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Belief In Branding by Bob Manna & Matt Manna • 00586F15(R04)

“Three well known brands shed a little light on the importance of belief in branding. Here’s a hint you can take to the bank, belief in branding has not changed since at least 1784.”

The Bank of New York (now Bank of New York Mellon) was founded in 1784 and is generally regarded as the oldest bank in the United States. Although difficult to exactly pin down, people in 1784 lived somewhere between 25 and 40 years. Today the difference between ages 25 and 40 is more a measure of conduct than life expectancy. Nowhere is this more evident than in the world of banking.

Juliette Gordon Low founded the Girl Scouts in 1912. This past year, the father of a Girl Scout described an unusual characteristic that he and many of his Facebook coworkers share; they don’t customarily carry cash to work. This insight, shared with his daughter and her troop, resulted in her troop selling 400 boxes of cookies at the Facebook Headquarters using a mobile device to process payments.

The genesis of the Salvation Army’s Red Kettle Campaign occurred in 1891 when Army Captain Joseph McFee placed a pot at the Oakland Ferry Landing with a sign that read, “Keep the Pot Boiling.” Today ringing bells and red kettles are iconic emblems of the Salvation Army Christmas Charity Campaign.

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The bells will likely be around forever but the kettles may not fair as well. This past season The Salvation Army accepted mobile payments at ten separate locations in each of four cities: Dallas, San Francisco, Chicago, and New York. As Salvation Army spokesman Major George Hood said in a recent New York Times article, “A lot of people just don’t carry cash any more. We’re basically trying to make sure we’re keeping up with our donors and embrace the new technologies they’re embracing.”

These examples help illustrate the proper definition of the term brand. A brand is a belief (or set of beliefs) that exists inside the mind. This definition of brand differs significantly from the traditional definition: A name, term, design, or symbol that differentiates one seller's product from others.

Names, terms, designs, and symbols are not brands, they are belief activators. The activated belief(s) are the brand. That is not to say that names, terms, designs, and symbols are unimportant. They are important. But the existence of these things, even when they are expertly designed, will not *create* beliefs.

A twenty-five year old and a forty year old both require the means to deposit funds into their banking account. In that regard they are alike. But the twenty-five year old makes her deposit inside a coffee house with a smartphone. The forty year old leaves the coffee house, drives to a local branch, and literally deposits the funds in question. Both have satisfied exactly the same need, and both may be customers of exactly the same institution. But each, in a nontrivial way, believes very different things when it comes to “making a deposit.”

No name, term, design, or symbol can be baked into a cookie that will change what Facebook employees in Silicon Valley believe when it comes to paying for products. These folks believe electronic payment processing is superior to cash, end of story!

Major George Hood is almost correct when saying, “We’re basically trying to make sure we’re keeping up with our donors and embrace the new technologies they’re embracing.” We say almost because donors do not embrace technologies. Donors (many in the case of The Salvation Army) embrace causes.

Donors also demand that the causes they embrace adhere to their beliefs. That's why the Salvation Army's experiment in accepting mobile payments proved successful in Dallas, San Francisco at large, Chicago, and New York. Folks in those cities embrace the same beliefs regarding payment processing as their Silicon Valley counterparts.

Be it cash, cookies, kettles, or anything else, belief has been in branding since at least 1784. It can't be any other way since a brand has no meaning outside of the belief that people bring to it. Brands do not bring belief to people, people bring belief to brands.



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