rather than the brand itself. By understanding the role it plays in its users' lives, Google has managed to define a strong position for itself in the minds of users.

*So what's next?*

In today's context, these five versions of branding still co-exist in tandem with one another; with some versions being more prevalent, and Creativeans continues to help our clients play an influential role in the branding world. However, it is certain that as technologies advance and consumer behaviour shifts, so will branding. While the role of brands will continue to evolve, especially as businesses have to navigate the waters of a pandemic-hit reality, it is undeniable that brands have to continuously re-examine the way [it engages and builds trust with its customers](#).