

BRAND OF THE YEAR

The fact that copy deadlines preclude me from knowing, and thus being able to pass comment on, this magazine's Brand of the Year awards prompts me to think a little more deeply about the concept itself: what is, or should be, a brand of the year, and upon which criteria should we rely?

At first glance, it's easy: which brand's marketing has impressed us the most in the last 12 months? However, a more stretching definition, and one which may depopulate the winners list somewhat, would be: which brand will be able to look back in ten years time and unhesitatingly name 2005 as the year that the course of the brand was irreversibly changed for the good? The problem with this approach is that it is much harder to spot in year one than are a few flashy tactics on a previously moribund brand. But seek we must; it is this kind of achievement which convinces skeptics, shareholders and even Finance VP's that our efforts do in fact add long term value.

The clues are there if we know what to look for. While every brand will somewhere have in its annual brand plan a chart entitled "Segmentation", most of these will be duplicates of the one from the year before, as incomprehensible and un-actionable to MBA-Joe as were hieroglyphics prior to the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. But some bright spark somewhere will have realized that a more relevant segmentation, properly executed in the marketplace, can have long lasting and dramatic impact. A good segmentation can discover unmet needs, expand markets or increase the amount that the consumer will pay for the product.

A terrific example of such is Quidel, a San Diego based pregnancy testing kit company. In looking to build their consumer business they realized that the purchasers could be

neatly divided into two mutually exclusive groups: those who hoped that they were pregnant, and those who hoped that they weren't. So the exact same product was launched under two guises differentiated in name, packaging, pricing and in-store placement. For the fearfuls there was "RapidVue", in a medicinal pack design, priced at



\$6.99 and displayed near the condoms. But the hopefuls had "BabyStart" in a nice pretty pink box featuring a gurgling, rosy-cheeked infant, priced 50% higher at \$9.99 and sold near the ovulation



predictor kits. But would this have won an award in year one? Unlikely: who of us would have seen what was going on?

Equally, when Gary and Diane Heaven opened their first Curves for Women in 1992, would we have spotted that this would become the fastest growing franchise business in the world? The execution of setting up a few basic exercise machines in a strip mall location



wouldn't have garnered a single vote from the average Pilates, spinning and yoga attending female marketer. But the magic of Curves is that it included in its segmentation of the gym market the many millions of women who hated and thus avoided gyms for their leering males, depressingly sculpted female uber-goddesses and incomprehensibly complex machines. By engineering out all three from the Curves product, a vast empire has been created.

So, as you peruse the winners list, ask yourself this: which of these brands was set on a new and more successful course by redefining how the consumer sees their category? Because after segmentation, everything else is just tactics.