

Our second annual survey on brand identity reveals big gaps between strong brands.

Who has the stronger brand identity for innovation: Apple or Google? It might seem a tough choice, a close call. “Google is more innovative, but Apple has a rock-solid brand,” said one of our survey respondents. “Apple gets more PR, but Google is changing the way we think,” said another.

But in the end, it was no contest: Apple was deemed more innovative, 70 percent to 30 percent. The lopsided pattern continued through a series of matchups between a range of brands, all of which arguably enjoy strong identities.

Among retail brands, Target bested Whole Foods, 73-27 percent. Hertz beat Avis in car rental, 69-31. It was the iPhone over the BlackBerry, 75-25 and Nike over Adidas, 86-14. In every instance, respondents made a good case for the losing brand:

- “Target is just a red Walmart. Whole Foods revolutionized an entire industry.”
- “Adidas quality has kept pace with its expense, Nike has not.”
- “Hertz may be bigger but Avis has the stronger brand identity.”
- “The iPhone is a superior product but the term ‘blackberry’ has become the ‘kleenex,’ ‘scotch tape’ and ‘xerox’ of its industry.”

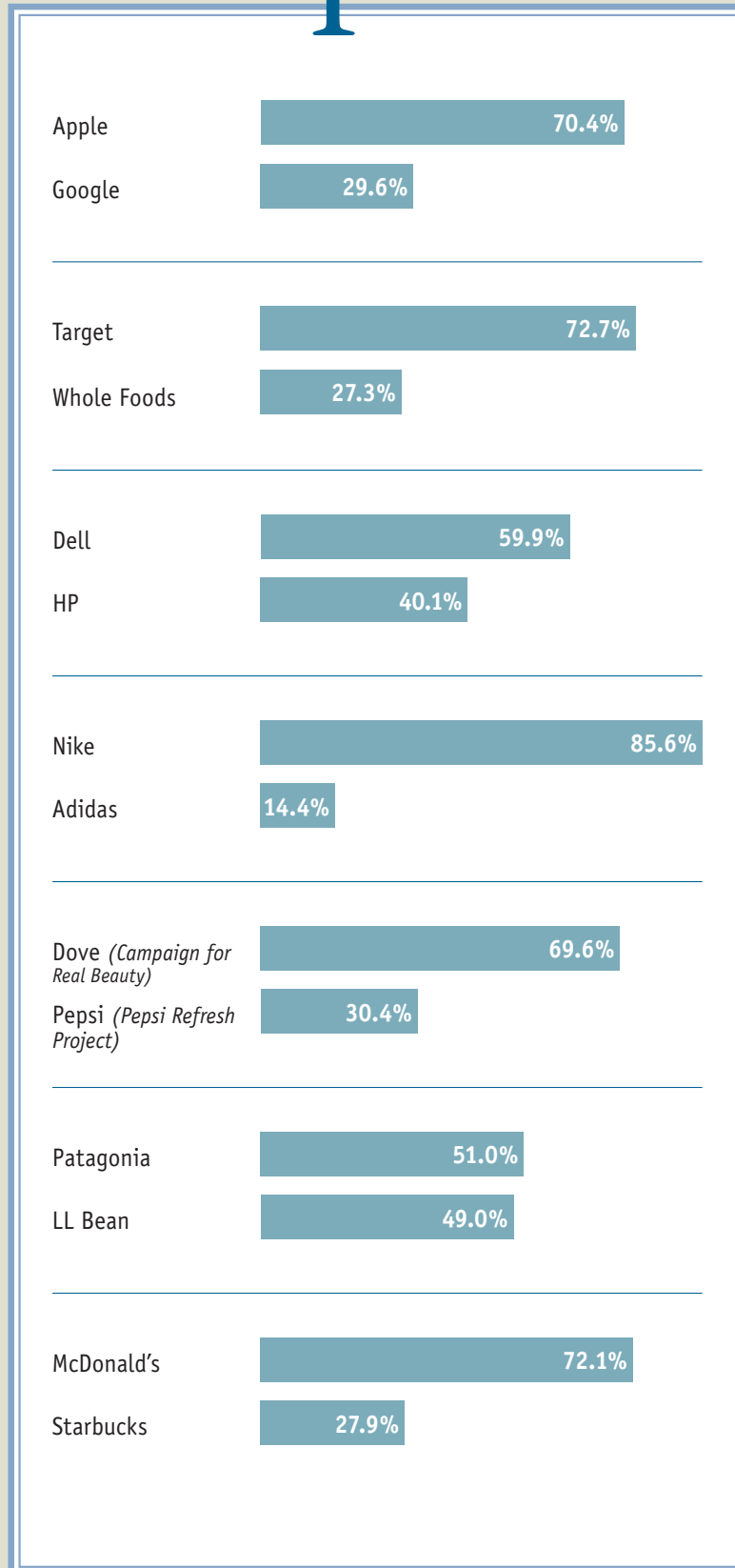
Opinions were not quite as polarized in the “personal computers” category, in our Dell versus HP duel, although Dell prevailed handily, 60-40 percent. Several respondents noted that they think of HP as printers, not computers.

In breakfast cereals, Wheaties edged Corn Flakes, 56-44 percent, however some said that “corn flakes” isn’t really a brand — which is true and makes the closeness of the result that much more interesting.

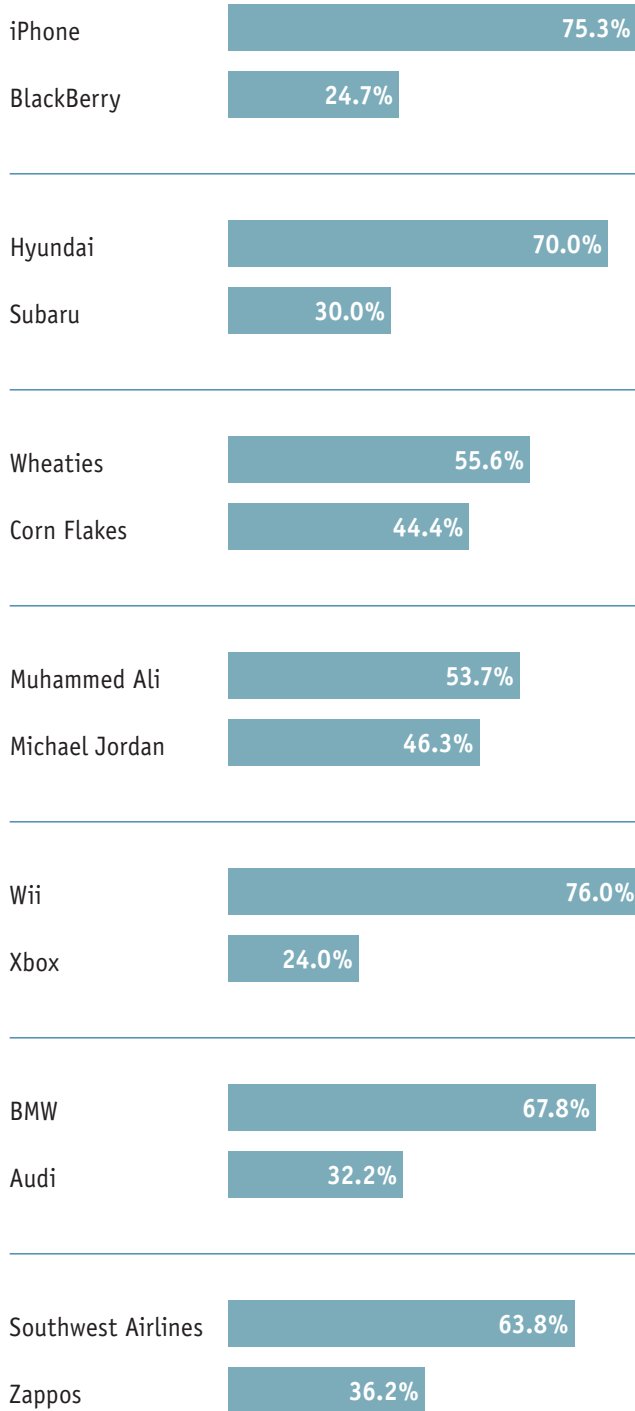
The closest contest of all was between Patagonia and LL Bean. Out of 551 votes cast, only 11 separated the two, and the lead changed several times during the course of the survey. Patagonia squeaked it out, though, 51-49 percent.

Some of our matchups were intentionally unconventional, pitting non-competitors against each other: Starbucks doesn’t compete with McDonald’s in the same sense as Burger King,

Compared



to What?



Survey results: http://hubmagazine.com/survey/brands_2010

but it is in the “fast food” business, for example. Some took issue with that view, which may at least partly explain why McDonald’s came out on top, 72-28 percent. Others simply noted the iconic power of the Golden Arches.

We also pitted Walmart against the Prius, given that both pursue identities as “green” brands. Perhaps predictably, it was no contest: Prius, 86-14 percent. Walmart fared better in its contest against Microsoft—in that both identify as mass-market brands—with Walmart in a walk, 77-23 percent.

With tongue firmly in cheek, we paired Facebook against the Central Intelligence Agency. Not sure what to make of this result, but Facebook came out way ahead, 72-28 percent. This may not be such a good thing for Facebook, given its issues with privacy lately.

We matched some personal brands, as well: Lady Gaga over Taylor Swift, 68-32 percent; Elvis Presley over Michael Jackson, 65-25 percent; and Barack Obama over Steve Jobs, 55-45 percent. It was a tighter contest between Muhammed Ali and Michael Jordan, with the decision going to Ali, 54-46 percent. That’s also interesting, given the relative lack of Ali merchandising.

However, the tightest contest of all was in the “rock star” category, between Keith Richards and Keith Richards, with each Keith taking exactly 50 percent. Despite 136 comments, no consensus alternative was evident. A few votes for Mick, but c’mon. Case closed.

We wrapped up with the ultimate, open-ended question of which brand has the strongest identity of all. Just like last year, *Coke Is It* (35 percent), followed by Apple (16 percent) with Nike and McDonald’s at four percent each. The keywords were: Ubiquity (Coke); Innovation (Apple); and Iconography (Nike & McDonald’s).

Three percent picked “religion” in some way, shape or form and two percent mentioned the United States of America. Just a handful of votes for Microsoft, Walmart, Google and Starbucks. Oh yeah... and one vote for Keith Richards!

RESPONDENT PROFILE

A total of 560 survey respondents included brand marketers (20%), consulting firms (19%), and agencies (19%). A majority were senior-level executives with 77% reporting more than ten years of experience in marketing.