

BrandDigital

In his new book, *BrandDigital: Simple Ways Top Brands Succeed in the Digital World*, Allen P. Adamson explains that, in the quickly accelerating digital marketplace the basic principles of branding are more important than ever. In this excerpt, Allen details how Liberty Mutual used digital tools and media to reinforce customer relationships and build brand equity. The excerpt is based on Allen's conversation with Liberty Mutual CMO Steve Sullivan, one of more than 100 interviews with top marketers in the book.

Defining your brand in a way that transcends its functional benefit is hard when it comes to consumer packaged goods. Commodities abound. But it's equally hard when it comes to commodity services, including financial management and insurance.

There are hundreds of branded pages on the internet dedicated to money management, banking, and insurance, as well as independent web sites that allow you to compare and contrast rates, plans, and programs in an instant.

It's becoming increasingly more difficult to distinguish one brand from another based on anything more than price and online functionality.

It's difficult enough to ladder up from a functional benefit expressed as bigger or stronger. It becomes exponentially more difficult when the claim is "cheaper" or "faster."

Steve Sullivan is the chief marketing officer of Liberty Mutual, a leader within the insurance industry category. He has been asked to speak at a great many advertising and marketing conferences because of his innovative approach to his business.

I asked him about how a company in the business of selling insurance goes about defining itself in a meaningfully different way, especially in a digital world where everything is magnified. He said:

Selling based on price and the ability to shop many insurers online has tended to commoditize the



Simple ways Liberty Mutual succeeds in the digital world.

consumer insurance market. We struggled with how to differentiate ourselves and swim against the commodity tide. On the one side we had our heritage as a workers' compensation company with ninety-five years of experience and a global reputation for safety expertise.

On the other side we had consumers who weren't necessarily looking for safety expertise when they bought insurance for their homes and cars.

So if we wanted to grow our consumer business without dismissing the safety heritage, which is still important to our business-to-business customers, we had to find a bridge. The bridge turned out to be right under our nose in the mission statement that has defined our company for decades.

When consumers were exposed to the statement they said, "A

company like that would be responsible. They'd do the right thing. And that appeals to me because I'm a responsible person, myself." It was from this insight that we developed our brand positioning, "To celebrate our customers' responsibility and relentlessly prove our own."

This forms a very solid roof under which we can communicate all our brand offerings. The idea of responsibility works for our products, our service, our salespeople, and, yes, on the commercial side, fits with our historical roots in the creation of safe work environments.

Liberty Mutual did not ladder up so high in its effort to identify a meaningful difference for its brand that it was disconnected from a functional benefit. While behaving in a responsible manner is not directly about safety or even about the cost of insurance, it relates wonderfully to the idea of making the world a better place, a topic as engaging as it is inspiring.

The centerpiece for the branding campaign is a series of television ads that show people “doing the right thing” as they go about their daily lives: a man who picks up a toy that has dropped from a baby carriage onto the sidewalk unbeknownst to the mother and runs after her to return it; the same young mother doing a good deed for the next person she encounters; an older woman helping a younger man across the street (yes—that’s correct).

The voice over: “When it’s people who do the right thing, they call it being responsible. When it’s an insurance company, they call it Liberty Mutual. Responsibility. What’s your policy?”

“We have three primary audiences,” Steve said. “The first is our employees. Our salespeople and our customer service representatives are our front-line brand advocates. They understand what it means to be responsible, and they incorporate it into everything they do.

“The second audience is our existing clients. Our objective in our branding is to make them feel good about their decision to buy insurance from Liberty.

Our third audience is prospective clients. Our online and offline branding initiatives are created with the hope that they’ll think of us when they think about insurance.”

Go to *Libertymutual.com*, and you’ll be able to see for yourself how Steve and his team have integrated the idea of responsibility into all aspects of the site. There are applications that provide basic, factual information and applications that allow dialogue, real-time dialogue, with customer representatives twenty-four hours a day.

If you want insurance for your new home or a new car, you can either discuss it with a representative via e-mail or click a button and talk to someone on the phone.

Steve and I talked a bit about the common misperceptions concerning the process of differentiating a brand in the digital age. He agreed completely that it’s not about the ability to shout louder, but the ability to use the tools offered by the internet to connect in a more relevant way about a relevant topic.

As almost everyone I spoke with stated, technology is not the answer, it’s the enabler. We talked about Liberty Mutual’s search optimization initiatives, and he told me that one of the most important factors was not impeding users’ access to the information they wanted in any way, but using the right vocabulary and the right programming that would get them exactly what they wanted when they wanted it.

I could sum up this chapter on how the importance of relevantly differentiating a brand in the digital arena has been magnified. But I think I’ll do the responsible thing and let Steve sum it up for me:

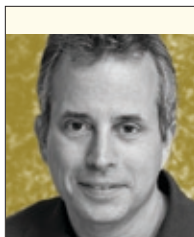
I’ve been doing this for thirty years, and this is the most exciting era of my marketing career. For the first time, marketers have a real opportunity to create a relationship

with someone before they become a customer, and they can enhance the relationship in a meaningful way as the prospects become customers.

The idea of responsibility as a relationship builder and a brand builder seemed natural given our history. As a result of the web, we can engage both customers and prospects in a conversation and give them all sorts of different ways for them to engage with us.

We can invite people to our web site and learn about their needs before we try to sell them anything. This is what good marketing is all about. Digital tools let us do this better than we’ve ever been able to do it before. ■

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