

The craft of simplification

 By [Glen Meier](#)

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We all know the term 'less is more', but in a busy and complex world it is often forgotten. For a brand to say more and have optimal impact it needs to say less, less grey, less of the same, and more difference, more relevance. Simple doesn't mean easy though, and that's where the craft comes in. The craft of simplification.

With the clutter of thousands of daily messages, supermarket choices and the invasion of mobile and social media consuming our minds, there is a vital need for brands to simplify, and be distinctive to cut through the clutter. But how do you do this?

Simplifying brands

Enough of grey, generic brands all carrying three of the four most generic brand pillars of honesty, trust, quality, premium... As Jack Trout says, differentiate or die! How are consumers going to remember your product amongst the 1,500 media messages they consume every day, or the 50,000 products on the average supermarket shelf? Through simplification. This means uncovering that sometime unobvious gem, often born from an insight or human truth to differentiate your brand, and then communicating it simply, over and over, and over again.

Steve Jobs said: "Simpler can be harder than complex: You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end; because once you get there you can move mountains."

Research shows that 82% of people globally are more likely to recommend a simpler brand. Simple brands are simpler to understand and live longer in memory because it doesn't add to the complexity in people's lives. Two of the top brands measured on the Global Brand simplicity index are Google and Amazon, which focus firstly on simplifying the user's online experience and believe that all else will follow. On the opposite side of the pendulum, social media ranked only 19 out of 25 categories in the simplicity index. Stats show that the invasion of social media in people's lives often clutters consumers' headspace.

Simplifying strategic marketing plans

How do you distill reams of research spreadsheet data, trend forecasts and 100 page 'death by Powerpoint' marketing presentations into a succinct plan to focus a brand or business to maximise the budget?

Again the answer lies in the fine art of simplification; by taking a broad overview approach, looking at every minute detail, then a birds-eye-view, putting the full plan onto one page, then a fine tooth-comb... Funneling the information until you

arrive at a plan that reaches the optimal target market relevant to your brand, and demonstrates the best return on investment.

A balance of science and gut-feeling are the ingredients to developing a simple strategy that builds brands and sells. Another way of looking at it is like the advice Michelangelo gave on sculpting: "If you want to carve an elephant, take a block of stone and chip away everything that doesn't look like an elephant." The craft of developing a simple strategic marketing plan is a lot like that. It's about taking away everything that clutters, leaving only what adds value and arriving at a plan that has a sharp arrow-head to pierce through the competition.

Simplifying messaging and communication

Marketing talk is complex, a language of an isolated tribe, and yet communication to clients and consumers is often in this foreign language. Communications needs to be streamlined to make it clearer and more relevant. Simple language used to cut through the volume and complexity of information.

The Japanese got this right with their language, prioritising the most important word of the sentence first. For example, instead of saying 'I am going to New York next month', they say 'New York is where I'm going next month', which I believe is something we can most certainly learn from.

Simplifying creative

In advertising you need simple, big ideas that have gravitas. In my opinion the best ads are still those that are so simple we get them straight away, evoking an emotion and a response. In design communication we need to focus on the hierarchy of information. Research shows that 80% of consumer purchase decisions are made at the point of purchase, so packaging and in-store creative needs to communicate boldly and simply, focusing on the benefits that sell.

Simplicity gets into your head faster and stays there longer. Helps us make choices, save time and money and minimises debate over decisions. Simplicity combined with significance will lead to a consumable brand.

ABOUT GLEN MEIER

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