

This Brand's for You

If a desire for a coherent business brand awareness is to be accepted as a clear fact of life, given an emergent informational world game, then Chris Grams is ready to share his knowledge through his book, *The Ad-Free Brand*. Over and above some ten years with Red Hat Linux, he has also clearly studied the subject of branding thoroughly out of his own purposefulness and passion.

Que Publishing, of Indianapolis, Indiana, has released *The Ad-Free Brand* as part of the Biz-Tech series, although Que may be best known for outright technical manuals, having an instructional tone. It is implied that since you have already decided you want to know something about this one particular, specialized way of doing things (by looking at this particular book), so here you can find all of the details you need to know about making this topic work for you. In this arena of involvement, *The Ad-Free Brand* would seem to represent an unusual, hybrid, crossover kind of venture, covering nuts and bolts suggestions about a subject really rather intangible, maybe like style or fashion or popularity. Nevertheless, it may be assumed you just want to know more about the practicalities of business branding, so let's get going.

Relatively little is actually going to be said here about the curious history and trajectory of the Red Hat Corporation. Instead, the focus hovers around various practices and perceptions regarding any commerce-oriented, business reputation, which can be intentionally guided and managed to a degree. Did Red Hat build the brand, or did the brand build Red Hat? Chris Grams appears to be claiming that an open-source approach, underlying everything that Red Hat has been doing, can now be applied further in a variety of places, just so long as the fundamental principles can be understood and honored.

Red Hat, Inc., as a company, has a presence as an investment on the New York Stock Exchange, and annual sales have risen to exceed one billion dollars. This is substantial. For Red Hat, an openly contributive business modality provides technical cohesion and technical support, for facilitating special software infrastructure systems. These systems are used inside large commercial computer networks and inside the Internet. A single share of RHT stock sells for a price of about fifty dollars right now. An aggregate price over earnings ratio, P/E, calculated at an impressive level of seventy times current profitability, means that the collected, conventional wisdom of the investment marketplace anticipates exceptionally ambitious ongoing business growth for the company.

Red Hat Linux represents a technical code-writing method, with a well established structure and syntax, which is poised to become more and more essential as it continues to become more and more widely deployed internationally. With an open-source game plan, there are no expensive proprietary informational boundaries, no special sauces and no secret blends. Instead, there are strong, reliable indications of continuity, availability and technical relevancy. In some manner, Red Hat is selling a kind of sophisticated assurance or insurance guarantee, rather than a physical product or a license for serviceability. This is meaningful in an institutional, corporate way, since ongoing protection for any practical business direction or business dependency can become a necessity, in and of itself.

Breakpoint. . . Setup

An ultimate goal for *The Ad-Free Brand* is to cover a complete, practical, framework regarding how people automatically process any type of directed recognition. Here it is being conceptually applied toward branding. Great brand positioning may help people to understand, to value, to identify, and to take ownership with respect to appreciation of an available possibility. This basic foursome first appears within a pyramidal diagram on page thirteen, in Chapter One.

A series of short, sidewise commentaries are displayed within grey boxes throughout the book, seeming to relieve any excessive linearity and directedness. One such grey box mentions several main open-source tenets, including participation, meritocracy and community.

In Chapter Two, there are four useful components for helping situate a brand in view of a larger realm of alternatives. These concern identifying other available choices, recognizing differences, admitting likely trade-off decisions, and finally expressing a single, simple, most basic, essential quality.

In keeping with open-source ideals, Chris Grams advocates involving many people with different backgrounds and opinions, in gathering input for a branding initiative.

The intended program for considering an ad-free brand, outside of any dependency on conventional advertising, is outlined toward the end of Chapter Two. The four steps to be covered are explained as: research, positioning, initial rollout (internal and external), and continuing engagement. These, then, will become elaborated more fully in Chapter Three through Chapter Seven, in succession.

The full blown formulation with all of these foursquare comparisons would seem to describe a sort of 3D four x four x four Rubick's cube. It might be presumed that this level of complexity and specificity will appear suitable to an audience anxious for action. Enough preliminary explanation. Let the real games begin.

In the end, a few general observations are collected in Chapter Eight.

Breakpoint. . . Getting Started

An exhaustive list of thirteen basic perceptions points and eleven advanced perceptions points is suggested as a means to explore a range of impressions about brand awareness. These cover areas like existing marketing materials, existing websites, customer surveys, and various interviews. Then, discoveries in each separate area under consideration can be uniformly evaluated through a ranking matrix. The proposed foursquare matrix imagines the situation of the internal organization and also the situation of external communities of interest along one axis, taken against the present reality and also taken against a potential future reality along the other axis. In each box of the foursquare matrix, separate impact rankings can be proposed concerning dollar cost, time cost and beneficial value.

Eventually all of the research discoveries can be synthesized and summarized. Make a big mess, spread out all of the artifacts and stir the information. Then extract brief conclusions about the situation of the internal organization and the situation of the external communities of interest, again taken against the present reality and a potential future reality.

Breakpoint. . . Design

The heart and soul of *The Ad-Free Brand* is apparent in the discussion of design thinking in Chapter Four.

A disciplined design approach is comprised of a number of phases described as define, research, ideate, prototype, choose, implement and learn (study and use results). The definition and research steps have been covered previously, so the immediate mission involves ideate, prototype and choose. These are to be accomplished in a group setting, and there is lot of specific advice about how to select participants and how to guide the activities. Particular recognition is directed toward recommendations about teamwork collaboration from the IDEO design firm, especially Tim Brown and Tom Kelley.

Here, an editorial interlude may be asserted. There are a lot of business management books, which present individualistic frameworks and individualistic terminologies. This can be wild-wild west, where anything goes. Sometimes certain experts gain a degree of notoriety. Then something else comes along. One alternate is to suggest a cross reference against other relevant, established fields of knowledge, like psychology. So, there might be a real utility in bringing up suitable techniques based on the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, since MBTI has been around for quite a while and has become widely adopted by a variety of universities and business companies. It might be claimed that the proposed design thinking phases can be correlated with the particular psychological capabilities identified within the MBTI system.

Define relates to extraverted sensation, research relates to extraverted thinking, ideate (on alternatives) relates to extraverted feeling, and prototype relates to both extraverted intuition/introverted intuition. These functionalities all generally involve taking in different external observances. The prototype step has a combinational dimension. Next, choose relates to introverted feeling, implement relates to introverted thinking, and using relates to introverted sensation. These functionalities all generally involve putting out tangible internally determined preferences.

If these correlations may have any validity, then a whole realm of observations about challenges and opportunities can be brought to bear on the situation. There are well-known capabilities and polarities regarding the different functionalities. In a personal way, most people will only have some grasp of one or two ways of working. So recognizing the ability of others within a group dynamic brings particularly comprehensive benefits and complications. At stake is the issue of appropriate cognitive diversity.

There certainly may be good merit in conventional, common-sense language, instead of a lot of wonky, professional sounding distinctions. The topic of the day is business brand awareness, which has realistic social connotations. The ultimate end-product of a branding identity exercise would actually appear as an expression of extraverted feeling, in the form of a recognizable set of qualitative associations to describe a business enterprise. Under other circumstances, the nature of the end-product could be expected to impact the course any generic design process, in view of the specific situation. (In the case of Red Hat, the mission of the company concerns highly technical software code development, so the immediate field of activity would appear to emphasize a concentration on introverted thinking.)

According to Chris Grams, "The best working groups are diverse, involving people from many different departments, bringing many different perspectives, from different management levels." (P. 98)

The actual work at hand within the design session addresses ideate and prototype possibilities. Here the recommended program returns to the four useful components for helping situate a brand in view of a larger realm of alternatives, as mentioned previously. Again, these concern identifying other available choices, recognizing differentiations, admitting likely trade-off decisions, and finally expressing a single, simple, most basic, essential quality. Chris Grams describes these as four blocks: the competitive frame of reference, points of difference, points of parity, and the brand mantra. Conclusions can be challenged to meet the test of being desirable, deliverable and differentiated. The effort to crystallize a correct two to five word inspirational phrase as a memorable mantra, not a slogan, is seen as being immensely worthwhile, if successful.

The author emphasizes, "Developing brand positioning can be like playing jazz. You may need to improvise and go where the music takes you." (P. 118) In keeping with open-source principles, it is best when representatives from various recognized outside communities of interest can be invited to participate. The goal is to allow as many people as possible to be able to contribute bits and pieces of understanding, valuing, self-identifying, and owning with respect to the brand awareness. Now we are again recalling the pyramidal diagram first seen in Chapter One.

Dr. John Beebe quotes directly from Carl Jung in a chapter about four basic functions of consciousness entitled "Psychological Types" which appeared in "The Handbook of Jungian Psychology" in 2006:

"Jung found it easier to define the first three functions than the fourth. On one occasion, he said, 'Sensation tells us that a thing is. Thinking tells us what the thing is, feeling tells us what it is worth to us. Now what else could there be? One would assume one has a complete picture of the world when one knows there is something, what it is, and what it is worth.' He added immediately, 'But there is another category, and that is time. Things have a past and they have a future. They come from somewhere, they go to somewhere, and you cannot see where they came from and you cannot know where they go to, but you get what the Americans call a hunch.' (Jung 1968: 13)"

It seems to be appropriate to relate owning to the sensation function, self identifying to the thinking function, valuing to the feeling function, and understanding to the intuition function.

The more remarkable feature is utilizing all of these different capabilities all together, which implies necessary complications, since potential contradictions and polarities are involved.

Breakpoint. . . Inside Acceptance

Having established clarity about the ideal character and direction of a desirable brand stance, the next considerations take on how to make it happen.

One proposal is to drive the creation of a brand story. A well conceived story can combine existing legends, histories, experiences and intentions. "Your brand story should be authentic to the brand's past and relevant to the brand's future at the same time." (P. 143) The story should be short, simple, in tune against meaningful current circumstances, and follow a typical storytelling trajectory using real persons and actual events. Booklets and films may represent the message appropriately.

Another proposal is to map the brand experience, by brainstorming any interactions that any participants from many various communities of interest may experience. There are likely to be existing touch points that are out of agreement with what the brand should convey.

Any number of promotional techniques might be activated to help build and maintain a desired momentum. Employee and executive brand boot camps can help foster brand intercommunication.

The real ethos of the brand awareness should become totally embedded in all aspects and activities of the enterprise. The typical interview, hiring, and orientation process for new colleagues ought to demonstrate an alignment with the goals of living the brand. Some attention must also be paid to off-brand people. And, the potential impact of active detractors does need to be regarded seriously. A Law of Institutional Idiocy is described humorously, in one grey box.

"To be effective, ad-free brands take advantage of the talent and voice of each employee, allowing each person to utilize his or her own strengths, interests, and passions to explain or begin to live the brand positioning." (P. 134)

Encouraging everyone involved to truly accept and live the brand promise in every possible way is truly instrumental for catalyzing a continuous stream of shared enthusiasm.

Breakpoint. . . Outside Acceptance

Now some real fun can start to happen.

Recognition of communities of interest expands to include an especially generous range of interactions. “Ad-free brands must care not just about what is good for the brand, but what is good for the communities surrounding the brand.” (P. 173) Generate active participation in keeping with the authentic meanings and purposes that are intrinsic for each of the various associations.

There are a number of useful examples of endeavors doing this well: Wikipedia, Trip Advisor, The Redwoods Group and TED.

One specific mistake to be avoided is to try to use new social media channels as outlets to broadcast a company’s own self-interested announcements. Blogs, Twitter, YouTube or Facebook should not be used in this way. People won’t pay attention to pure company propaganda. Instead, those members of any community really should become motivated to notice the sincere involvement of the brand as a matter of course in relation to authentic community concerns.

“Ad-free brands use social media to help members of brand communities as much or more that they use it to help themselves.” (P. 203)

“Ad-free brands eschew the old policy of having one official voice for the brand through which all messages are emitted and one set of eyes and ears registering all complaints, ideas, and information. Instead, they empower as many people as possible to listen and speak on behalf of the brand.” (P. 208)

Brand ambassadors can be identified as those who are actively committed to the organization and who are also actively committed to the related community.

Community councils might be sponsored at regular intervals to strengthen alliances and to galvanize additional opportunities for cooperating and sharing. The experiences that begin to emerge from such involvements can be used to advance a beneficial momentum even further.

Certain expeditions are especially entertaining; the Red Hat Road Tour, Truth Happens and Dark Matter Matters: The Intersection of Brand, Culture and Community.

Breakpoint. . . Continue

Once a program has been initiated, it should be sustained, kept consistent, and reinforced.

“Brand, community, and culture are extremely difficult to measure well and sometimes accurate measurement is impossible. They are the dark matter of organizations.” (P. 218)

Nevertheless, some gauge of usefulness can be gained through attention to the public media coverage, online listening posts, surveys, interviews, and even formal brand tracking studies.

Also, we all have seen monumentally disturbing incidents affecting established reputations. A few suggestions for avoiding difficulty or for recovering gracefully are mentioned in passing.

Breakpoint. . . Believe

Chris Grams was born and raised in Indiana. A childhood friend of his happened to become associated with Pearson PLC (NYSE: PSO). And, Que Publishing, of Indianapolis, Indiana, happens to be a component of the Pearson enterprise. A degree of serendipity and happenstance has allowed *The Ad-Free Brand* to come into being.

This rapid overview of *The Ad-Free Brand* has emphasized the apparent structural order and formal substance of the book. At least some mention should be offered about the fluent style of the presentation. Chris Grams has made a real effort to cover the material in way that is inspirational, useful, friendly and accessible. There are any number of personal examples, testimonials and declarations of preference. There are a few reasonably good jokes. It is interesting to find out that the vaguely noir figure of the Red Hat logo is known as Shadowman. There are many references to other books and articles about marketing by recognized consultants and academic experts. The motto of the State of North Carolina is "Esse Quam Videri." A good number of visual images are used to illustrate various ideas. Think of astrophysics in relation to Dark Matter Matters. There are lots of recommendations regarding useful websites. There are clear references to large, well-known companies, as well as a few completely imaginary case studies meant to assist in explaining the various stages of the process. A spirit of dedication and conviction is constantly and completely being conveyed. A commitment to an open-source way of doing things is carried consistently throughout the entire endeavor. As long as the premise of the suitability of open-source is accepted in relation to the expanding imperatives of the digital information universe, ad-free opportunities are offered as a great way to go.

Now it is possible also to look away elsewhere and to consider a different sort of comparison coming from the literature of psychology.

The eminent Analytical psychologist, Marie-Louise von Franz, relates an experience from her distinguished career, in the book *Psyche and Matter* (1992). She had a young student who was learning about land use planning in Switzerland. Although he was directed by his professors to demonstrate mastery of specific statistical methods to formulate economic recommendations for a certain real district of the country, he went further and visited every village and talked to all the people. He convened local meetings. He took a lot of photographs. He asked for ideas from the school children. In the end, he came up with another set of recommendations based on the actual, collected convictions of district. His efforts impressed the authorities as being something totally different and useful. Next, he became invited to prepare a larger, actual land use plan for one of the governmental cantons of Switzerland.

A central plan had already been prepared by the official planning agency in the capital, so this upstart initiative represented a renegade challenge to the official way of doing things. Here the young planner began to also include references to the old, longstanding, traditional myths and stories and legends of the local communities. Due to some unforeseen circumstances driven by happenstance and serendipity, he discovered that an important senior official had a real fascination with the old, traditional myths and stories and legends. Through a meaningful intervention, the renegade plan was permitted to be subject for a vote by all of those local communities to be affected. In the end, the central planning agency was completely perplexed about how and why such an unconventional approach became so popular.

It would seem that there are honorable roots for open-source strategies, coming from conventionally neglected directions of realization and understanding. So, a dark mystery is proposed for Shadowman to ponder. The notion of Dark Matter Matters would seem to be somehow reminiscent of an ancient, traditional Dark Madonna from the old myths and stories and legends of Switzerland. "Mater" is Latin for "Mother," and the English word "Matter" has a shared derivation here as well. In the era of an extremely profitable, technically superb, wildly popular, highly acclaimed, award winning movie like James Cameron's *Avatar*, this notion may not be so totally preposterous. *Avatar* is rated as the best selling film of all time, with international gross box office revenues approaching three billion dollars.

"The Large Hadron Collider is the world's largest particle accelerator. It was built on the border of France and Switzerland and is about 17 miles wide. One of the things that particle physicists hope to prove with this enormous project is the existence of dark matter." -- Chris Grams

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