

The benefits of brand partnerships

By Colin Bates

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Reaching out to a new consumer segment

One particularly imaginative brand partnership that I noticed recently is between Nike and LEGO. Nike is producing trainers featuring LEGO's popular BIONICLE series of action heroes. (Never heard of them? Me neither, but then we're not the target market!).

The Nike BIONICLE trainers feature removable (and collectible) "toe masks" in the shape of the action heroes.

For LEGO this partnership extends and strengthens the BIONICLE brand experience and for Nike "The BIONICLE partnership is perfectly tailored to fulfill Nike's mission to motivate children to be active", that from Deborah Hilleren, Nike's children's footwear director. I'm not usually cynical, but I'm sure it will help them sell some trainers too.

Reaching a niche amongst your existing target audience

When Motorola partnered with hip-hop urban retailer Phat Farm to produce a limited edition mobile phone, what was it hoping to achieve? Well, for the young urban trendsetter the Motorola brand probably doesn't have much appeal, it's far too mainstream and 'mass'. But partner with Phat Farm and all of a sudden Motorola have a compelling offer to this niche, but important, group of consumers.

Creating opportunities to interact with consumers

Sometimes the main objective of a partnership is to offer consumers a new way of engaging and interacting with the brand. Here in Asia, Sony is now partnering with Channel V for just that purpose. (Channel V is a music channel, similar to MTV).

Together the two brands are offering the opportunity for viewers to make a music video, upload the video to the Channel V site (using Sony technology of course!), and have the opportunity to win Sony prizes plus the chance to work with a Channel V music video production team.

A 'technology provider' has partnered with a 'content provider' to create a motivating offer to consumers to get involved, to everyone's benefit.

Achieving share of market, and creating safety in numbers

Sometimes partnerships are driven by market dynamics. In the airline industry achieving scale and route coverage is all important and so we have seen the market consolidate into two main service alliances: creating two new brands, the 'Star Alliance' and the 'Oneworld Alliance'.

The airline companies that have formed these alliances have committed themselves to a long-term and business and brand partnership.

Enhancing a specific product / service feature

Sometimes a brand partnership can be used to enhance a specific product or service feature, and therefore the overall brand experience. United Airlines knew that they would never be able to make a special feature of their in-flight coffee. But create the right partnership and suddenly they have a strong point of differentiation: Starbucks coffee in-flight.

'Intel inside' is probably one of the oldest examples of this, Intel did a great job of making 'Intel Inside' a compelling offer to consumers (and so a securing their relationship with the computer manufacturers).

Adding product / service features, and securing new revenues

Manchester United have one of the most powerful brands in football, with a global fan base that brings the club significant revenues from merchandising and media coverage. Just before the World Cup last year they signed a four year exclusive deal with Ladbrokes (the world's biggest betting company) to provide betting services at their Old Trafford ground and on their official website.

The press release at the time said: "The club will co-operate with Ladbrokes on international marketing to secure global betting and gaming revenues, which will be shared." The partnership allows the powerful Man United brand to offer new services, and immediately generate significant new revenues.

If you are the owner or manager of a brand these are just some of the benefits that you can enjoy by creating brand partnerships. Take a look around, you might find a great opportunity...

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