

BRANDING BACKWARDS

FOR FUN & PROFIT

Examples Of How Broadcast Pros Can
Create Profitable Brands for Local Advertisers



BLAINE PARKER & HONEY PARKER

Branding Backwards For Fun & Profit

Examples of how broadcast pros can create
profitable brands for local advertisers

Blaine Parker & Honey Parker

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BRANDING BACKWARDS FOR FUN & PROFIT

YES, THE TITLE STARTED AS A JOKE

The “Fun & Profit” part was a placeholder until I came up with something more profound.

Then it occurred to me that having a brand is actually fun and can indeed be profitable. We certainly have some anecdotal evidence to backup such an assertion.

But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Let’s let the title be for a moment, and ask a really important, burning question...

WHAT THE HECK *IS* BRAND, ANYWAY?

Before we answer that question, a little backstory is in order. The Fabulous Honey Parker and I founded our small-business branding agency on the simple premise that small businesses deserve big-brand thinking and don’t get it.

And by the way, my wife’s brand name is The Fabulous Honey Parker by no choice of her own. I did it to her. For years, I wrote a branding newsletter. Then, when we founded Slow Burn Marketing, we started going to a lot of business events. The next thing you know, total strangers are walking up and saying, “Hey, you’re The Fabulous Honey Parker!” The good news is, she lives up to the fabulousness of the brand promise.

Now, back to the question: What the heck *is* brand, anyway?

There’s a lot of confusion here.

Brand is often thought to be a logo, a font, a color, a tag line, a jingle, or some other element of a business’s marketing. Yes, a brand would have

some or even all of these elements. But those elements are not what comprises a brand.

Other folks think a brand is a conceptual element, like a promise or a mission.

Promises and missions are good things.

Logos, fonts, colors, tag lines and jingles are also incredibly useful.

They are not, in and of themselves, a brand

Some will call me a heretic for saying this, but here it goes. Ready?

Your brand is the one way you want your core customer to feel about your business.

That bears repeating.

Your brand is the **ONE** way you want your **CORE** customer to **FEEL** about your business.

We are ardent opponents of endless font formatting.

But, here we have three words, in ALL CAPS, **bold** and *italic*.

Too much font formatting? No.

Why?

Because those words need beating in with a hammer.

Your brand is the **ONE** way you want your **CORE** customer to **FEEL** about your business.

Let's break this down.

Why one and one only?

We live in an overcommunicated culture. People are beyond saturated with information. They are too busy to focus. Split focus will not work. Focusing on ONE thing is key.

And FEEL?

Why the word "feel" instead of, say, "think"?

Go back to Sales 101: Customers make buying decisions emotionally and justify them intellectually. It's necessary to appeal to a prospect's emotions before appealing to their intellect. Intellectual selling doesn't work nearly as well.

There's a noted Canadian neurologist by the name of Donald B. Caine. To paraphrase a popular quotation from Dr. Caine, here is the essential difference between emotion and reason: Reason leads to conclusions; emotion leads to action.

So, you can be intellectual about it and reason with folks all day long. Want them to take action?

Make the right emotional connection.

Making a prospect feel one thing about your business puts you way ahead of the competitors who don't.

The easiest way to understand brand is to look at some hugely powerful, recognizable and nationally dominant examples of solid brand.

For example, what if I asked you, "What's the happiest place on earth to buy a hamburger?"

It's unlikely you'd answer with anything other than McDonald's.

We've asked this question to thousands of people at a time, and the resounding reply of assembled voices is always the same, from Boise to Kuala Lumpur. People know: "I'm lovin' it." We've stood on stages ranging from Los Angeles to Singapore and asked people if they know where the happiest place is to buy a hamburger. They all roar the answer because it is ubiquitous and decided and has been force fed for decades.

McDonald's understands the value of making customers feel something about the experience of eating at their restaurants. They certainly focus on that experience more than they focus on the food. And look at the McDonald's tag lines over the years.

"I'm lovin' it."

"We love to see you smile."

"Nobody makes your day like McDonald's can."

"Make every time a good time."

"Food, Folks & Fun."

Now, contrast this with another fast food giant, Burger King.

This is the brand that hangs its hat on a flame-broiled Whopper. That's not a tremendously emotional hook. At best, it's selling taste. It's selling a feature. And admit it: It's a lot more difficult to get emotionally engaged by a patty and how it's cooked.

Do you want a burger?

Or do you want fun?

Wouldn't you rather have a happy meal, so to speak?

Certainly, there is plenty more that goes into a successful brand. A brand does indeed make a promise. And you have to be able to deliver on that promise. Accordingly, McDonald's has invested a lot of time and energy in making sure the food they deliver is happy-making. Even the late, great

French chef Julia Child was a fan of McDonald's, especially the french fries when they were still being fried in beef fat.

I don't have a lot of fast food in my diet, but I know that in a pinch, I can get a surprisingly good cup of coffee at the golden arches.

My local McDonald's has also done a lot to make it feel like it belongs in the high-end resort town where we live. It has big screen TVs and a fireplace. The furniture is more hip than you expect to find in a fast food restaurant. But it still is unmistakably as McDonald's as the one in Iowa where farmers in work boots gather at breakfast to talk hog reports.

There are women who, when driving cross country, will always stop at Mickey D's because they know the restrooms are always clean.

The company works at delivering happiness. The experience lives up to the expectations created by the brand. But the feeling of happiness takes the lead in the brand equation.

Now, let's switch gears.

If I were to tell you to go out and buy the world's sexiest computer, what machine are you most likely to bring back?

Just as with the burger question, we throw this one out to packed rooms from Los Angeles to Singapore, and the response is always the same: Apple.

This is a company that has completely changed what it means to own a computing device. They've made their hardware objects of desire.

And talk about buying emotionally and justifying intellectually: The first generation iPad sold over 15 million units.

How many of those 15 million people truly had iPad needs? Water, food, clothing, shelter, iPad? Don't think so...

But again, the product and the service live up to the sexy computer brand. It becomes an object of desire. If Apple products sucked, no amount of good branding could compensate for the flawed product. The machines are elegant, they are the latest and greatest, they work well, and they are a pleasure to use.

Go into an Apple Store. It's very sexy for a retail operation. The packaging for the products is very hip and elegant. It all lives up to the brand. It's not just a concept slapped onto a hardware manufacturer by an ad agency. It is a part of the entire ethos upon which the consumer experience is based.

What if I were to ask you about the best budget motel?

The answer is likely to be Motel 6. After 30+ years of Tom Bodett leaving the light on for you, this is a brand that has become indelibly written in people's minds—even if they would never stay at a Motel 6. The company has done an excellent job of making people feel like Motel 6 is truly the nicer, friendlier, better, cheap alternative.

And, as radio guru Dan O'Day likes to point out, the Motel 6 USP has little to do with leaving the light on for you: They always promise the lowest-priced motel room of any national chain. But the resonance of the brand is so potent, that light left on is what sticks with people.

Not only does Motel 6 deliver on their brand promise, but back in the 1980s when the campaign was created, their ad agency refused to run the ads until all of the Motel 6 properties had been brought up to snuff and could represent.

As I've said many times before, I like trotting out this brand for all small businesses, but for radio advertisers especially. The reason? There is nothing here that a small-budget radio advertiser can't have: good writing, good voice talent, simple production.

This is a juggernaut of a national brand delivered with ease and simplicity.

When a business has a brand, it becomes the foundation to produce extraordinary results.

The difference between being branded and not being branded can be the difference between fun & profit (i.e., enjoying work and cashing in), or being just another overworked, less-profitable voice in an overcrowded marketplace.

That might sound like an exaggeration.

Here are a few examples:

- At Slow Burn Marketing, we branded a new business in such a way that in year one, they hit revenue of almost \$1 million a year. They continue to crush it—even though they often get their marketing wrong.

- We rebranded an existing business in such a way that the owner, who was tired and stressed and ready to sell it, was reenergized, her staff was reinvigorated, and she doubled her client base in six months.
- Before we even finished the re-branding on one business, the owner walked away from a client meeting with an additional quarter million dollars. His client said to him, “Who ARE you?” Even half done, his brand changed the conversation.

A solid brand is a catalyst that changes businesses and changes lives.

You might not be dealing with any advertiser as big as McDonald’s, Apple or Motel 6. But you could easily be working with a local burger joint, a local computer reseller or a local hotel.

And there’s a high likelihood that the local advertiser with whom you’re working doesn’t have a brand.

You can do something about that.

Note, too, that we’re going to use a lot of the second person here. “Your business.” “Your customer.” At Slow Burn, we are big believers in ownership. When we take on a client, we become a part of that business. Their business is our business. Their customer is our customer.

It’s useful to take ownership of the client’s business. Besides being psychologically powerful, it’s good for client relations.

WHY IS BRAND NECESSARY?

Very simply, brand is a means of focusing your efforts and standing for something. The happy hamburger place. The sexy computer maker. The friendly budget motel.

Brand helps you define who you are in your own mind so you can define yourself to your customer.

Brand also helps a business stand out in an overcrowded, over-communicated marketplace. In the age of digital insanity, the messages are coming at everyone fast and furious. The incessant buzz of traditional media like radio, TV, print, in-store and outdoor is compounded by SMS, banners and social media and other digital.

It's virtually impossible to focus on anything that doesn't cut through the clutter like a branded razor.

Sometimes, that can be a single, unbranded advertising message.

A single message can sometimes move a lot of product.

But how much better would it be for the messenger if, instead of just a single message, it was a brand that routinely sliced through the clutter?

We're talking about the difference between attracting loyal fans versus purely transactional customers.

"Diamond rings, 50% off."

That headline will turn heads and sell diamonds.

It could also be run by any jeweler.

It would do a lot to grab the attention of the one-time buyer who's in the market for a diamond ring.

Contrast that with Robbins Brothers Jewelers, The Engagement Ring Store.

They're out there every day, banging the drum for the engagement ring buyer.

Everything they do in their marketing supports The Engagement Ring Store brand.

Long after that message of "Diamond rings, 50% off" has evaporated into the ether, and the faceless jeweler has served a handful of one-time buyers, Robbins Brothers is still there, high-profile, iconic and reliable.

They have fans.

And just by the way, after a guy buys an engagement ring, guess what else he has to buy?

A wedding ring.

And anniversary gifts.

And birthday presents.

And holiday gifts.

There is a lifetime potential of further jewelry in that engagement ring buyer.

And guess who his reliable jeweler is?

Yes, Robbins Brothers. They're not dummies. They sell bracelets and necklaces and earrings and other gifts.

They just don't bother talking about them.

They drive their brand of The Engagement Ring Store like a hot nail through the cold butter of the male psyche with a relentless consistency. They're building equity and engendering loyalty with fans and friends.

Meanwhile, the un-branded jeweler who keeps advertising sale prices to find new business is left twisting in the breeze of his own anonymity.

Which recipe would you prefer?

Branding is the way to be known for one thing and one thing only and becoming category dominant.

WHAT IS BRANDING BACKWARDS?

When you work in radio, many (probably most) advertisers come to you without a solid brand. Having no solid brand heightens the challenge of advertising to the audience. And the longer the sales cycle, the harder it becomes. (See also: Robbins Brothers. How often is a guy in the market for an engagement ring? Unless you're modeling yourself after Henry VIII, not so often.)

If you can help the advertiser understand the importance of brand, it's possible to reverse engineer his own brand in such a way that it informs all of his advertising.

It sets him apart from the competition, makes his advertising more consistent and more potent, and makes everyone's job easier and more profitable.

Find the advertiser's juicy center, make him stand for something, and he has a much better chance of winning.

How To Do It: 6 Easy Steps

- 1) Get a client.
- 2) Ask the client what he thinks his brand is. Listen to the answer.
- 3) Throw that all away.
- 4) Get ready to ask questions endlessly.
- 5) Look for the "Ah ha!" moment.
- 6) Turn that truth into Brand.

So, let's break this all down, shall we?

Step 1: Get a client

No instructions for this step. It's up to you.

Step 2: Ask the client what his brand is.

Listen to the answer. Chances are, it's filled with nonsense like, "It's our people that make the difference" and "We fulfill all your widget needs." It ultimately means nothing.

Step 3: Throw away everything the client just told you.

There's probably a one in 100 chance the client might actually have a brand. Be astute enough to identify it. If the brand is, as described above, "For all your widget needs," be astute enough to know it means crap.

Step 4: Get ready to ask questions endlessly.

One of our favorite discovery questions is, "Why do you love what you do?" If they can't reply to this with any better answer than, "The money's good," or, "We fulfill client needs across a broad platform of solutions," it may be best to cut and run.

Another good question for the advertiser is, "Can you tell a story about a customer whose problem you solved?"

Often, this can yield a really potent example of what's so great about doing business with this guy. Assuming he delivers a good story, a good follow up question is, "How did that make you feel?" If this individual is at all candid, it will start pointing towards the juicy center of this guy's business.

Step 5: All during steps 1 through 4, be ready for the "Ah ha!" moment.

There should be at least one if not several of these moments during the course of your conversation. You'll know it because it smacks you between the eyes, inspires a rush of adrenaline, and makes you instantly want to start writing advertising.

If this doesn't happen, you (a) might have to dig deeper, (b) make something up, or (c) quit. Yes, option (c) might sound cavalier. It's not. There are people whose money you simply should not be taking. We've seen that happen, and didn't have the liberty of saying, "You're not ready" because I was only the creative director. It was not my client. I was not the sales manager. And I was unwittingly committed to riding a train to nowhere in an effort to sell a business that was not ready to advertise.

Step 6: When you've found the truth, you've found the brand essence.

We're essentially talking about a diamond in the rough. It will require cutting. You'll need to shape it. It will take time. But getting to the truth is getting to the raw materials for branding, whether backwards or forwards.

THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIC TRUTH

Organic Truth is an exciting, evocative quality about the business. It can be used in the marketing. It grows naturally from within rather than being a contrivance of a marketing department. An Organic Truth can be exaggerated—but is still honest at its core.

For example, take breakfast cereal.

By and large, they're all the same.

If you look at Cap'n Crunch, Corn Pops (known to a previous generation as Sugar Pops), Quisp and Froot Loops, they're all pretty much the same stuff. It's all made from corn slurry and sugar. Their brand differences are contrivances of marketing.

Kashi, however, is truly different. Their brand of "Seven Whole Grains on a Mission" is based on an exaggerated, Organic Truth about the cereal.

The company was started by a couple in Southern California who wanted a healthy, whole grain alternative for breakfast cereal. In essence, they were on a mission. And the product indeed contains whole grains and seeds. The ingredient list includes soy grits, brown rice, barley, hard red wheat, rye, buckwheat and sesame seeds.

Contrast that with corn flour, sugar, oat flour, brown sugar, coconut oil, salt.

Those are the ingredients of Cap'n Crunch.

Or Quisp.

Take your pick.

You could never distinguish between Quisp and Cap'n Crunch merely by looking at the ingredient label.

The Organic Truth of Kashi is reflected in its branding.

Sugared up kiddie cereal is branded by contrivance.

This isn't a value judgment.

But it is an example of how a little company with an organically true, honest brand can rise to the top and end up becoming big enough to be bought by Kellogg.

Organic Truths properly handled can create brand monsters.

Will It Blend: Organic Truth exaggerated for fun & profit

If you're not familiar with *Will It Blend?*, it is an extraordinary testimony to the power of online video as well as Organic Truth for the basis of brand. Blendtec is a Utah company that makes professional-grade kitchen blenders. The pro line was doing really well. But they also had a line of consumer blenders that wasn't doing so well.

As the story goes (there are various versions), the new marketing director was walking through the place and came upon a pile of sawdust. If you think really hard, you'll realize there isn't a lot of lumber that goes into manufacturing electric blenders. So he asked where the sawdust came from.

He was told the owner of the company routinely tested blenders coming off the line by blending 2 x 4s.

The marketing director decided, "We need this on video."

So *Will It Blend* was born.

The first video is said to have cost \$60.

It became an internet sensation.

Over one hundred videos later, *Will It Blend* was iconic.

Blendtec consumer blender sales reportedly soared by 800%, and the videos were supposedly a revenue stream.

Blendtec owner Tom Dickson became a minor celebrity. T-shirts with his face on them were emblazoned with the title, "Tom Dickson is my homeboy."

Tom is a US Grade A Fancy nerd, he is perfectly comfortable being that way on camera, and the entire success of *Will It Blend* was predicated on Organic Truth run amok.

And, as mentioned earlier, this is also an object lesson for the power of YouTube as a marketing tool. Never should anyone discount what can be done with a medium by someone who understands how to use it.

THE ADVERTISER'S CUSTOMER IS OFTEN THE BEST RESOURCE

Few, if any of us, have any objectivity about what we do for a living. We are so immersed in our own stuff, we can't see the objective truth. So, when interviewing an advertiser about his business, it's highly likely there will be a challenge getting any useable info.

At that point, consider turning to the customer.

The customer knows the truth.

And there's a good chance what the customer knows is a shortcut to creating a brand for the advertiser.

One of the quickest ways to make this happen is by asking the advertiser if he has any love letters from happy customers.

Frequently, these missives can help you understand the truth about the business and where the juicy center really is.

If there are no love letters, it's possible to go and talk to happy customers. Tell the advertiser you want to become a customer. But first, you want some referrals. Can he provide the names of three people who'd be good referral sources? Then, call them up. Tell them you want to do business with the advertiser. See what they have to say. Ask them how they **feel** about doing business with the advertiser. (Yes, "feel." In bold. This is about how the advertiser makes people feel about doing business with him because, as you already know, people make their buying decisions emotionally. What they think is not as potent as what they feel. Intellect leads to conclusions. Emotion leads to action.)

Talk to these people and look for the "Ah-ha!" When nuggets drop from their mouths, be prepared to gather them up.

One piece of advice given to me by the great Dick Orkin was to go down to an advertiser's place of business and hang around. Strike up conversations with customers. Talk to them. Find out why they're there and why they like it. Engage them as if you were another customer. Do not talk to them as if you were creating advertising because it will destroy the dynamic.

Nobody will give you a better, more realistic picture of doing business with the advertiser than the customer. That's simply because he's not down inside the advertiser's foxhole. All the advertiser can see is the dirt he deals with on a daily basis. The customer is standing outside the foxhole and can see better what's going on down in, around and above that foxhole.

TURNING THE TRUTH INTO A BRAND

Look for the intersection between the advertiser and the customer. Find the juicy center of things. Look for the WOW that will become the emotional resonance for the customer.

Earlier, we talked about Kashi. A married couple wanted to create a healthier breakfast cereal. It's intended for a consumer who wants to be

healthier. This consumer presumably knows something about the importance of whole grains. Hence, Kashi becomes the “Seven Whole Grains on a Mission” cereal.

The emotional resonance is not just the idea of whole grain, but the idea of whole grain with a purpose and a calling, going above and beyond, bringing some pith and humor to the brand.

One of Apple’s most resonant campaigns was “Think different,” which complimented the Apple user for being a creative rebel. McDonald’s emotional resonance is in finding the happy spot, the “I’m lovin’ it” juicy center, the we-love-to-see-you-smile-ness of what they sell. It’s not just a burger, it’s indeed a happy meal. (This is especially important to mom, who just wants the kids to eat and be happy, i.e. quiet, for about 7 minutes.)

When you find the intersection, when you’ve poked into the juicy center, you’ll know it. Begin writing. Do not self-edit. Just pour it out onto the page. Nobody is going to judge it. Nobody is going to grade it. Just write like a lunatic until you have nothing left to write. Then, go back and look for the nuggets. Once you find them, concentrate on them. Write more. Distill, distill, distill. Find the brand focus in 10 words or less, and be looking for a tag line.

At Slow Burn Marketing, our focus is that we bring big-brand thinking to small business marketing. Nine words. Our current tag line is, “My, what a big brand you have.”

Find your “I’m lovin’ it,” “Seven Whole Grains on a Mission,” “We’ll leave the light on for you.” Get some simple poetry that sings and just does it.

IMPLEMENTING BRAND IN A RADIO COMMERCIAL CAMPAIGN

This might seem obvious, but it’s now time to write commercials that fit the brand direction. Again, I will point to Motel 6 as a juggernaut of a national advertising campaign that doesn’t do anything you can’t do: It is smart writing in a consistent voice with a simple music bed and a tag line, and it’s been delivering for over 30 years.

When I was working at a radio network in Los Angeles, I had an interiors and upholstery advertiser for whom I created probably 60 commercials. They were all written in the same style: his voice, extemporaneously telling an amusing story about his business. I’ve been gone for about 10 years. As far as I know, they’re still creating these commercials for him. The radio advertising turned him into a minor celebrity and he’s sticking with it.

Consistency is king.

EXAMPLES OF BACKWARD-BRANDED ADVERTISERS

It's great to talk about all this in theory. But showing some examples is key. Because yes, it is possible. Yes, you can do it. Yes, it does help. Immensely.

This Appliance Center

This is one of my favorite brand examples. This is a one-off, Southern California appliance superstore. For years, This Appliance Center (not their real name) had been running very same-same, Post-It Note radio commercials. They were essentially a list of bullet points assembled on the page and held up to the microphone. When I was hired onto the account, I was told I “had to keep the dog.”

The dog?

Seems he was a one-line mention at the end of the spot. The dog is always in the store, people like him, so the owner wants to mention him in the spots.

To which I said, “To hell with that.

You got a dog in the store and you want him mentioned in the commercial?

Then he's going to BE the commercial.”

If there's a dog in the store, it speaks to the kind of place it is, the kind of management they have, and the kind of customer they want to attract. The dog is an Organic Truth.

The dog's name is Jake. He's a golden retriever. I wrote an announcer-driven piece of copy that spoke to the kind of place the store was. It introduced Jake early on and made him a part of the copy. There was a callback to him at the end of the spot, where he barked again. It ended with the new tag line, “Where the most important kitchen is yours.”

This is not genius. It's pretty simple minded.

It also scared the owner.

He said, “That's an awful lot of barking.”

Right.

Maybe 3 seconds out of 60.

But the sales guy pushed him forward. The campaign ran with regularity. In less than a year, the advertiser was saying, “That dog owns this store.” Business was up 30% in a year. The owner says that when they had their annual tent sale, 8 out of 10 people walking into that tent wanted to see Jake.

They finally started retrofitting the dog into all their other marketing materials. That new brand represents a commitment and a consistency that is so often lacking.

CUT TO: Several years later. The sales guy called us at Slow Burn. He wanted us to help rebrand the store and create new advertising. The goal: Sell the business. About a year later, we were let go (happily) when a contract was signed to sell the business.

SIDEBAR: Definition of an entrepreneur: A guy who would perform brain surgery on himself if he could figure out how to stay awake during the operation.

Dr. Stacy

I can't claim any credit for this one. The brand was engineered by Dave Deno at Salem Communications for a Salem station in Northern California. Dentists seem to be attracted to radio, and Salem's stations are no exception. Too frequently, the advertising simply doesn't work for various reasons we won't bother to speculate on here. Let it suffice to say that Dave got a call from the account rep. “The spots aren't working.” So they had a conversation about the dentist. Dave started asking probing questions.

During the course of the conversation, the account rep said that her young daughter had been to see Dr. Stacy (not her real name). She came out of the office and said, “Mommy, she has the hands of an angel!”

Boom. Organic Truth.

Dr. Stacy became “The dentist with the angel's touch.”

She also became a minor juggernaut—so much so that no other dentist was able to compete with her on that station. They tried repeatedly, and always went away. The dentist with the angel's touch remained.

Transmission Shop

This commercial is in the rare category of winning a major award AND making the advertiser's phone ring off the hook. (Added bonus: There is no phone number anywhere in the spot. So much for the "need" to repeat the phone number twice.)

The Transmission Shop (as you've guessed by now, not their real name) is a small transmission repair business. In my discussions with the account rep about the owner, I learned that the guy is an utter transmission geek. He builds racing transmissions. Organic Truth.

Accordingly, we branded the owner as "The original transmission geek. He doesn't tell good jokes. He doesn't have much imagination. Just look at the name of his company. 'The Transmission Shop.' How creative is that? But then again, how creative does he need to be? A transmission is a cold, ugly piece of machinery. You don't want some guy who says, 'Hey, let's see if we can fit this over there!'" SFX: BOOM!

We painted him as a wunderkind at transmission repair. "The Transmission Shop. They're not creative. They're just good." Branding Backwards with an Organic Truth exaggerated. The phone rang off the hook. The spot won a Radio Mercury Award.

We Be Tools

This was fun. It's more retail, which we don't often get to do. And it's a specialty store that lends itself to doing radio with a character type. We Be Tools is, as you might imagine, an enormous place full of tools. 30,000 square feet of tools. Organic Truth: It is a freaking playground for guys who love tools.

The account rep came up with the tag line, "Where men really love to shop." I tweaked it slightly to, "Where *real* men really love to shop," just 'cuz I like the music of it. Then, I developed a character that has since become known as Radio Hank. He has a deep, gravelly voice and he waxes poetic about the virtues of We Be Tools. He says things like, "You're a guy. The last fairy ya believed in was the tooth fairy. You were six. So what if I told ya the tool fairy was comin'? Ya wouldn't believe me. Until ya got down to We Be Tools for the Spring Tool Fair. That's right, the Tool Fairy has made his annual visit to We Be Tools."

Or, when We Be Tools bought a second location: “You might call us the twin 900-pound gorillas of tools. Only friendlier. Like a pussycat. But twin 900-pound pussycats sounds kinda weird.”

It’s been hugely successful for We Be Tools, and has been extended into their phone on hold system. I’ve continued doing work for these guys long since leaving radio purely because they love it, they’re willing to pay for it, and it’s fun to do. (Radio Hank has also become a brand of his own, and has done work for other advertisers. Among other projects, he voiced an industrial video for Trimble’s line of agricultural GPS electronics.)

Dentistry Center

This was an interesting one. A Slow Burn client, this job very easily could have been done by an ambitious radio station account and creative team.

We were referred by the dentist’s practice management consultant. The dentists said, “We want to advertise dental implants.” We talked to them for a while and found out various key facts of their reality. One, the 900-pound gorilla of dental implants in their market is Clear Choice. You might know them. They’re a national chain of implant clinics. They’re also expensive, probably because they’re paying for a wide-ranging marketing campaign with lots of TV.

We also found out that dental implants can completely change a person’s life. People with bad teeth or ill-fitting dentures are socially challenged, don’t smile, hide their teeth, don’t go out as often as they might, and will avoid meals with others. Getting implants reverses all of that. They’re happier and they have a new lease on life. Organic Truth: Implants change the way people feel and live.

We told them, Look, as a general dentistry practice, you can certainly advertise implants. But why? What good does that really do you? Develop a new brand specifically for the implant side, and it (a) makes you a specialist, (b) lets you become known for one thing and one thing only, and (c) lets you be the David who goes up against the Goliath of Clear Choice.

The brand became Liberty Dental Implant Center. (Not their real name. But similar.) Tagline: “Confidence restored.”

The first round of radio was a series of glowing testimonials from happy patients. They were emotionally resonant, but weren’t generating enough response. We came to the conclusion that Clear Choice had entirely too much media and was too price-driven for us to be as soft as we were

being. So we switched to a series of value-oriented spots with an announcer-driven message and made use of sound bites from the testimonials. Response increased. They now resonated as the value alternative

In the first year, that implant brand was in the black to the tune of just under a million dollars. They decided to take their marketing in-house, and had a solid brand identity from which to launch anything they do. Speaking conservatively, they have over \$1 million in implant revenue annually. A far better outcome than “some ads advertising implants” would have accomplished.

BE PREPARED FOR FEAR AND EGO

It doesn't matter what level of advertising you're working at, from the littlest nowhere radio station to the biggest ad agency servicing a multi-national advertiser: fear and ego are always going to rear their ugly heads.

This actually points back to one of the common denominators that my wife and I realized were a constant in our respective professional challenges. I'd come home from working at the Salem radio network. She'd come home from freelancing at an agency like Deutsch LA. We'd talk about our respective days. And the stories were almost always about clients making decisions from a point of fear or ego.

My wife was once working on the pitch for a cat food account. The marketing guy on the client side says, “No people in the commercials. I have a theory about people who own cats. They don't like people.”

Really? You have a theory? Backed by what empirical evidence?

You'd think someone running the marketing for a multi-million-dollar pet food account would operate on something besides his own half-baked theory.

Anyway, the agency didn't win the pitch.

And the next thing you know, the cat food advertiser is running commercials with people in it.

Hello, Ego.

Another favorite is the “I'm open to anything” client.

Honey and I have both experienced this in our respective past careers. “I'm open to anything” is code for, “I'm going to shoot down everything you suggest.” Fear is the motivator in this one. It's similar to, “I want to be different.” The sentence is unfinished. The entire thought is, “I want to be different *just like them.*”

Fear will tell advertisers they can't do something. Often, they're afraid of standing out. As Honey likes to point out, it's a little like high school, where everyone wants to be different by finding a clique and dressing like them. The whole idea of being truly and uniquely bold scares them.

Footnote: Being different can also scare the account rep. The "He's not a clever man" commercial mortified the account rep. He didn't want to take it to the client. He was afraid he was going to lose the account. In actuality, the client was thrilled. He got it. He didn't try to change a thing. He didn't even try to put a phone number in it.

After Fear, Ego will tell advertisers the rules don't apply to them. Back in the day, one of the areas where we had to do a lot of backwards branding was in mortgage advertising.

Before the subprime meltdown, the advertising landscape was clogged with mortgage brokers. The only way for the advertiser to stand out was to stand for something.

We weren't calling it brand. I don't know that any of us were smart enough to realize that's what we were doing. But in essence, we were trying to execute Backwards Branding on every mortgage advertiser who came to us. We assured them that if they refused to pick a mortgage niche and speak to that specific borrower as an expert in their area of home finance, they would fail. We repeated this strategy with such frequency, I even wrote a book about it.

Many embraced it and succeeded beyond their wildest imaginings.

The ones who refused to do it?

They failed.

They walked away saying, "Radio doesn't work."

Usually, this was ego at work. Sometimes, it could be fear. Or both. "The rules don't apply to me! I'm not going to do that!" Subtext: "I'm afraid I won't catch enough fish if I don't use a wide enough net."

Fear will say, "I can't do that."

Ego will say, "The rules don't apply to me."

In either case, the advertiser is likely to walk away.

So it goes.

It's an uphill battle to try to work with either of these dynamics. At Slow Burn, we're very picky about who we work with. We won't take the client if we don't think it's a good match. We used to joke that our primary business was turning down new clients. And so far, we've never fired a client. But we did once have a client who, upon presentation of three possible brand directions, was positively giddy.

Then, two days later, the emails started coming in.

These fear-based missives were second guessing everything that had been presented. Nothing was right. Nothing would work. It was all wrong. What about doing it this way? (“This way” being the way he’d been doing it, flailing and failing.)

Finally, we offered him the opportunity to be free of us, and he leapt at it.

He couldn’t share the courage of our convictions about branding, and didn’t have the stomach for leaving his comfort zone. We opened the exit door and he ran through it.

BRAND-IS-NOT-FOR-ME-ISM

It’s entirely possible this one is fear and/or ego at work. I don’t know. But it’s such a common manifestation that it’s worth addressing.

We once spoke to a 4,000 seat room, filled primarily with small business owners, and presented 90 minutes on branding.

We showed three different examples of international brands. There were three different examples of internationally known one-man brands. There was one example of a social media brand. Finally, four case studies of our own small-business clients, before and after branding. This included an eye doctor, a house painter, an online business and a dental practice management consultant.

In each of the four cases, the business owner changed his business, and changed his life.

So of course, after we were done, a woman walks up and says how great it was.

Then she says, “But I sell groceries. I don’t need a brand, right?”

It’s difficult to know exactly what fuels this. In the face of evidence and our assertion that, “No matter what business you’re in, a brand makes things easier and more profitable,” someone can still say, “Yeah, but that won’t work for me.” I can only guess that branding isn’t for you until someone shows you a brand in your category.

For a grocer I would say, “No, brand isn’t for you at all. Unless, of course, you’re trying to set yourself apart from Albertson’s, Whole Foods, Seven-11 or Trader Joe’s.”

The easiest way to shoot down brand-is-not-for-me-ism is to find examples in the category.

AT ALL COSTS, AVOID COPYING A BRAND

I say this because it happens all the time. There's someone in the category who has a hugely successful brand. It's plainly evident to everyone. So a challenger comes along, and his strategy is to say, "I can do that!"

And instead of coming up with something based on who he is and what he does, he tries to be just like that other guy. And the results are just sad. There's the crazy mattress guy with 27 stores who acts like a goofball to sell you a mattress. So there's another mattress guy with three stores who says, "Hey, I can be a goofball, too!" And he runs ads that say, "Me too! Look at me! I can be that guy, too! I'm standing on my head, too!"

As the Fabulous Honey Parker likes to say, "Me-Too Marketing doesn't make you competitive. It just makes you an annoying kid brother that nobody wants around."

BRAND BACKWARDS, AND YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY TO CREATING A JUGGERNAUT

The word "juggernaut" gets thrown around a lot. But few people actually know what it means. At best, they know that a juggernaut is an unstoppable force. It has its roots in a kind of Hindu temple on wheels, the Ratha-Yatra temple car, or The Car of Juggernaut.

It's a little like a pre-combustion engine Mardi Gras float gone wildly Krishna.

It carries a statue of the deity Jagannatha, whoever he is, and is brought out during the festival of Ratha-Yatra. (Surely, you celebrate that.)

Historically, this enormous cart with no brakes was so large and so heavy, it was impossible to stop. As it passed in the street, the devoted would throw themselves beneath it and be crushed to death by the wheels.

So, a juggernaut is unstoppable and deadly.

So it is with a well-built brand.

I will continue to harp on Motel 6, probably to a fault. That's because the execution is so insanely simple, and the marketing is so committed and consistent. There is nothing about Motel 6 that any one of us can't emulate. 'Nuff said.

There's a wildly successful chain of mattress stores in Southern California called Sit & Sleep. The owner is Larry Miller. He is an icon for lunatic personality branding. "I'll beat anyone's advertised price or your mattress is FREEEEEEEE!"

His brand is the crazy, low-price mattress place. He makes you feel like you'd be crazy to go anywhere else. It's hardly the height of intellectual genius. But it has made him a household name in Southern California. He's been doing it for years. Note: Competing on price alone is typically a non-starter, especially in a Walmart world. This is an instance of where it actually works. I lived in LA for 15 years, and I couldn't even begin to name another mattress retailer.

There's a mortgage broker named Wesley Hoaglund who, for awhile, seemed to be everywhere I went. In various markets, including LA, he was on the air as Lenox Financial. The name seems to vary depending on market. What didn't vary was his brand. His tag line is, "The biggest no brainer in the history of mankind." Genius? I think not. But he's committed to no-cost home loans. He beats that drum with relentless consistency. Intellectually, it sounds too good to be true. Emotionally, I have a hard time not being engaged by the guy. Footnote: One day, when I came off the Hollywood Freeway by the Hollywood Bowl and approached the routine bottleneck at the intersection of Franklin and Highland, there was a new, enormous billboard there. In gigantic letters, it said, "No Brainer." I knew before I even continued reading, it was for Lenox Financial. Thank you, relentless consistency.

We've already talked about the Dentist With The Angel's Touch. She was a brand juggernaut on a single, small local station.

We've mentioned my interiors client. Not huge. Modest schedule. But a brand strong enough that even within the limited context of his one small station, he became The Man To Call.

This isn't rocket surgery. It's merely smart thinking. One of the myths that we've tried to bust at Slow Burn is that brand is expensive.

On the contrary, if you do it yourself, brand is practically free. Thinking doesn't cost anything. What costs money is implementing your marketing. And that is a scalable proposition. For radio advertisers, it's going to be relatively expensive. But it's more expensive without a brand.

Yes, radio might be dying. Again. But using radio and (also dying) print almost exclusively, we re-branded a rather faceless United Eye Care Specialists as Dr. Sam's Eye Care. One of the first ads was a mailer to

existing patients that said, “Why is United Eye Care Specialists changing its name to Dr. Sam’s Eye Care? Because you can’t shake Dr. United’s hand.”

Using radio and print, he doubled his new patient base in each of the first two months he was on air. Eventually, he went on to do (probably also dying) local TV advertising.

In 10 months, a business that had been flat for three years was up 35%.

And oh, by the way, his closest competitor went very much on the defensive. He seriously upgraded his website and made a misfired attempt to have as much personality as Dr. Sam.

Is Dr. Sam a juggernaut?

After a fashion.

It’s hard for an optometrist in rural New Hampshire to be steamrolling anyone.

But he’s a heck of a lot better well known today. He handed some outgoing mail to a postman who looked at it in awe and said, “Are YOU Dr. Sam?!”

It’s so much easier to sell stuff when you’re recognized as standing for something. Branding is not an expensive proposition. It’s a thinking proposition. What’s expensive is NOT branding.

The power of brand lies in making your prospect feel one thing that matters. We’re talking about the power of thinking yourself out of obscurity and into the public consciousness. Brand rules.

For more information on Blaine Parker and his much smarter wife and business partner, The Fabulous Honey Parker, visit www.SlowBurnMarketing.com