



Insightful? Or Just Interesting? How to Identify a Brand-Building Home Run

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April 2007

Marketers are trained to believe insights are the foundations of brand strategy and powerful insights about the target customer yield strong brands. But what exactly constitutes an 'insight' and how do you recognize one when you see it? What makes one idea worthy of building a brand around and another simply 'nice to know'?

That's an Insight?

When I read case histories about brand building, I am often surprised at how modest are the insights at the heart of the strategy. My immediate reaction, '*that's an insight?*', is immediately followed by curiosity. How did the team pluck that idea out of mountains of consumer research and make it the basis of their brand strategy? Consider these examples:

- Did someone in a Dawn Direct Foam strategy meeting actually jump up to say, "I've got it! Women don't like to do dishes and want to make it fast and easy!"
- Did the Master Card team really need an extensive brand audit to conclude, "Buying things allows you to get to some other place in your life that makes you feel good"?
- How many proprietary studies did the Dove team at Unilever need to determine "Only 2% of all women consider themselves beautiful, and only 5% consider themselves pretty"?
- Did it take a rocket scientist at Goodby Berlin to discover that "Things just don't feel the same without milk"?

In retrospect, each of these ideas is enormously insightful and each provided a powerful platform for brand building. But how did they know? Even now, each so-called insight seems a bit obvious.

Insights Don't Announce Themselves

In the case of Dove, we have evidence that even the brand team wasn't completely sure they had unlocked the key to women's psyches. Initially, the marketing budget was relatively small because there was some skepticism about spending on a campaign that didn't sell a specific product. The subsequent soft launch gave Unilever an indication they were onto something big. O&M, the agency for the effort, estimated

the PR campaign generated \$21 million in free publicity. *People* magazine featured six real women in their underwear on their cover. These women went on to make a much-talked about appearance on *Oprah*. In the next three years, the brand went on to gain \$1.2 billion in value.

The MasterCard example is especially instructive because, like Dove, the insight is so seemingly obvious, it would have been easy to miss. You can almost put yourself in the conference room and hear the objections:

- Isn't that good feeling *generic* to all credit cards?
- Will it actually motivate someone to change their behavior in a *mature* category like credit cards?
- Shouldn't we emphasize something more differentiating like safety or convenience?

Yet, through the brilliance of the insight, along with a strong strategic connection (MasterCard simplifies your life so you have time to focus on what matters), the "Priceless" campaign provided a cross cultural platform that resonates with consumers worldwide. This cleverly-executed campaign not only differentiates the brand, it enhances connections with consumers and delivers bottom line results, the equivalent of a brand-building grand slam.

A more recent example from the financial world is a new campaign breaking from Mullen for Mass Mutual's retirement planning services. The campaign, which targets individuals, financial planners and brokers, is based on extensive research by Landor that shows "most consumers actually resent scare tactics, and they simply don't believe the fantasies. This campaign is based on the simple fact that people generally know they need to financially prepare for their future, and MassMutual can help them realize the difference between thinking about it and doing something about it." 'Insert brand name here', is my immediate response. Why should this campaign move MassMutual 'to the forefront of my consumer mindset' more than a dozen other brands? And yet, who knows, this may be the insight that moves millions to action.

Insights about Insights

As a brand strategists and market researchers, we have a strong interest in discerning potential insights from the merely interesting. Consequently, here are some guidelines to use when considering whether a finding is 'an insight' worthy of building a brand effort around.

1. *Insights say more about the target than about the product or service.*

Few anti-drug campaigns have been more effective than Foote Cone and Belding's National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, "Above the Influence". This campaign is based on the insight that to be effective, a campaign needs to zero in on teen lifestyles and be based on a teen point of view. The main insight was that teens are very sensitive to influences, positive and negative, from peers and the media. The message was positioned so that teens would see influence itself as the enemy, and

marijuana as one of the influences that gets in their way. This insight has very little to do with drugs and everything to do with the target.

2. *Insights are more about the category than the brand.*

Jenny Craig is not that different from a half dozen other complete weight loss plans. But unlike the others, this company leveraged an insight about the category driver into a \$462 million business. Dieters truly want to believe that there is a diet that will succeed this time. They are hopeful and willing to believe if a plan has worked for others, it will work for them. The category driver is 'optimism'. There are few brands quite as optimistic as Jenny Craig. The strategy was brought to life brilliantly as dieters everywhere watched Kirstie Allie, America's favorite fat actress, shed 75 pounds and return to glamour. Being optimistic has worked so well for Jenny Craig that the company was acquired by Nestle in 2006 for five times what the investors paid in 2002 to acquire it.

Many strong brands are based on category insights. Indeed, owning the category benefit is often considered an indication of brand leadership. United Airlines for many years grew based on the idea that it alone offered friendly skies. 9-Lives thrived on the insight that it alone could satisfy the finickiest of finicky cats. More recently, Google is known as easiest, most powerful search engine and is considered FedEx as the most reliable delivery service.

3. *Insights reveal more about how people want to feel than what they think.*

Brands are adopted because they help customers *feel* better, not just because they do a better job of offering benefits they *think* they want. We want the brands that fit the life we want to lead. Brand strategist, David Lemley, puts it this way: "*Said plainly, "I love you because of who I get to be when I am with you."* Brands built on insights about desired lifestyle are among the best loved and most successful in the world. They include Nike, Starbucks, Apple, BMW, Martha Stewart, Oprah and more.

Discovering how people want to *feel* is sometimes more difficult than discovering what they think. Feelings go right to our deepest needs and values. People are less likely to come right out and say they want to feel loved, secure, indulged, healthy, smart, adventurous and productive than they are to say they want products that are affordable, taste good or have a longer warranty. Find an insight based one of a dozen basic emotions and it is possible to build a brand people will love, not just buy.

4. *Insights focus more on what is enduring than what is new.*

Enduring brands are often built on lasting values. If your insight is likely to be gone tomorrow, chances are it is not an insight worth investing in. Carhartt is a brand that prides itself on being the antithesis of trendy. For over 100 years, it has made quality workwear for people in the farm and construction industries. Workers have come to know Carhartt as the authentic brand. During the early 90's, its work wear was adopted by the skater and BMX subcultures. Top rap and hip-hop groups were wearing Carhartt work clothing on televised videos as well as on CD covers and in performances onstage. Carhartt clothes were even featured in the pages of *Vogue* and *Harper's*

Bazaar. Yet, Carhartt's marketing team resisted capitalizing on this windfall, maintaining that it was in existence to serve the needs of people who work hard for living. Staying true to its core values is what has, and will, make this brand strong.

Some brands that appear to be built on fads, are actually the antithesis. For example, Abercrombie is based on the insight that pre-teen adolescents want to wear fashions that are lasting and make them fit in, not stand out. Their clothing is a clever blend of classic styles of jeans, t-shirts and sweatshirts, with trend-following, not trend-setting, details.

5. *Insights stimulate new ideas and thinking, not the same old stuff.*

Real insights are not just 'good to know'; they should challenge companies to act in new ways. Payless Shoe Source 'discovered' the insight that men are not simply women with big feet. Men and women mean something completely different when they say 'casual shoe'. While both expect a casual shoe to be comfortable, something they can wear 'everyday', they mean something completely different in terms of styling. Men mean something brown or black that will go with everything. Women are more likely to mean something that suits a variety of occasions without being boring or 'too sensible'. This idea led to new ways to address the merchandise needs of men (e.g., mix fashionable with classic shoe styles) and treat them differently when they are in the store.

Conclusion: Don't reject an insight just because it seems obvious.

First ask yourself:

- Does it reveal something about the target?
- Does it relate to the category driver?
- Does it capture how consumers want to feel?
- Does it speak to an enduring value?
- Does it challenge the brand to act in new ways?

If you can answer yes to some or most of these questions, chances are you have an insight for building a powerful brand.

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