

How Strong Brands Evolve

By Colin Bates

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colin.bates@buildingbrands.com

BuildingBrands <http://www.buildingbrands.com>

There are many brands that have been with us for years, and have remained strong by evolving over time. When properly managed this 'evolution' ensures that the brand stays relevant and motivating to stakeholders and the society in which they live.

These changes can take many forms, and often this 'evolutionary process' can happen so slowly that it is hard to notice. But a brand, like a living thing, must respond to the changes in the environment around it.

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change".

Charles Darwin

Take Volvo for example, one of the oldest of car brands. What jumps to mind when you see the word Volvo? For most people it would be 'safety'. Here's why...

In 1927 the founders of Volvo committed the company to this idea:

"...Cars are driven by people. The guiding principle behind everything we make at Volvo, therefore, is and must remain, safety..."

Assar Gabrielsson and Gustaf Larson

But safety is pretty dull and boring these days. We don't think about our safety too much when we buy cars, because all cars are built to be safe for their occupants. To meet this challenge the brand has evolved, to continue to meet our needs.

'Safety' at Volvo now works in new ways. 'Preventative' safety helps us avoid accidents in the first place: "Simply put, avoiding accidents is better than having accidents". And they have also addressed increasing concerns about crime with their 'Personal safety' initiatives: building features into the car that help make you safe as you enter and exit your car.

Volvo has also developed its thinking from the founders' philosophy of 'cars are driven by people'. Today, this means that: "Volvo builds cars for human beings. At Volvo, we also recognise that

human beings are just a small part of the life of our planet." This is the basis for a more environmentally friendly car, supported by a policy of 'reuse and recycle'.

All of this is beautifully summarized in their corporate line:

Volvo for life.

It's a clear evolution from their early brand positioning, which was focused on keeping you safe from accidents with 'safety glass' windshields and steel cages (two of their earliest initiatives).

The Volvo brand remains strong because it has successfully evolved to stay relevant and motivating. How about your brand?

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