

## DOES THE BRAND SAY IT ALL? IS THE PROFESSIONAL MARKET THE SAME AS THE FAST MOVING CONSUMER GOODS MARKET?

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### ABSTRACT

This paper describes some of the key aspects of branding and selling with particular reference to biosolids and biowastes. It is partly based on the personal experience of building brands and developing markets from nothing. Brands are not a short cut to success, they require all of the good business skills; integrity and commitment are essential. Selling is often neglected or taken for granted but it is vital to any business; there are basic aspects that can be learnt and there are key factors to the way of practising sales. The brand and the sales people are the first point of contact with the potential customer; if these are wrong it won't matter how good your mouse-trap is, there won't be many people coming to your door.

### KEYWORDS

Brand stretching, Brand values, Customers, Designing brands, Differentiation, Segmentation, Selling

### INTRODUCTION

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), U.S. essayist, poet and philosopher is quoted as saying in a lecture he gave in 1871:

*“If a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mouse-trap, than his neighbour, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door.”*

Emerson was wrong – first the world has to find out about the mousetrap – that's selling. Selling is crucial and its importance is often underestimated. Marketing, branding and adhering to brand values are also keys to success in creating volume demand for your mousetrap.

In its broadest sense most of us are selling most of the time. Whether it is exchanging goods for money, bidding for projects, seeking planning permission, getting approval from the Board for a project, persuading somebody of

our ideas, or trying to get a date, it is all selling.

A brand is short-hand for the whole customer experience: rather than having to describe the better mouse-trap you just have to say the brand name; rather than ask for a classic chocolate bar comprising four wafer fingers covered with thick milk chocolate you ask for a Kit Kat and if you've had one before you know what you are going to get because Nestlé maintains the quality and consistency of the product.

Brands do not create markets if there's nothing behind them; neither does compliance with regulations or standards. People in the biosolids business know that complying with the Sludge Use in Agriculture Regulations does not cause farmers to order their biosolids: farmers expect suppliers to act within the law. For some reason people in the biowaste business seem to have been under the impression that the hurdle to having a market for their composted materials was that there was no equivalent regulation. Customers expect products and services to comply with regulations, to be fit for purpose, etc.

Standards such as “organic”, “kosher”, “halal”, “BS3882:1994 ‘Specification for topsoil’” create sub-divisions of the market but they don't help to sell your particular organic sausage or whatever. The standard creates a barrier to entry to the sub-division over which all products must leap, but once they have been admitted to the sub-division they compete on merit and price. In this case merit is the total experience.

I have had the experience of building 4 brands: Thamesgro Organic Soil Treatment; the TERRA ECO-SYSTEMS family of brands; BOOST and TIM EVANS ENVIRONMENT.

Thamesgro Organic Soil Treatment was the branding for Thames Water's biosolids recycling 1977 to 1983 from the wastewater treatment works serving London. We were land-applying anaerobically digested biosolids that had been lagoon thickened, mechanically dewatered or air-dried. The brand acquired

recognition and differentiation from generic biosolids recycling. It later morphed into Thames' first enterprise company "Thamesgro Land Management" that, amongst other things, supplied topsoil manufactured to BS3882:1994.

TERRA ECO·SYSTEMS was launched in 1990 for Thames' biosolids recycling to clear the site where Heathrow Airport's fifth terminal is being built. The Thamesgro name was still in use so we needed a new one and started with TERRA *organic fertiliser*, which uses the classical link to the earth and the nature of the product as perceived by the customers. By 1992 we had brought other types of biosolids into the brand, all without compromising its values. We called the lime-stabilised biosolids TERRA *lime plus* and there was compost as well so we launched the umbrella branding TERRA ECO·SYSTEMS, alluding to ecology, environment and the QA/QC systems that we employed [1].

BOOST was an acronym for Biosolids and Other Organic Soil Treatments. BOOST enabled 25-year strict-liability latent-defect insurance for biosolids and biowastes that were treated and used in accordance with its HACCP-based protocols. The producers of biosolids and biowastes said they could not give the indemnity that landowners and others were asking for because they could not get insurance. The insurance companies would not cover the risk because it was inadequately defined. BOOST defined the risk so that one of the largest insurers in Europe (backed by the largest re-insurer) was prepared to provide the cover [2]. The product was technically competent but it could not cross the chasm [3].

TIM EVANS ENVIRONMENT my current brand is intended to trade on the recognition that I had gained at conferences and standards work, linked with the vision of assisting clients to achieve sustainable solutions especially for biosolids and biowastes, but with the breadth/slack to branch out into other areas, such as Airbeam Roller Stockpile Covers [4] if and when the opportunity developed.

#### **DESIGNING A BRAND**

A brand should encapsulate the total experience and values of the product or service. Like a reputation it takes longer to build a brand's value than to lose it. Some may remember that the long established and respected Italian sports car brand Alfa Romeo lost its reputation when its cars became very prone to rust. The heritage and loyalty of

enthusiasts survived but the volume of cars sold plummeted and has been very slow to recover.

Recently there has been a fashion amongst brand consultants to divorce the name from the function. British Steel became Corus; PWC Management Consultants became Monday; and most notorious of all the Post Office became Consignia. The last of these apparently cost about £500,000 for the brand development and an additional £1 million for scrapped notepaper, goods, etc. when it was rebranded back to Royal Mail. The UK's Post Office was founded in 1635 by King Charles I; 365 years later it was losing more than £1 million per day, morale was low and so was performance; something had to be done. Somebody sold the idea that changing the brand would cure the organisation and in March 2001 it changed its name to Consignia. The name did not mean anything and nobody liked it – except presumably the consultants who banked the fee. On 13<sup>th</sup> June 2002 it changed its name to Royal Mail, which reflects its heritage and purpose. Separately the hard work to rebuild the morale and performance has been undertaken but at least it was not hampered by having a daft name.

My experience is that you need to think about what the product and the whole experience means to the users. Market research can help to establish this and can also help to distinguish ingredients that work best with customers. Even the colours and the font convey meaning about the type of company/product to which the brand is applied.

When we were designing the packaging for TERRA ECO·SYSTEMS garden centre products (multi-purpose compost, soil improver and growing media) the market research revealed that gardeners responded well to butterflies so we put them on the packaging.

There have been many biosolids and biowaste brands in addition to the ones I have mentioned already; some of them are distant memories and some very much alive. Milorganite is probably the best known, and here are a few of the others: Agrivert, Apex, Bestway, Biogran, Biogro, Bioverm, Cinagro, ComPro, Dillo Dirt, Dagfert, EcoCompost, Hou-Actinite, Hydig, Kellogg Supply's Amend and Topper, MetroGro, Mine Mix, Morganic, Nature's Blend, New England Fertilizer Co., Nitrohumus, Nutribio, Nutri-

Green, OrganoCompost, Synagro, Yorkshire Bounty, and SilviGrow and GroCo from Seattle. You can decide which of these inspire but it's not just the name, it is what is behind the name that really counts. Does the customer always get the type of good experience that makes them want to come back for more?

There has been a fashion amongst brand consultants that you should not use a person's name in a brand – so I got it wrong there, but I'm in good company with Ford, Porsche, Dunhill, Rolls and Royce, Du Pont, Lloyds, Bentley, Chanel, Atkins, Gore, McDonald and many, many more. I guess that if you are a brand consultant you have to have something to say.

When Bloggs' Waste Management Co. Ltd. decides to sell the compost it makes from greenwaste or the biosolids that it is recycling for a water company the "Waste Management" part of the name is probably not going to be a winner for the people they are trying to entice to be customers for their compost of biosolids. Bloggs' compost, Bloggs' soil improver, Bloggs' fertiliser would probably be better, and it is probably best to leave the "W" word for selling to municipal customers who want a waste management service; but might municipal customers really be looking for recycling rather than waste?

Creating a successful brand is much more than a good name; the critical success factor is the customer's experience. If the packaging, font and name are attractive it will help the first purchase; if the experience is good every time it will ensure repeat business. If a shop's window dressing is good it will get people to enter the shop but if there's nothing behind the display they won't stay and if the total experience (both merchandise and service) inside the shop does not match up to the window dressing they will be disappointed and disillusioned. In the biosolids and biowaste business we want repeat custom every year: this is not a once in 20 years' double glazing sale.

### **BRAND VALUES**

Since the success of a brand is fundamentally linked to the total experience of the product or service to which it is attached it is critically important to decide the values by which your brand is going to live. Table 1 gives examples of some values and visions of some brands; these might look like "motherhood and apple pie" but a brand that really lives its values is successful. Keeping a brand up to its values

requires constant attention. It is the members of the team/company and their identification with an ideology that enables organisations to generate a commitment that can become intuitive. There is little point in investing large sums in advertising and design, if the reality of employee behaviour undermines those well honed messages of product and service superiority. The brand should run through a company like the lettering through a stick of rock.

We get the organisations we deserve. If we accept duplicity, greed and manipulation individually, and as a society, we should not be surprised by businesses that stretch the boundaries of corporate behaviour. Equally, given that the language of marketing has long accepted hyperbole as a necessary part of its armoury, the over-claiming of some products should be expected. The consequent cynicism towards brands has an undoubted impact on consumers, but it also affects employees and their sense of worth. To build a genuine commitment towards an organisation requires sincerity. Living the brand is not a six month programme or a campaign of internal communication. It is an integrated, ongoing and genuine commitment to the focused development of employee potential. It requires organisations to think anew about their roles and responsibilities and to focus on their culture. Consequently living the brand is not about developing a few well-chosen management tools but about creating an open, honest and participative environment.

The benefit of all this hard work is greater job-satisfaction for all of the people working with the brand, from being associated with the brand, as well as greater business success. There is also greater customer satisfaction from having bought from a successful and respected brand; that is why people want to be seen to be associated with some brands.

### **DIFFERENTIATION**

Recognised brands differentiate their products and service from the rest of the offerings. Watches tell the time and even inexpensive battery powered quartz watches are reliable and accurate but people are prepared to pay large premiums for Omega and other top line brands; do they really understand the extraordinary differences in materials and precision engineering that they are buying?

Differentiation can be valuable if there is a problem with another brand or indeed with the generic class of product. This can be positive

if it is somebody else's products that are the subject of criticism but negative if you have taken your eye of your values and it is your product that is found wanting. If you were Alfa Romeo when the rust issue was recognised you were in a hole but if you were another brand you could look over the edge of the hole knowing that you were differentiated and would not get dragged into the hole as well.

A farmer friend related a conversation he had with a neighbour:

Farmer 1: *Are you going to use sludge this year?*

Farmer 2: *No, but I'm going to give that TERRA a try, that looks pretty good.*

That conversation was a testament to differentiation.

### **DISCOUNTING**

A brand consultant observed to me that the sales department always tries to have discounts, special offers, etc. when a new product is launched – because it makes their life easier, but what they are saying with their discounts, etc. is that the product is not worth its full price. His advice was to resist the siren call of the sales department and believe that the product is worth [at least] the price you are selling it for. It's a great product and would be good value at twice the price – well maybe that's going too far.

### **BRAND STRETCHING**

When you have achieved brand recognition and reputation you can launch other products under the brand provided they meet the brand's values; this is called brand stretching. Under no circumstances should the brand be applied to a product or service that is not consistent with the brand's values.

Virgin has a very clear and compelling design DNA: fun, edgy, innovative, approachable and personal. Its logo, a handwritten signature at a rakish angle, is the design glue under which span a host of different services and products, from record stores to airlines to clothing to colas. It is extraordinary how far the Virgin brand has been successfully stretched. A significant anchor for these sub-brands is Virgin's unmistakable design identity and how this design DNA successfully thrives within every new venture and expansion. A customer always knows when they are experiencing or buying a Virgin brand. Virgin Trains could be

considered an exception to the rule that you should not apply the brand until the product matches the values. The train company has had a notorious performance record but apparently customers trust that it will improve because they have so much faith in the brand and Richard Branson. Your brand has to be very strong before it engenders such trust and loyalty.

By the mid 1990s TERRA ECO-SYSTEMS had good recognition around the M25 in south east England because there were so many trucks carrying the logo hauling biosolids to farms, land reclamation sites and from one wastewater treatment works to another. Although it was a Thames Water brand we did not display Thames' logo because at that stage in the brand's development we did not think that either added to the other.

We were producing composted biosolids at one of the treatment works, it looked friable and attractive, and the campaign against the use of peat for gardening was vocal so in 1994 I experimented with different formulations to see whether I could match the performance of the brand-leading peat-based multi-purpose compost. This was successful and after 2 more years of product development, market testing, etc. we launched a range of products for gardeners based on the composted biosolids, though we described it as "sewage cake sanitised by composting with straw and other biomaterials" so that there was no ambiguity for customers about what they were buying. The M25 and surrounding area has around 10% of the UK's population so we built on the brand recognition from the "professional market" and applied the brand for the fast-moving consumer-goods market. The prime objective of preparing biosolids in a form that the general public could use was to demonstrate that faecal aversion is not very widespread; our market research showed that 90% of gardeners were quite prepared to buy and use these products provided they got results just as good as the peat-based media.

The success of brand building and stretching and of being set a target to increase income can be seen in Figure 1. The managing director set a target for income, which was quite a challenge at that stage in the development of the company's mentality. Targets for profit would come later.

## **CONSUMER VERSUS PROFESSIONAL MARKETS**

In autumn 1996 when we launched the TERRA ECO-SYSTEMS range of products for gardeners we reckoned we knew about selling to farmers and other professional users. For these customers we needed to provide technical agronomic advice, to tailor the choice of biosolids to the customer's needs and to give an excellent quality of service. It was a technical sale.

Joe Pine the author of "Mass customization" [6] has said:

*"Customers do not want choice, they want the thing that fits their needs at a price they are prepared to pay."*

A store might have trousers with waists from 20" to 50" and legs from 25" to 36" in all the colours of the rainbow plus white and black but you will only be interested in the size that fits you and probably a restricted selection of colours. In the case of biosolids and biowastes we need to know our product but the first objective of the sales call is to find out what the customer needs, then we present the features and benefits of the product that fits those needs – customization.

The consumer market was different from the professional market; for a start we were not selling directly to the end user: we were selling to a retailer. Retailers wanted to be sure that the products worked, i.e. that we had done the technical development work and had the results to show that the performance equalled the competition, that was a given, but there was more. Earlier experience with peat alternatives had soured some retailers because they did not work, their customers did not repeat purchase and the retailers had been stuck with unsold product. Retailers were well aware of the anti-peat propaganda going out to gardeners on prime time TV each week but want to know how were we, TERRA ECO-SYSTEMS, going to get gardeners to come to their garden centre? How would we increase their foot-fall? What advertising and promotion did we plan? We had a shoe-string budget so we had to get maximum publicity for minimum expenditure. Bags of compost take up a lot of room and generally if a retailer was going to display pallets of our product it would mean removing competitors' pallets from the sales area.

Even when we had got our products listed by a retailer and his or her customers were repeat

purchasing we found we still had to watch stock levels because retailers seldom contacted us to re-order; they would just move a competitor's pallet into our space. However when they were told stock was running down they would re-order. Generally retailers are happy as long as the cash tills are ringing – it does not really matter what is selling. Generally retailers didn't have a particular interest that it was our product that sold (unless they had a special relationship with us) – why should they?

## **SELLING**

When you have done the technical product development and characterisation work and you've got your branding and design for your "better mouse-trap" you are ready to launch: will the world then beat a path to your door? The answer is "no" – you have to sell the product and this is an aspect that is frequently over-looked or under-resourced. I overlooked it when we launched the TERRA range in 1996. We had all the technical performance data to show that the products worked. We had attractive packaging. We had done market research to assess gardeners' reactions to the proposition. We launched at the leading annual trade show at which we spoke with journalists and leaders in the industry. But we had not given enough attention to planning a sales operation. We put that right, sales doubled year on year and we rapidly achieved nationwide distribution.

I have seen this lack of attention to selling in other biosolids and biowaste organisations with whom I have worked. As with any activity there are some people who are innately more talented at selling than others and a few who are congenitally unsuited to selling, but the principles and skills can be learnt by most people. Selling requires organisation and resources. Sales people need to know their products and what they will do for the customers. Part of the skill is finding out what each customer needs, when you know this you are better able to present your product's properties in a way that answers those needs, but it must be truthful. Going back to the clothing store example, if you find out that the customer wants trousers to wear at a conventional funeral there's no point in getting out your best yellow trousers.

A frequent error is to lead with your product, which means that the customer has to see how it can adapt to his or her needs, another is to promise the impossible. Some sales people don't really know their product from the

customer's perspective; they only know it from their own perspective. For example all that some producers selling composted greenwaste have to say about their compost is what it was made from and the size of the screen; the customer has to work out whether this might be useful for their particular application. Some people selling deliver and spread for biosolids or biowastes don't consider the logistics of the spreading campaign. It is easy to get orders for treating arable land immediately after harvest but if there is a lack of consideration of the spreading schedule there are going to be a lot of disappointed customers – the selling did not give due consideration to the total customer experience, it was just focussed on getting product out of the gate and stockpiled on customer's land.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Branding can be extremely valuable provided that you live and maintain the brand. If it is just froth with no substance to support it a brand will have no worth. A brand will be compromised if the team does not live up to the values of the brand. Brand success is all about customers' total experience of the goods and services, including the personal interactions with the team. A successful brand will differentiate its products from the competitors and the generic whole. Achieving and sustaining a successful brand requires hard work and commitment.

Selling is generally under-valued and under-resourced. There are skills associated with selling and there are basic resources that are needed, these are very frequently under-developed in the biosolids and biowastes world, but they can be acquired.

The consumer market is very different from the professional market and needs additional considerations to assure success.

We are all customers and we are all exposed to brands. Ralph Waldo Emerson was not entirely correct, but if you have a good mouse-trap, a good brand and total commitment to its values you will be well placed to cross the chasm, achieve good sales and facilitate stretching into other fields.

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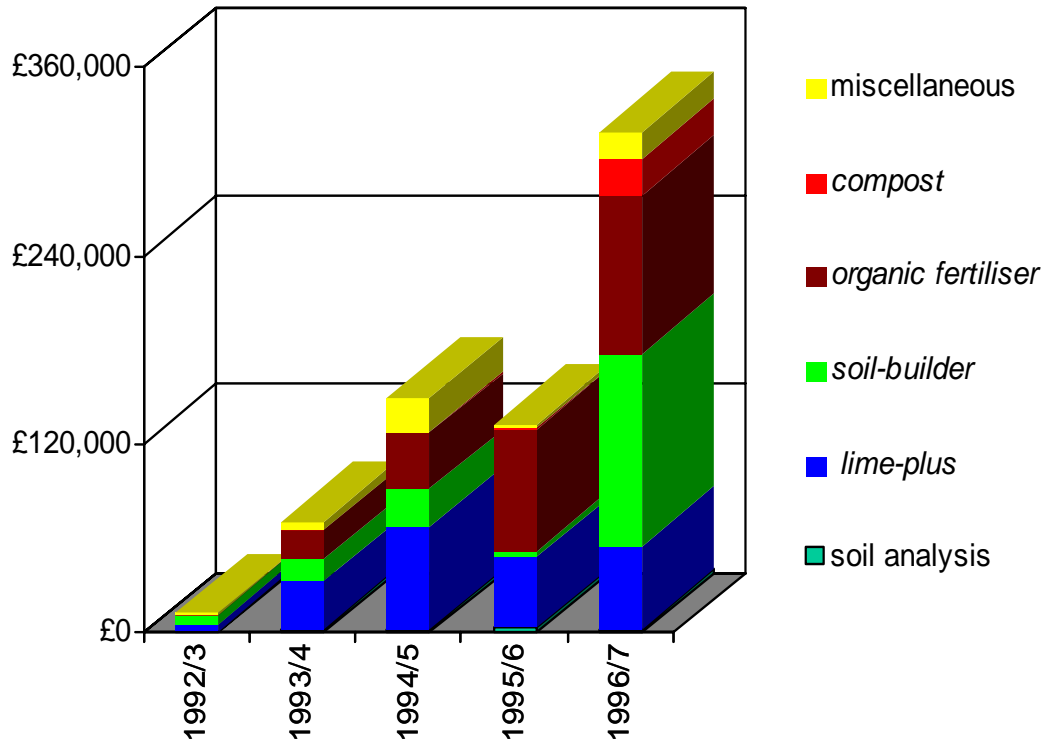
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**TABLES**

**Table 1 Examples of values and visions declared for some brands (from [5])**

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Values / Vision</b>
Fujitsu	Indomitable spirit Pride in providing high-quality products and services Concern for environment Deeply felt sense of responsibility to solving our customers' problems
Virgin	Best quality Good value for money An innovation pathway A sense of challenging existing alternatives Sense of fun
Mars	Quality – the consumer is our boss, quality is our work, and value for money is our goal Responsibility: as individuals we demand total responsibility from ourselves; as associates we support the responsibilities of others Mutuality: a mutual benefit is a shared benefit; a shared benefit will endure Efficiency: we use resources to the full, waste nothing and do only what we can do best Freedom: we need freedom to shape our future: we need profit to remain free
Red Cross	Humanity Unity Independence
Nokia	Customer Satisfaction - the basis of our operations Achievement - achieving results requires that every Nokia employee is working according to a strategy and well-defined goals Continuous Learning - everyone is entitled to look for ways to improve their performance in an industry where leadership takes innovation, courage and constant willingness to learn Respect for the individual: Nokia believes in the individual whether she or he is an employee, a business partner or a customer
TERRA ECO·SYSTEMS	Always focusing on our customers' and clients' needs Seeking continuous improvements in the quality and costs of our services Enabling our employees to give of their best
Harley Davidson	Tell the truth Be fair Keep your promises Respect the individual Encourage intellectual curiosity
Du Pont	Safety Ethics Respect for people Environmental stewardship
Orange	"Refreshing" - Orange is bright and cheerful. Orange aims to liberate people from the constraints of yesterday's technology, providing them with fair, user-friendly products and services, wherever, whenever and however they want to use them. "Honest" - Orange is bright and cheerful. Orange aims to liberate people from the constraints of yesterday's technology, providing them with fair, user-friendly products and services, wherever, whenever and however they want to use them. "Straightforward" - Orange makes things easier by using simple language and no jargon "Dynamic" - Orange is continually developing new services to make communications even easier "Friendly" - Orange is a brand that you can understand and trust

**FIGURES**



**Figure 1 TERRA ECO-SYSTEMS' income growth (1992/93 to 1996/97)**