**Apple: It's All About the Brand**

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Apple is one of the leading branding companies in the world. Marketing experts like Marc Gobe argue that Apple's brand is the key to the company's success. It's got nothing to do with products like the iMac or iPod.

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Ask marketers and advertising experts why Mac users are so loyal, and they all cite the same reason: Apple's brand.

It's no coincidence that during the late 1980s and early 1990s it was a marketing executive from Pepsi, John Sculley, who turned Apple into the biggest single computer company in the world, with $11 billion in annual sales. Sculley marketed Apple like crazy, boosting the advertising budget from $15 million to $100 million.

"People talk about technology, but Apple was a marketing company," Sculley told the *Guardian* newspaper in 1997. "It was the marketing company of the decade."

The current CEO, Steve Jobs, spent $100 million marketing the iMac, which was a run-away hit. Apple continues to spend lots of money on high-profile ads like the "Switch" campaign, and it shows.

"It's a really powerful brand," said Robin Rusch, editor of the [Brandchannel.com](http://www.brandchannel.com/), which awarded Apple "Brand of the Year" in 2001. "The overwhelming presence of Apple comes through in everything they do."

Marketer Marc Gobe, author of *Emotional Branding* and principal of [d/g worldwide](http://www.dga.com/), said Apple's brand is the key to its survival. It's got nothing to do with innovative products like the iMac or the iPod.

"Without the brand, Apple would be dead," he said. "Absolutely. Completely. The brand is all they've got. The power of their branding is all that keeps them alive. It's got nothing to do with products."

Gobe, who hails from France, formulated this view while researching his book, in which he tells how brands have established deep, lasting bonds with their customers.

Apple, of course, is the archetypal emotional brand. It's not just intimate with its customers; it is loved. Other examples are automaker Lexus, retailer Target and outdoor clothing line Patagonia.

"Apple is about imagination, design and innovation," Gobe said from his office in New York. "It goes beyond commerce. This business should have been dead 10 years ago, but people said we've got to support it."

Gobe is of course referring to Apple's financial tailspin during the mid-1990s when the company looked in danger of going out of business. At the time, its products were lackluster, its branding a mess.

"Before Steve Jobs came back, the brand was pretty much gone," he said. "That's one of the reasons Apple has been rebranded -- to rejuvenate the brand."

Apple abandoned the old rainbow-hued Apple logo in favor of a minimalist monochrome one, gave its computers a funky, colorful look, and streamlined the messages in its advertising. It's done wonders, Gobe said.

Gobe argued that, in some cases, branding has become as powerful as religion. "People's connections with brands transcend commerce," he said. Gobe cited Nike, which sparked customers' ire when it was revealed the company's products were assembled in sweatshops.

"They were not pissed about the products," Gobe said. "It's about the company's ethics. It's interesting how emotionally involved people are."

According to Gobe, emotional brands have three things in common:

\* The company projects a humanistic corporate culture and a strong corporate ethic, characterized by volunteerism, support of good causes or involvement in the community. Nike blundered here. Apple, on the other hand, comes across as profoundly humanist. Its founding ethos was power to the people through technology, and it remains committed to computers in education. "It's always about people," Gobe said.

\* The company has a unique visual and verbal vocabulary, expressed in product design and advertising: This is true of Apple. Its products and advertising are clearly recognizable. (So is Target's, or even Wal-Mart's, Gobe said).

\* The company has established a "heartfelt connection" with its customers. This can take several forms, from building trust to establishing a community around a product. In Apple's case, its products are designed around people: "Take the iPod, it brings an emotional, sensory experience to computing," Gobe said. "Apple's design is people-driven."

Gobe noted that Apple has always projected a human touch -- from the charisma of Steve Jobs to the notion that its products are sold for a love of technology.

"It's like having a good friend," Gobe said. "That's what's interesting about this brand. Somewhere they have created this really humanistic, beyond-business relationship with users and created a cult-like relationship with their brand. It's a big tribe, everyone is one of them. You're part of the brand."

The human touch is also expressed in product design, Gobe said. Apple's flat-screen iMac, for example, was marketed as though it were created personally by Steve Jobs and Jonathan Ive, not by factory workers in Asia.

"People are anxious and confused," Gobe said. "Technology is accelerating faster and faster than we can keep up with. People need to find some grounding, that human touch, the leading hand. There's a need to recreate tribes that give people a grounding."

Writer Naomi Klein is a leading critic of branding, especially Apple's. Klein, author of *No Logo,* argues that companies like Apple are no longer selling products. They are selling brands, which evoke a subtle mix of people's hopes, dreams and aspirations.

Klein notes how Benetton used images of racial harmony to sell clothes, while Apple used great leaders -- Cesar Chavez, Gandhi and the Dalai Lama -- to persuade people that a Macintosh might also allow them to "Think Different."

"People are drawn to these brands because they are selling their own ideas back to them, they are selling the most powerful ideas that we have in our culture such as transcendence and community -- even democracy itself, these are all brand meanings now," she told the *Guardian* newspaper.

Klein's analysis of branding finds a receptive audience in the marketing community. Jean-Marie Dru, described by *Adbusters* as the "ad industry's current wonderkid," also believes that brands thrive or perish based on the ideals they espouse.

"Apple expresses liberty regained; Pepsi, youthfulness; Oil of Olay, timeless beauty; Saturn, the American competitive spirit; and AT&T, the promises of the future," he wrote in his book *Disruption.*

To Dru, brands are more important than products. Products have limited life cycles, but brands -- if managed well -- last forever. "The battle of brands and products will be, above all, a battle of ideas," he wrote.

Ryan Bigge, writing in *Adbusters,* said: "Our dreams and desires for a better world are no longer articulated by JFKs nor generated through personal epiphanies -- they are now the intellectual currency of Pepsi and Diesel. We used to have movements for change -- now we have products. Brands may befriend us, console us and inspire us, but the relationship comes at the highest price imaginable -- the loss of self."

Apple's famous "1984" Super Bowl ad, for example, was expressly political: It's message was, give power to the masses. The power, of course, was computing power.

"Macintosh was always bigger than the product," Steve Hayden, the ad's copywriter, told *AdWeek.* "We thought of it as an ideology, a value set. It was a way of letting the whole world access the power of computing and letting them talk to one another. The democratization of technology -- the computer for the rest of us."

The "1984" ad began a branding campaign that portrayed Apple as a symbol of counterculture -- rebellious, free-thinking and creative. According to Charles Pillar, a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, this image is a calculated marketing ploy to sell expensive computers.

"Expressions of almost spiritual faithfulness to the Mac, although heartfelt, weren't a purely spontaneous response to a sublime creation," he wrote. "They were a response to a calculated marketing ploy to sell computers that cost much more than competing brands.

"I'm not making this up. Members of the Mac's original engineering and marketing team told me all about it. They did it by building a sense of belonging to an elite club by portraying the Mac as embodying the values of righteous outsiderism and rebellion against injustice. It started in the early '80s with the famous '1984' TV commercial that launched the Mac, and continued with 'The computer for the rest of us' slogan and several ad campaigns playing on a revolutionary theme."

Steve Manning, co-founder of [Igor](http://www.igorinternational.com//), a brand consultancy in San Francisco, California, said even a seasoned professional like himself is seduced. "Even though I understand this stuff, I’ve bought into it," he said. "I own four Macs. They’re more expensive, but the advertising and marketing works."

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