



How to Become a TrailBlazer Brand

REINVIGORATING YOUR BRAND'S FUTURE

Just what is a TrailBlazer Brand? At one point in time it might have been exclusively those brash upstarts who invent new categories in their garage, and following a rapid rise to good fortune become acquisition targets for larger players.

Today, given the upheaval in marketplace dynamics and the rise of consumer control that ultimately narrows the competitive advantage of sheer aircraft carrier size, both category leaders and followers must adopt the behavior of a TrailBlazer to stay ahead of the innovation curve. Here are a few characteristics of the true TrailBlazer:

TrailBlazers have a visceral appreciation of the need to constantly reinvent themselves, to avoid the calcifying effects of resting on your laurels. They recognize that in today's market place, nothing short of remarkable, meaningful products that engage the consumer are required to stay ahead of the constant drive underneath to commoditize everything that doesn't cause the consumer to care.

TrailBlazers routinely think beyond any inherent limitations imposed by their current manufacturing configuration or source investments.

TrailBlazers culturally respect and cultivate the efforts of internal creatives who work to drive new ideas through the organization. They refrain from diluting concepts and nurture new approaches

without subjecting them to layer upon bureaucratic layer of review that works to avoid risk.

TrailBlazer brands are not afraid of failure and encourage experimentation. They assiduously avoid testing regimens and analytical rituals that may push an important innovation from breakthrough down to vanilla.

TrailBlazers are slavishly focused on consumers. They regularly invest in the kinds of consumer anthropology research that aims to learn, to understand interests, wants, behaviors and needs. They want a dialogue, an open relationship with their customers based on transparency and mutual trust.

TrailBlazers are ahead of the curve in utilizing communications strategies that reach beyond the conventional go-to-market tool box in their respective categories. They know the days of bombast, hype and interruption marketing are gone and now credibility and believability reign supreme as the factors in maintaining healthy relationships between consumers and brands.

TrailBlazers have a visceral appreciation of the need to constantly reinvent themselves, to avoid the calcifying effects of resting on your laurels.

A collaborative and collegial relationship with consumers is necessary to remain competitive and to assure your products and marketing are relevant.

Trailblazing is about creating sustainable growth and profitability. It is based on an understanding that the playing field has been permanently leveled and that the consumer's expectations are high.

Anything less than constant reinvention and investment in relationship building will result in price being the dominant conversation about achieving business results. Once caught in the price vortex, it is difficult to get out.

Tools of the TrailBlazer

Recognition and acknowledging the need for change — the first step to recovery.

This is followed closely by a willingness to reinvent. Becoming a TrailBlazer means that conventional product development and go-to-market processes and strategies need to be overturned. In their place will come a slate of unconventional and brave steps that work to force fundamental re-appraisal of what your brand is about.



Faithfully follow and execute your muse.

While absolutely respectful of consumers and the need to matter to them, TrailBlazers don't base their business strategies on the wagging compass needles of the latest Hot New Trend. They are instead confident and resolute in their ability to produce products and services with sufficient value and inspiration that their allure glows naturally.



Walk in your consumer's shoes.

Listen, listen and then listen again. In the end having a place in the consumer's heart and mind is the goal of any successful business. The days of talking at people are over. A collaborative and collegial relationship with consumers is necessary to remain competitive and to assure your products and marketing are relevant. You must know the brand faithful as well as you know your own children. This requires time, investment and priority.



Establish the pathway.

In the end, everything matters. And because everything matters to achieve brand success all stakeholders including employees, management, suppliers and customers need to sign up. The vision must be clearly articulated and spread virally. As outreach moves to consumers, it should feel credible, natural and discoverable.

